



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.



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.

In fact, the first presidential debate of the 2024 election season proved that debates can have campaign-altering effects. Biden’s performance in [this debate](#) caused concern regarding his ability to serve another term. After widespread calls for him to step down, he [ended](#) his bid for reelection on July 21, 2024. Vice President Kamala Harris became the new Democratic nominee on August 5, 2024.



A presidential debate is set for September 10 between former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris. Both candidates have agreed to [these debate rules](#). In addition, a vice presidential debate is set for October 1 between Ohio Senator J.D. Vance (R) and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz (D).

To Think and To Do: As the 2024 election debate season gets underway, use the debate guides linked below before, during, and after you watch.

- ★ [Presidential Debate Guide: Before the Debate](#)
- ★ [Presidential Debate Guide: During/After the Debate](#)

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

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



Take Part in the 2024 Mock Election!
If you are in **Florida**, join us with [KidsVotingFlorida!](#)
Somewhere else?
Check out [DoubleClick Democracy](#)