

Political Debates

In the 1950s, television prices fell, making this type of media more accessible. Nightly news became a mainstay on major networks like ABC, NBC, and CBS. For the first time, Americans could watch political candidates and politics play out in real time. Television became a focus for advertising and elections, and for politicians to plead their cases. Televised debates and political ads were often used to introduce candidates to the public. The expansion of social media in the 2000s has reduced the press's role in the traditional sense. However, presidential elections since 1960 have continued to have televised debates.

Presidential debates aren't the only times politicians debate. Local and state elections can also choose to have their candidates debate. Historically, midterm elections have reflected the president's approval ratings by determining congressional control. The higher the approval ratings, the better the outcomes are for their respective parties. For example, both Bill Clinton in 1998 and George W. Bush in 2002 saw midterm elections reinforce their party's favorability.

Political debates offer everyone (those of voting age and not) a chance to engage civically. They draw attention to local and national issues while painting a clearer picture of the political landscape around us.

Directions: Find a news station broadcasting a debate of interest. The following sections will allow you to analyze the candidates before, during, and after the debate.

Before the Debate

What are two topics or issues that you hope to hear the candidates discuss during the debate?	Find a copy of the released rules for the debate. What rules do you feel are important in a debate?
What matters most to you as a viewer: a candidate's speaking abilities/delivery, the substance of the candidate's answers, or the potential entertainment value? Explain.	Which candidate do you predict will perform the best when it comes to: speaking abilities/delivery, the substance of answers, and entertainment value?

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During the Debate

Directions: Place an X in the box each time you hear either candidate discuss one of the topics.

TOPIC	Candidate 1:	Candidate 2:
2ND AMENDMENT		
ECONOMY		
EDUCATION		
ENERGY		
ENVIRONMENT		
FOREIGN POLICY		
HEALTH CARE		
IMMIGRATION		
LAW ENFORCEMENT		
MILITARY		
RACE RELATIONS		
REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS		
TAXES		

List any endorsements/special interest group support you hear mentioned by either candidate:

Candidate 1:	Candidate 2:

Take notes of some of your favorite one-liners/jabs/zingers. Make sure to indicate who said it.

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After the Debate

What is something you heard a candidate or both candidates discuss that you would like to fact-check or research further?	List one new thing you learned about each candidate.
Did your expectations of the debate align with the reality of the debate? Why or why not?	To what extent do you think either candidate may have won over undecided voters?
Did either candidate consistently break the agreed-upon debate rules? Did that bother you as a viewer?	How would you rate the moderators' overall performance? Did they have control of the debate? Were they fair to both candidates?
Did either candidate make promises you found unrealistic for them to keep? Explain.	Describe each candidate's performance when it comes to: speaking abilities/delivery, the substance of answers, and entertainment value?