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Biden-Trump US presidential debate: What the data shows about who said what

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Photo: Composite image: Donald Trump AFP/Mark Peterson. Joe Biden AFP/Mandel Ngan

In 2020 an exasperated Joe Biden came out swinging in the first presidential debate, exclaiming to then-president Donald Trump: "Will you shut up, man?"

Four years on, he may have wished he said it again.

While the interruptions which marked the chaotic **first 2020 presidential debate** were absent thanks to muting of microphones and talking turns were tightly controlled by CNN moderators Jake Tapper and Dana Bash, fast-talking Trump still dominated 2024's first debate.

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Softly-spoken and raspy, the 81-year-old Biden managed to speak just 39 percent of all words said in the 90-minute match-up, while the 78-year-old Trump commanded 48 percent.

With pre-written notes banned, both contenders gave sometimes rambling, meandering responses.

An RNZ data analysis of what was said by who breaks down who talked the most, who gave the longest answers and what topics were the hottest.

Who talked the most?

Trump clocked in more than 8000 words, while Biden spoke fewer than 7000 words. Trump also had slightly more speaking turns (41) than Biden (39).

Trump gave seven of the 10 longest answers of the evening, with his longest of 437 words aimed at issues around migrants: "People are coming in and they're killing our citizens at a level that we've never seen. We call it migrant crime, I call it Biden migrant crime."

Biden's longest response was to the first question of the debate he faced, asking what he would say to voters who feel worse off under his presidency. He told viewers Trump had left the country in chaos, "literally chaos".

What was said

Hot topics of the debate included the war in Ukraine and Israel, but the economy, tax and inflation also rated highly. Biden refrained from hammering [Trump's recent conviction in a hush-money trial](#), although he did mention Trump "having sex with a porn star" and described him as having the morals of an alley cat.

Some phrases were on heavy repeat. Biden often numbered the points he was making in his responses to questions. He said "number one" 14 times, but only made it to "number two" nine times. Trump used "millions and millions" and "billions and billions" four times each. He also referred to the country as a failing nation.

Both contenders labelled the other as the worst president in United States history four times each. In one instance Trump ignored a question about the cost of childcare, instead opting to label Biden as the worst president ever. Biden's response to Trump included 130 words about why Trump was the worst president, and 60 words on childcare.

What was the vibe?

According to a language sentiment data dictionary, which rates words as either positive, neutral or negative, Biden used a very slightly higher percentage of both positive words and negative words than Trump during the debate.

Biden's top three negative terms were war, killed and attack. Trump's top three were worst, killing and horrible.

How we analysed the data: The debate was transcribed by Otter.ai and then manually cleaned to improve accuracy. Text was analysed using R and the Quanteda package.

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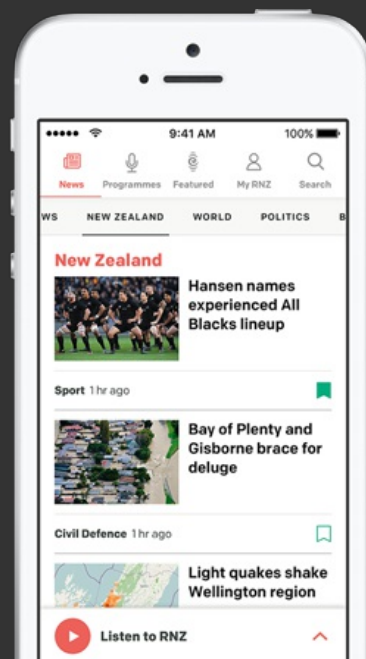
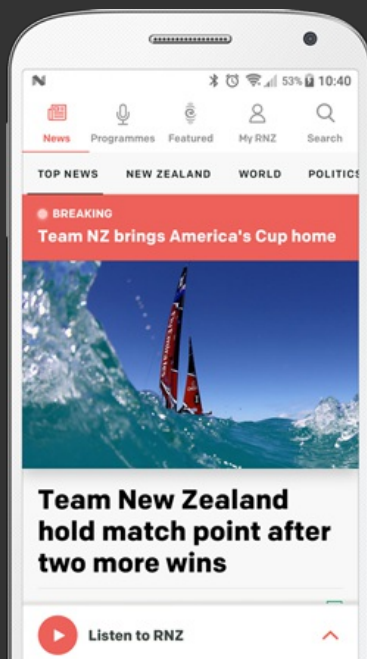
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