

Are These Presidential Election Debates Necessary?

By Roger L. Simon

Are you looking forward to the debates between President Biden and former President Trump, the first one scheduled to be in late June?



(Left) President Donald Trump participates in the final presidential debate against Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden at Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn., on Oct. 22, 2020. (Right) Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden participates in

I'm not.

How would they really be edifying? Both men have already served as president. We already know what they actually do when in the office. What they say or will say pales by comparison. The rubber, as the cliché goes, has already more than met the road.

This is a special case, since two presidents who have served rarely run against each other. But the nature of our

presidential debates has declined significantly since the storied days of the 1858 Lincoln–Douglas senatorial debates in Illinois when two men (Abraham Lincoln and incumbent Senator Stephen Douglas) were able to confront each other on the issues, without intermediaries, while barnstorming across the state.

Now everything is pre-defined with rules written that make the event seem programmed. What becomes memorable is almost never the ideas or policies promulgated but theatrical moments. Two of the most famous are Sen. Lloyd Bentsen attacking Sen. Dan Quayle during the 1988 vice-presidential debates with, “Senator, you’re no Jack Kennedy” and President Ronald Reagan’s quipping when debating Sen. Walter Mondale in 1984, “I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent’s youth and inexperience.”

The 1960 John F. Kennedy–Richard Nixon debates were the first to be televised and it is said that Kennedy triumphed in that election because Nixon did not look good on camera.

What does any of this have to do with how someone would perform as president? It’s hard to say.

What presidential debates have devolved into is largely a publicity extravaganza that benefit for the most part the networks that broadcast them. Many of these same networks have for some time been in a decline and are in need of a rescue.

It doesn’t help that the debates are hosted for the most part by the “same old same old” crew of extremely high-paid talking heads who try to hide their obvious biases while burnishing their resumé’s.

Sometimes the bias leaks out, as when Chris Wallace, then of Fox News, squashed Donald Trump’s attempts to bring up the Hunter Biden laptop at the last round of Trump–Biden debates. In instances like that, the debates can actually be dangerous

to the country because they're misleading.

But that was 2020. In this go-round, I was hoping we wouldn't have to endure anything like that because debates would be abjured. President Biden, it seemed, did not want to participate and would be, on what was said to be advice of his counselors, staying out of the limelight as much as possible.

No such luck. Whether because the swing state polls were not going his way or some other reason, President Biden challenged his predecessor to debates. A surprisingly early date, well before Election Day, was chosen in recognition that many would already be voting because the (highly criticized) mail-in voting would soon be under way.

We are now embroiled in a debate about the terms of the debates. Stay tuned—or, if you choose, don't. Who would blame you?

It's worth noting [The Epoch Times made](#) a small attempt to change the terms of political debate in 2022 with which I was involved. We hosted a debate with a new form that was something of a "pilot" in the Republican Primary for the Tennessee 5th Congressional District. Instead of journalists, we used subject domain experts (foreign policy, economy, and so forth) to ask the questions with the goal of minimizing bias and focusing on policy. Although feedback was generally good, our hopes others would follow our lead with their own improvements have so far not materialized.

I am sorry to have been so grumpy about the debates. I was intending (before they were announced) to write about something else I think of more import.

What if President Trump does win in November? What next? Specifically, what do we do about the question of vengeance, or more specifically accountability, that has both moral and practical implications?

The Law of Projection tells us the left fears this more than anything due to their own proclivity for vengefulness. This

could be underpinning a great deal of their behavior, up to and after the election.

How do we deal with this? How do we make sure certain things do not happen again?

I will start briefly here but I am almost certain we will all have more to say as time goes on. I am only beginning to evolve my thinking on this issue, as are many, I would also imagine.

I have heard much discussion of who must be held accountable and how for what has gone on the last few years. I am referring, principally, to the weaponization of our justice system, the open border, hugely unnecessary spending, and, most of all, to the excessive control of our lives due to the pandemic.

This all relates directly to something most seem to agree—we are a broken country. How do we put it all together again? (Certainly not through presidential debates that begin with “make my day.”)

If one were to name Dr. Anthony Fauci as the poster boy for “who must be punished,” I would probably agree. But to go further we are often in murky ground. How to solve it?

As a Jew, I am supposed to believe in the biblical “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” and so forth (*lex talionis*), not a particularly popular belief in modern terms, because it seems barbaric. But I do.

Why? Because an “eye for an eye” is not what it has been construed but is actually an advance for human equality, as explained with great eloquence by [Dennis Prager at PragerU](#).

If you haven't watched this five-minute video, you should. It provides a superb basis for what we are all going to have to be dealing with going forward. President Trump cannot put the proverbial Humpty-Dumpty together again by himself. Nobody could.

As they say, to be continued.

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