



Trump vs. Biden: Different Debate Needs Will Produce Different Strategies

President Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden will walk onto a debate stage in Cleveland Tuesday night carrying markedly different needs, which likely means they will be pursuing distinctly different strategies.

The president has to try to turn the race into a referendum on the challenger rather than on himself. "We're only a few months removed from discussions about whether Trump would even agree to attend the debates, yet now he needs them more than Biden does," says Kevin Madden, who was a top adviser to Sen. Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential campaign. "The pandemic response and the economic disruption that has resulted have put Trump on defense, so he needs this first debate to change the momentum in his favor."

Mr. Trump therefore may spend more time attacking his opponent as simply too weak for the job than in talking about what he would do in a second term.

Mr. Biden, by contrast, wants to come across as a calm and unifying figure, while reassuring voters that he is up to the presidency and in charge of a Democratic Party pushing him leftward. He very much wants the race to be a referendum on the president, not on him.

"Biden just needs to hold on to what he's got: to reinforce the perception that he is a competent, caring and effective alternative to the narcissistic failure that is Trump," says Democratic pollster Mark Mellman.

Wall Street Journal, excerpt posted on [SouthFloridaReporter.com](https://www.southflorida-reporter.com), Sept. 29, 2020