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Obama and McCain Take Their Last Shots



In the last debate of the campaign season, the candidates go face to face.

By [Kathryn Carlson](#) and [Andrew Garib](#)
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Sen. Barack Obama, the Democratic presidential candidate, and Sen. John McCain, the Republican candidate, defended their increasingly negative campaigns in the final presidential debate Wednesday night and in a unique twist to appeal to white middle-class voters directed their comments on the economy to “Joe the plumber,” an Ohio voter who represents highly sought-after swing voters in battleground states.

The debate, held at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y., was widely considered a must-win for McCain, of Arizona, who has been trailing by as much as double digits in some recent polls. As with the last two debates, there were no clear winners. But McCain failed to deliver a game-changing performance that would resuscitate his sliding campaign.

In their first face-to-face conversation about the negative tone of the campaign, the candidates decried the attacks that each party has made upon the other. McCain pointed to comments by Obama supporter Georgia Congressman John Lewis, who accused the McCain campaign of stoking racial tensions. McCain said the remarks were “hurtful” and “very unfair and totally inappropriate.”

While Obama said he expected the presidential campaign to be “tough,” he also said that voters wanted to hear

where the candidates stood on issues like the economy. "The American people have become so cynical about our politics because all they see is a tit-for-tat and back-and-forth," Obama said.

"I don't mind being attacked for the next three weeks," Obama said, adding "what [Americans] deserve over the next four years is that we talk about what's most pressing to them — the economic crisis."

McCain defended accusations that he was not doing enough to quell the tempers of his supporters, some of whom at recent rallies have been heard shouting "terrorist" and "kill him" in reference to the Illinois senator. "I have repudiated every time someone has been out of line, whether they've been part of my campaign or not," McCain said.

In the heated exchange, Obama answered McCain's renewed call to explain his connection to William Ayers, a founder of a radical left-wing group responsible for bombings in the 1960s. "Forty years ago, when I was eight years old, he engaged in despicable acts with a radical domestic group," Obama said of Ayers. "I have roundly condemned those acts," he said, later adding that Ayers "is not involved in my campaign. He has never been involved in this campaign. And he will not advise me in the White House."

Earlier in the 90-minute debate, moderated by Bob Schieffer of CBS News, the candidates reiterated their multibillion dollar plans to rescue the ailing economy. McCain referenced a conversation between Obama and Joe Wurzelbacher, a plumber and small business owner that Obama met on the campaign trail in Ohio.

Addressing his opponent directly, McCain said, "What you want to do to Joe the plumber and millions more like him is have their taxes increased and not be able to realize the American dream of owning their own business." McCain attacked Obama's tax policy, calling it "class warfare," and said that rather than the government "spread the wealth around," a McCain administration would let "Joe to spread the wealth around."

Obama hammered McCain with his central attack, calling the Republican's platform a continuation of Bush's "failed policies," to which McCain offered a sharp rebuttal: "Senator Obama, I am not President Bush. If you wanted to run against President Bush, you should have run four years ago."

Obama was quick to reply. "When it comes to economic policies, essentially what you're proposing is eight more years of the same thing," Obama said. "And it hasn't worked, and I think the American people understand it hasn't worked."

Neither candidate offered new details on their energy proposals, with both senators outlining their plans to decrease dependency on foreign oil within ten years and emphasizing the need to develop nuclear, "clean coal," and renewable energy sources.

Obama and McCain were divided on abortion rights, with Obama defending the landmark 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, which struck down state laws prohibiting abortion. McCain said he opposed the decision. "We have to change the culture of America," McCain said. "Those of us who are proudly pro-life understand that."

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