Fact Check: Kamala Harris and Donald Trump’s presidential debate

AFP – Kamala Harris and Donald Trump clashed Tuesday in the pair’s first and so far only scheduled debate of the 2024 election campaign.

Harris, the US vice president and Democratic Party candidate, and Trump, the Republican nominee, traded claims about each other’s record in office, as well as their plans if they emerge victorious after November 5’s election.

AFP fact-checked the accuracy of what both contenders said on key issues:

– The economy –

Asked if Americans were better off than they were four years ago, Harris did not give a direct answer. She accused Trump of leaving Democrats “the worst unemployment since the Great Depression.” This is misleading. Joblessness spiked at 14.8 percent in April 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic shut down the US. By the time Trump left office unemployment was 6.4 percent.

Harris said she would offer families a tax credit of up to $6,000 for each eligible child, as well as a $50,000 tax deduction for small businesses, if elected president. She claimed Trump would favor billionaires and corporations over anyone else, and said the former president planned a sales tax that would hurt ordinary Americans.

Trump countered by saying President Joe Biden’s administration ushered in the highest inflation in US history, quoting figures of 21 percent and as high as 60 percent on some goods.

This is false. Inflation currently stands at 2.9 percent. Inflation did hit a high of 9.1 percent under Biden in 2022. This was well below a historic high of 23.7 percent in 1920.

Trump denied he would impose a sales tax but conceded that other countries would face trade tariffs at a minimum of 10 percent. Experts say tariffs amount to a tax on consumers who end up paying extra as the costs are passed on to them.

– Immigration and 'migrant crime' –

Trump falsely claimed that "millions and millions" of people from countries such as Venezuela "from mental institutions and insane asylums" are entering the US and committing crimes. He also re-aired a baseless viral claim that migrants are eating pets in places including Springfield, Ohio.

"In Springfield, they're eating the dogs, the people that came in, they're eating the cats. They're eating the pets of the people that live there. And this is what's happening in our country."

Police and local authorities say there are no credible reports of such animal killings.

Violent and property crimes in the US are near their lowest levels in decades, according to FBI data from 2022, the most recent year for which figures are available.

A June 2023 study found a decline in incarceration rates among immigrants from all regions since 1960. Other research has found migrants commit fewer violent crimes than US citizens.

FBI statistics from the first three months of 2024 also show a 15 percent decrease in violent and property crime year-over-year.

Illegal immigration during Trump's administration was higher than under President Barack Obama's two terms. Earlier this year, during the Biden administration, illegal immigration

reached a historic high. It has fallen since an executive order signed in June.

Harris said Trump put politics above policy by ordering Republican lawmakers in Februrary to kill a bipartisan bill that would have toughened policies at the southern US border, effectively denying Democrats a win on immigration in an election year.

– Abortion –

Trump, who appointed three conservative judges to a Supreme Court that overturned Roe v Wade, the precedent that guaranteed abortion access, called Democrats "radical" on the issue, claiming vice presidential candidate Tim Walz supports "execution after birth – it's execution, no longer abortion – because the baby is born is okay, and that's not okay with me."

This is false. No state allows a baby to be killed after it is born. This is infanticide, which is illegal across the US.

Debate moderator Linsey Davis corrected Trump, saying: "There is no state in this country where it is legal to kill a baby after it's born." Harris added: "Nowhere in America is a woman carrying a pregnancy to term and asking for an abortion. That is not happening."

Harris claimed: "If Donald Trump were to be reelected, he will sign a national abortion ban." But the former president immediately replied: "I'm not signing a ban," saying that the issue is with the states.

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