

Democrats Failed The Convention Optics Test



In comparing the DNC and RNC, the optics and the policy contrasts could not have been clearer. And that was even before the fireworks.

The Federalist, By [Ben Domenech](#),
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In the past two weeks of conventions, during which Democrats' media champions have increasingly raised alarms about the direction of the race, is that this year the optics of these conventions mattered most, and could not have been more different. And they should [worry](#) Democrats.

Very few people tune in to these things who aren't already decided about who they want to support. Undecideds are often the spouse of the decided viewer, gleaning information about what a party is presenting by osmosis and learning who these political figures are for the first time. Another aim is establishing a permission structure: the Republican convention's design was clearly intended to give upper middle class white people a shield, the image of a diverse racial coalition citing reason after reason (First Step, Education, HBCU dollars) to come back home to vote Trump. You want a rationale for telling your coworker why you're voting for Trump? Send your friend that [Ann Dorn video](#), or Alice Johnson's speech, or Kayla Mueller's parents trying to choke back tears, and there's your argument.

On the surface, most conventions look very similar. Lots of red white and blue, lots of boring speeches media folks pretend are memorable, and a balloon drop at the end. What mattered more this year was the total divergence in optics. Even if you didn't watch the conventions – most Americans didn't – you saw the images. Joe Biden in darkness, with no one close by, talking to Zoom screens as if he's in a sci fi movie. Even the fireworks display was uncomfortable – the idea that Biden needs to socially distance from his own Vice Presidential nominee is absurd, even as a matter of modeling behavior for the public.

It comes across not as a good example, but one of fear and constant endless lockdown. The Biden campaign is even running ads with his mask hanging off one ear in multiple shots, wafting in the breeze, because he's outside. It doesn't look serious, it looks ridiculous. And

combined with his Zoom calls into MSNBC and CNN, and sending out Kamala to give a prebttal to Trump, it doubles down on the idea in the mind of those who aren't that partisan that Biden is a weak figure, operating out of fear, with no answer except a return to lockdown and mandatory masks outside until a vaccine is widely available.

The optics of the Trump convention were much different. It looked a lot more like a convention without an audience. And while watching it could be a little hinky, it had none of the low-rent qualities of the DNC. Last night, it closed in over-the-top Trumpian style. Yes, his speech was overstuffed and you could have cut the Americana portion in half – it's hard to deliver soaring rhetoric outdoors in 90 degree heat and sweltering DC weather – but the optics and the policy contrasts could not have been clearer. And that was even before those fireworks. The point is: this looked presidential, confident, not cowed.

As the Cook Report's Amy Walter pointed out, the strongest line of attack in the speech was perhaps this one:

For 47 years, Joe Biden took the donations of blue collar workers, gave them hugs and even kisses, and told them he felt their pain – and then he flew back to Washington and voted to ship their jobs to China and many other distant lands. Joe Biden spent his entire career outsourcing the dreams of American Workers, offshoring their jobs, opening their borders, and sending their sons and daughters to fight in endless foreign wars.

Trump would be wise to repeat that line of attack, particularly in the Midwest.

Noah Pollak shared this [interesting point](#) about the dynamics of the election, from an email correspondent. “Ordinary Americans intuitively understand that they're being held hostage. The message from the left, without anyone having to say it explicitly, is that the violence will end and we can return to our lives on the condition that we get rid of Trump. And if we don't ... Who's to say how bad things can get?

I wish we could all afford to take the principled position that you don't appease hostage takers. But that's not real life. If you're a normal person who just wants to send your kids to school, to get back to work, and for the riots to end, you know that those things can probably happen by Thanksgiving if you just give the left what it wants and get rid of Trump.

Liberals don't even hide that this is the message. Just look at their convention last week. They spent it repeating, as if it were a mantra, that Donald Trump is an “existential threat to American democracy.” Nobody believes that. It's literally crazy. But crazy is the point. We need to know that they just might be crazy enough to burn the country to the ground, and claim just cause for doing so, if we don't give them what they want.

If you want optics of that crazy, you got them Thursday night in Washington. As Trump was speaking, black-clad leftists gathered outside with bullhorns, flashing lights, vuvuzelas and a guillotine. The sound in the background cropped up during the speech in ominous ways. As soon as attendees started to leave, they were confronted by [screaming idiots](#) trying to incite something. Video [here](#). And [here](#). And [here](#). And [here](#).

And when it came to Rand Paul, they got even more [aggressive](#). The image of a U.S. Senator – a member of the most powerful 100 people in Washington, champion of criminal justice reform, a prominent opponent of war, the opposite of a knee-jerk defender of cops – surrounded by a bunch of entitled mostly-white people shriek at them, steal his wife’s shoe as she clings to his arm, and threaten them with violence, saved only by a diverse group of DC police who escort them through the mob sends a message louder than any politician’s speech.

Optics matter. The optics of the past several weeks have been terrible for Democrats and good for Republicans. That can change, of course. We’re 31 days from the first debate. If it happens.



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