

# Final Trump-Clinton debate: A bankrupt political system staggers toward the finish line

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The third and last of the Clinton-Trump presidential debates was just as false and intellectually degraded as the first two, characterized by lying by both candidates and mutual mudslinging.

This latest chapter in the spectacle of reaction of the 2016 elections had a certain aura of political exhaustion. The American political system, in which two right-wing corporate-controlled parties have long enjoyed a monopoly, is staggering toward the finish line under conditions of a global crisis so deep that no one can be certain what the world will look like when the votes are counted on November 8.

In the 2016 elections, the US two-party system has achieved a certain negative culmination: in Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump, it has presented the American people with a choice between not only the two most unpopular candidates, but also the two most reactionary candidates in modern history.

Trump, the billionaire product of the semi-criminal world of New York real estate speculators, promoted and cultivated for decades by the corporate media and the political establishment, appeals to widespread economic distress only in order to direct social anger into the channels of racism, anti-immigrant bigotry, economic nationalism and militarism.

Clinton has become the consensus candidate of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, and, increasingly, of the Republican as well as the Democratic wing of the political establishment. It is significant that Trump never identified himself as a Republican or made any reference to the Republican Party during the debate, while Clinton repeatedly invoked the names of Republican presidents, including Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, and contrasted them to Trump.

Clinton's apparent aim in the third debate was to keep totally concealed what is coming after the election if, as polls now suggest, she wins the vote on November 8 and

becomes the next president in January 2017.

On every issue of domestic policy raised in the course of the 90-minute debate—democratic rights, immigration, economic policy, social spending—Clinton employed liberal rhetoric, claiming to defend abortion rights, the legalization of most undocumented workers, government-funded job-creation, a rise in the minimum wage, equal pay for women workers, and an increase in Social Security benefits.

Neither Trump nor Fox News moderator Chris Wallace pointed out that in the flood of documents released by WikiLeaks over the past week, Clinton aides openly discuss the need to make such bogus promises in order to fool the American people and stave off the primary election threat of the Bernie Sanders campaign, and Clinton herself reassures her Wall Street paymasters that they should take her campaign promises with a very large grain of salt.

As she told a landlords association, which coughed up her usual six-figure speaking fee, “you need both a public and a private position” to be effective in politics. The public position, of course, is pie in the sky for the voters, while the private position, delivered to one's financial backers, is what really counts.

It was only on national security issues that she gave a glimpse of the genuine Clinton, the arch militarist who sought to close the deal with the US ruling elite by demonstrating her hard-line defense of imperialist interests around the world.

When questioned about the WikiLeaks revelations concerning her remarks to private meetings of bankers, Clinton launched a calculated diversion, declaring that the central issue raised by the WikiLeaks documents was “Russian espionage,” and citing claims by US intelligence agencies that the Russian government had hacked Democratic Party emails and supplied them to WikiLeaks.

She then demanded that Trump admit the Russian role—for which no actual evidence has been presented—and condemn it, calling the supposed intervention by Putin “unprecedented in an American election” and declaring that Trump would be “a puppet for president” who would “spout the Putin line.” Moderator Wallace joined Clinton in this neo-McCarthyite smear, demanding, “Do you condemn this interference by Russia in the US elections?”

Clinton went on to advocate a wider war in the Middle East while concealing her plans after taking office, claiming she would “not support putting American troops back into Iraq as an occupying force.” This leaves the door wide open for the dispatch of American troops for some other purpose—i.e., fighting ISIS—rather than as an “occupying force.”

For the first time in any of the debates, the question of a US-Russian conflict in Syria was broached when Wallace asked Clinton directly about her support for a no-fly zone over Aleppo and other contested Syrian cities. He pointed out that General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had said a no-fly zone meant war with Syria and Russia, then asked, “If a Russian plane violates the no-fly zone, does President Clinton shoot it down?”

Clinton simply ducked the question, claiming that the no-fly zone, an act of war against Syria and its allies, Russia and Iran, would be the subject of “negotiation.” Trump said nothing about either ground troops or more aggressive intervention in Syria, contenting himself with denunciations of Iran and the deal between the Obama administration and Iran on its nuclear program.

Both candidates gave themselves the widest possible latitude for escalating the US military aggression throughout the Middle East in the name of fighting “terrorism.”

Trump touched a number of ultra-right talking points in the course of the debate, calling for the appointment of Supreme Court justices who would reverse *Roe v. Wade* and outlaw abortion, reiterating his signature demand to build a wall along the US-Mexico border and deport millions of undocumented workers, and pointing out, correctly, that the Obama administration has deported many millions already.

He appealed to the economic grievances of working people only to give them a right-wing expression, declaring that expelling immigrant workers, renegotiating trade agreements to bar foreign imports and slashing taxes on the wealthy and the corporations would generate an unprecedented economic boom, with annual GDP growth of six or seven percent. At the same time, he rejected

suggestions that cuts were required in Social Security or Medicare, because this runaway economic growth would supposedly resolve all federal budget issues.

The political perspective underlying Trump’s effort to combine appeals to economic distress and ultra-right, nationalistic policies emerged most clearly in the section of the debate devoted to each candidate’s “fitness to be president,” as Wallace put it.

Trump and Clinton replied with mutual mudslinging, first about the allegations of sexual harassment by Trump which have been the focus of a week-long media barrage, then the charges of “pay to play” at the Clinton State Department, with donors to the Clinton Foundation receiving special access.

It was at this point that Wallace raised Trump’s claim that “the election is rigged and Clinton is trying to steal it.” Pointing out that Mike Pence, Trump’s running mate, and even his daughter Ivanka Trump, had said they would respect the outcome of the vote on November 8, Wallace asked for a similar assurance from Trump himself.

The candidate flatly refused, saying he would wait to decide until the results were in. He declared that “millions of people are registered to vote that should not be allowed to vote,” then added that Clinton herself “should never have been allowed to run for president because of what she did with emails and so many other things.”

While media commentary after the debate declared that Trump had irrevocably lost the election by telling voters he would not respect their decision, there was no discussion of the real significance of this statement. It only underscores that Trump’s purposes go beyond the election: he is laying the basis for the development of a fascistic movement.

The final election debate only confirmed the fact that, whatever happens on November 8, the next administration will be the most right-wing in American history, and will take office under conditions of unprecedented economic, social and geopolitical crisis.



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