



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.



More than 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.

August 23, 2023 marks the first time Republican presidential candidates will face off with one another to highlight their views and policy positions for the American people. Not all the Republican presidential candidates will be present. To be eligible to participate in the debate, a candidate had to meet certain requirements set by the Republican National Committee. To [qualify](#), a candidate had to:

- poll at least at 1% in three national or mixed polls between July 1 and Aug. 21
- have at least of 40,000 donors, with 200 donors in 20 or more states

The Republican candidates who have met this threshold, and who will be on the debate stage, are:

Gov. Doug Burgum (ND); former Gov. Chris Christie (NJ); Gov. Ron DeSantis (FL); former Gov. Nikki Haley (SC); former Gov. Asa Hutchinson (AR); former Vice Pres. Mike Pence; entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy; Sen. Tim Scott (SC)

Former President Donald Trump also qualified to participate in the debate, but he has decided not to.

2023 DEBATE SCHEDULE

- ★
August 23 - 1st Presidential Primary Debate
 Fiserv Forum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- ★
September 27 - 2nd Presidential Primary Debate
 Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, Simi Valley, California

To Think and To Do: With the 2024 presidential primary 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 presidential primary debates?

Learn MORE about presidential debates. Free registration may be required.

- [Debates.org](#), from The Commission on Presidential Debates
- [5 Facts About Presidential & Vice Presidential Debates](#), from Pew Research Center

