



Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.



On September 26, 1960, American households gathered around their television sets to view the **first televised** presidential debate between Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts and Vice President Richard M. Nixon. For the candidates, this was big. They had access to their largest campaign audience ever, as they stood side by side, acting “presidential,” in an effort to tell their stories and convince voters that their vision for America was best for the next four years.



For voters, what they saw was a youthful looking John Kennedy square off against an unshaven and sweaty Richard Nixon. As the two highlighted their policy differences and preferences, viewers were transfixed on the images of the candidates coming into their living rooms. Kennedy went on to win the election. After the election, Kennedy **noted** that “it was TV more than anything else that turned the tide” toward his victory, though the **evidence** is mixed.

Sixty years later, presidential candidates are still standing side-by-side on that debate stage, showcasing their views, highlighting their accomplishments, and giving glimpses into their personalities and character, all in an effort to connect with voters.

For voters who may be undecided, have lingering policy questions, or likability concerns about the candidates, the debates can help formulate judgements and opinions over who they believe would be the better president. In short, debates can make a difference. The substance of the candidates’ messages and the manner in which they portray themselves matters. Voters notice, and debate performance may translate into votes at the polls on Election Day.

2020 DEBATE SCHEDULE

- ★ **Sept. 29th - 1st Presidential Debate**
Case Western Reserve University and Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH
- ★ **Oct. 7th - Vice Presidential Debate**
The University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT
- ★ **Oct. 15th - 2nd Presidential Debate**
Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, Miami, FL
- ★ **Oct. 22nd - 3rd Presidential Debate**
Belmont University, Nashville, TN

To Think and To Do: With the 2020 Presidential Debate season gearing up, review the National Constitution Center’s **10 Famous Political Debate Moments**. Select two or three debate clips to watch. As you do, consider the substance of the candidate’s message and the manner in which they portray themselves. Does what you see and hear matter? Does it affect how you view a candidate’s ability, personality, intelligence and whether or not you would support them in an election? How might you apply this to the upcoming debates?

Classroom Extension Activity: There is **some disagreement** over whether general election debates have an impact. Explore with students the question over whether presidential debates matter. Download the **Bill of Rights Institute’s** lesson for a student-led discussion about presidential debates.

Learn MORE about presidential debates.

Free registration may be required.

- [Debates.org](https://debates.org), from The Commission on Presidential Debates
- [5 Facts About Presidential & Vice Presidential Debates](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/22/5-facts-about-presidential-debates/), from Pew Research Center



Lou Frey Institute



Take Part in the 2020 Mock Election!

If you are in **Florida**, join us with [KidsVotingFlorida!](https://www.kidsvotingflorida.com)

Somewhere else?

Check out [DoubleClick Democracy](https://www.doubleclickdemocracy.com)