

A low-angle, close-up photograph of the Statue of Liberty's head and crown against a clear blue sky. The statue's green patina is visible, and the rays of the crown are prominent. A semi-transparent grey rectangle is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the title and speaker information.

Presidential Debates in a Nutshell

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"NY Statue of Liberty" by Celso Flores

Brief History of Presidential Debates

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- 4 debates between Kennedy and Nixon in 1960
 - ▶ Open-seat election that was expected to be close.
 - ▶ Most TV viewers thought Kennedy won.
 - ▶ Single most important event in the 1960 campaign according to Nixon biographers.
- After 1960, no general-election debates until 1976 (Carter vs. Ford)
 - ▶ Nixon refused to participate again and nothing required him to.
 - ▶ Regular fixture since 1976.

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- Purely voluntary; no legal requirements whatsoever
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Why Are Presidential Debates For?

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- **Candidates' perspective:** Persuading undecided voters and energizing existing supporters.

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- These are the exceptions, however.
- Best to view any debate as a single event in a larger campaign.

Things Social Scientists Think We Know About Presidential Debates

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- 2) People who watch debates on TV pay more attention to the candidates' personalities.
 - ▶ May be more likely to vote based on personality traits.
- 3) Debate performances are more likely to strengthen existing voting preferences than to change them.
 - ▶ Partisanship is a filter
 - ▶ Few undecided voters left

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- Supreme Court nominee hearings held, expected to pass.
- Biden's polling advantage over Trump has increased modestly.
 - ▶ Biden is +7.7% in who people plan to vote for according to the latest averages.
 - ▶ Trump's approval rating has dropped by about a point.
 - ▶ Numbers have rebounded somewhat for Trump in the past week or so.

Sources

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