

# [***The Biden-Trump Debates Won't Move the Needle. Here's Why | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C1W-H3T1-JBR6-9001-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek.com

May 16, 2024 Thursday 2:12 PM EST

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**Length:** 877 words

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**Highlight:** The reality is that almost no one other than die-hard political junkies and people who get paid to write hot takes afterwards wants to see these two elderly, unpopular politicians bicker for two hours.

**Body**

Yesterday President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and his likely [*Republican*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republican?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) opponent, former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), [*agreed*](https://www.politico.com/news/2024/05/15/biden-proposes-2-debates-with-trump-ditching-bipartisan-commission-00158082) to hold two debates prior to the presidential election, one in June and one in September.

Awesome.

The reality is that almost no one other than die-hard political junkies and people who get paid to write hot takes afterwards (Hello!) wants to see these two elderly, unpopular politicians bicker for two hours. Biden should really consider not inflicting such a spectacle on us, but if he must, he should make sure that Trump can't turn the proceedings into interminable shouting matches that make people wish they had never been born.

Let's start with what's not up for debate: Donald Trump and Joe Biden are the two most radioactive politicians ever to square off in an American presidential election. President Biden's average approval rating, according to 538, is [*just 38.3 percent*](https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/biden-approval-rating/) and Trump is [*at 41.2 percent*](https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/favorability/donald-trump/). And because this is also the first rematch since Adlai Stevenson and Dwight Eisenhower fought it out in 1952 and then again in 1956, there is much less to learn about these unloved men, their plans, and their comportment than in a normal presidential election. To make matters worse for viewers, neither of them is exactly at the top of their rhetorical game. At a combined 159 years old when the debates will take place, the candidates are both struggling against the relentless march of time.

Biden, never an Obama-like presence on television in the first place, [*has had*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/03/21/biden-stutter-trump-mock-compassion/) a stutter his whole life. While stutters don't get worse with age, time seems to have made it harder for him to find linguistic workarounds to get his ideas across. Like all octogenarians, his memory and reaction times seem to be showing signs of wear. The resulting style can often be halting and not terribly confidence-inspiring, even compared to a few years ago. Trump has always been a walking non-sequitur, as liable to go off on a tangent about Rosie O'Donnell or the Grammys as he is to say anything meaningful about the job he is seeking. But over the past year, perhaps fatigued after constantly flying from Mar-a-Lago to campaign stops and his various criminal trials and back, his word salads have [*become harder*](https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/trump-biden-age-2024-election-rcna141691) to assemble into a rhetorical meal.

It wouldn't be fun to sit through even if they were running against each other for comptroller in a mid-sized city. Overall, this impending nightmare matchup reminds me of the fact that I used to gather socially with other human beings and watch presidential debates for fun, something that now feels like a hopelessly naive relic of another time. I wouldn't rewatch a Trump-Biden debate even if every streaming service on Earth shut down and it was literally the only thing you could put on a screen. Yet we are now signed up for more.

It's also depressing because we know exactly how this is all going to turn out unless the Biden campaign insists on new rules. Trump is going to lie, and if he isn't muted (a distinct possibility) interrupt the president relentlessly. Even if his microphone is off, Trump may well shout over him, a tactic designed to derail Biden's train of thought and trigger unforced errors.

While Trump has set this dial of irritation and unsportsmanlike conduct at various levels from moderate to maximum during his five televised general election debates in 2016 and 2020, there is no question that rubbing his opponent raw will be central to his debate strategy. Indeed, given his underlying lack of rudimentary personal discipline and his inability to stay on message even for an hour, it is probably all he has. Good sense just isn't his thing.

And there is no reason that the Biden campaign should sit back and let this happen again. The final rules of the debate should be crystal clear—some cross-talk is inevitable, but there should be an interruption threshold beyond which there are consequences. And if Trump won't agree to limits on his abusive behavior, Biden simply should not debate him, no matter how far behind in the polls his campaign thinks it is at the moment.

Speaking as a Democrat, these debates are going to be stressful enough as it is. Even without Trump butting in every three seconds, I'll still be gripping the armrest like I'm on a plane going into an uncontrolled vertical spin. Though there is copious political science research demonstrating that debates have, at best, a [*very marginal impact*](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/presidential-debates-have-shockingly-little-effect-on-election-outcomes/) on election outcome, every vote could count in a race that looks like it is going to be closer than twins. Biden can ill afford any display of physical or mental infirmity, and he seems unlikely to get through a whole debate without some kind of stumble that will dominate the news cycle for days.

Just the thought of it makes me want to pour myself a martini—hold the olives, hold the vermouth and just give me the glass full of gin. See you in June, I guess.

*David Faris is an associate professor of political science at Roosevelt University and the author of* It's Time to Fight Dirty: How [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Can Build a Lasting Majority in American ***Politics***. *His writing has appeared in* The Week*,* The Washington Post*,* The New Republic*,* Washington Monthly *and more. You can find him on Twitter @davidmfaris.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2394353/looking-fight.jpg)

**Graphic**

Looking for a fight

Andrew Harnik/Getty Images

Former President Donald Trump stands next to a podium placed next to him to challenge President Biden to a debate as he speaks at a rally on April 13, in Schnecksville, Pennsylvania.

**Load-Date:** May 16, 2024

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