

Trump refuses to condemn white supremacists or post-election violence

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U.S. president refuses to condemn racist violence during debate. (Photo: NPR)

Cleveland, September 30 (RHC)-- Political observers watching the first U.S. presidential debate on Tuesday evening said there were no clear winners. Most noted that both President Donald Trump and his challenger, Joe Biden, were unable to control themselves and ended up interrupting each other and constantly talking over the others comments.

During the debate, when questioned about the ongoing protests against racism in the United States, Trump refused to denounce any far-right or white supremacist groups. He said: "Proud Boys, stand back and stand by, but I'll tell you what, somebody's got to do something about antifa and the left, because this is not a right-wing problem. This is a left-wing problem"

On the Proud Boys' account on the social media app Telegram, the group appeared to take the statement as marching orders. "Standing down and standing by sir," the account wrote. The account then posted two videos of the answer, including one with the caption: "God. Family. Brotherhood," in which a man howled at the TV in response to Trump's response.

Megan Squire, a computer science professor at Elon University in North Carolina who tracks online extremism, said Trump's giving the Proud Boys orders was their long-sought "fantasy."

"To say Proud Boys are energized by this is an understatement," Squire said. "They were pro-Trump before this shoutout, and they are absolutely over the moon now. Their fantasy is to fight antifa in his defense, and he apparently just asked them to do just that."

The Proud Boys, a self-described "Western chauvinist" organization, is considered a violent, nationalistic, Islamophobic, transphobic and misogynistic hate group, according to the Anti-Defamation League, a nonprofit organization that tracks extremist groups. Proud Boys members marched at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and have organized against Black Lives Matter protests in recent months.

The group recently staged a rally in Portland, Oregon, in support of Trump. About 200 people, some armed with guns, attended the rally, short of the expectations of thousands.

Proud Boys organizer Joe Biggs also posted after the debate that he was "standing by," and he said the president "basically said to go f--- them up."

"President Trump told the proud boys to stand by because someone needs to deal with ANTIFA... well sir! we're ready!!" Biggs wrote.

Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt said in a tweet that the president's answer was "astonishing." "President Trump owes America an apology or an explanation," he said. "Now."

Trump's comments drew widespread condemnation on social media. Yamiche Alcindor, White House correspondent for "PBS NewsHour," tweeted that she quoted the refusal to condemn white supremacy multiple times on air.

"It was a remarkable moment for the commander in chief as white supremacy is seen by national security experts as a threat to national security," she wrote.

David French, a conservative commentator who has been critical of Trump, tweeted that Trump's comments were "a call to be ready." "In a nation wracked by unrest, that was one of the most irresponsible and reprehensible statements I've ever seen from a president," French wrote.

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