

# Voices: A call for better political rhetoric

October 9, 2024

Before the recent vice-presidential debate, I found myself wondering whether it was possible for us to hold a truly cordial and respectful presidential-level debate focused on policy, rather than on personal barbs and attacks.

Could we see a repeat of the vice-presidential debate, where candidates engage in a meaningful exchange of ideas, demonstrating genuine respect for one another, even in disagreement?

In recent years, it seems we have lost sight of all our presidential debates are supposed to accomplish. They are more than just a platform for candidates to plug their policies, sway voters or rally their bases. They should be much greater than that, serving as a reflection of who we are as Americans.

What do our debates say about who we are as a people? When the debates devolve into personal jabs and divisive rhetoric, what do they show the world?

Both sides of the aisle have sunk into this quagmire of winning at all costs. But what if we chose a different path—one we could be proud to display as a representation of who we are as a people?

What if our debates could emphasize our shared humanity and the values that unite us? What kind of good example could we set, both for our own children and for people watching from around the globe?

# Reshaping debates

We are deeply divided as a society, and the presidential debates reflect this. We often reward candidates for cutting remarks and witty comebacks, rather than for presenting well-thought-out policies or offering constructive solutions. A candidate's goal, then, is to get a sound bite to shape into a campaign ad.

The media reinforces this by focusing on dramatic moments rather than substantive issues. Although these moments draw viewers to the screen, they make debates more entertaining than informative. The result is a political culture that prioritizes performance over progress, where the loudest voice is heard, not necessarily the wisest.

Is it naïve to demand that debates serve to bring people together rather than drive them apart? Why can't candidates share their vision for the future in a venue where they can discuss differences openly without having their microphones muted when both candidates talk over each other?

How different would our country be if candidates approached debates in a spirit of humility, recognizing leadership means serving? This type of debate not only would lift the political discourse in our nation, but also would present the true nature of substantive political dialogue to the rest of the world.

Such a shift would require a change not only in how candidates approach debates, but also in how we as voters and viewers evaluate them. We would need to reward thoughtfulness, empathy and a willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue.

# Demonstrating strength

It is now considered weak to have a respectful dialogue about complex topics. However, I contend it's actually a demonstration of strength.

To be able to sit down and listen to someone who thinks completely differently than you do and respond thoughtfully is an act of courage. However, instead of modeling this behavior, candidates display all the behaviors that continue to drive us apart.

In a world on the knife's edge of conflict, the way we conduct our debates sends a message about who we are as a nation. When our debates display hostility and personal attacks, it reflects poorly on us. It shows the world how divided we are. The world isn't helped right now by a show of how divided the United States is.

Although it will not be easy, it is essential we all come together and call our leaders to be civil with one another. We must remember we are one nation, and although we do not always get along, we all should work together to make the world we pass on better than the one we have now.

If Christians want to change the divisiveness in American politics, it should start in the church. To achieve this, we need to lower the political rhetoric within the church and demonstrate the love of Christ to everyone, regardless of their political views.

Remember the words of C.S. Lewis: "The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs."

As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors, even when we have political differences. This isn't about backing down from our beliefs or failing to address hard truths. It's about acknowledging the inherent dignity in others.

Rhetoric matters, and it is time our leaders remind us that just because you disagree with someone politically does not mean that person is not made in the image of God. If we can do that, we not only will elevate our political discourse, but we also will set a powerful example for future generations and for the world. That is a political stance I can get behind.

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