

***At final debate, Biden shows Trump what it means to be a politician***  
*Jonathan Allen - ABC News*

*Analysis: Four years have diminished the value of Trump's framing that it's better to have an outsider as president.*



*In 2016, playing the untainted outsider to Hillary Clinton's veteran insider worked well enough for Trump. But four years later, the idea that it's bad to be a politician seems fundamentally less resonant. Chip Somodevilla / Getty Images*

*NASHVILLE, Tenn. — In the final two weeks before Election Day, President Donald Trump is placing an awfully big bet on the premise that casting his opponent as an insider has the same value it did four years ago.*

*He repeatedly hurled the "politician" charge at Democratic nominee Joe Biden in [their final debate](#) Thursday night. Biden's entire campaign is a celebration of [the virtues of old-school politics](#).*

*"We should be talking about your families, but that's the last thing he wants to talk about," Biden said from the debate stage here at Belmont University. It was, as Trump noted, the pivot of a practiced politician [away from personal invective](#) and toward the public's needs.*

*"I ran because of you," an agitated Trump said. "I'm looking at you now, you're a politician."*

*At another point, he undermined his own allegations that Biden and his family have enriched themselves — no modern president has done **more of that than Trump** — by conditioning them.*

*"If this stuff is true about Russia, Ukraine, China, other countries, Iraq," Trump said. "If this is true, then he's a corrupt politician." If this stuff is true? Some politicians might fabricate an hour's worth of supposed dirt on an opponent, but they would be reluctant to then admit it was all unsubstantiated. Typical politicians believe they have to hew close enough to the truth to avoid losing the honesty battle that Trump has forfeited to Biden.*

*In 2016, playing the untainted outsider to Hillary Clinton's veteran insider worked well enough for Trump. But four years later, the idea that it's bad to be a politician seems fundamentally less resonant. Refusing to even pay lip service to the idea that candidates "should be talking about your families" in a time of deep crisis is the take of someone who misunderstands the electoral process.*



*Final presidential debate highlights between Trump and Biden*

*The American system was designed to create an incentive — elections — for officials to cater to the sentiments and will of the voting public. Many voters are more than ready for a president whose self-interest is tied to knowing how government works best to serve them, who tempers his instinct for self-promotion with an understanding of the line between that and deceit, and who seeks to heal societal divisions rather than exploiting them.*

*These are the things a politician does. There should seldom be conflict between a president's self-interest and the broader public interest. To the extent that voters are divided, a typical politician seeks to unite them in common purpose and explain why he or she follows one approach to reaching their goals over others.*

*Some voters who don't approve of Trump's presidency agree with him that he is not responsible for the coronavirus. But the large majority of voters — including many who support him — believe he mishandled the coronavirus crisis. His unwillingness to publicly acknowledge a threat that he privately said was brutal has contributed to a failed administration response to the pandemic.*

*A typical politician knows that it's folly to argue with voters about what they believe to be true. In the case of the pandemic, it's that a better response would have protected more of the nearly quarter of a million Americans who have died since the end of February, cost less than the trillions of dollars taxpayers have had to pour into the economy and mitigated an impact on commerce that has led to tens of millions of lost jobs and tens of thousands of closed businesses.*

*What's confounding, if not surprising, is that Trump seems constitutionally incapable of simply making a salient argument against Biden without overshooting the mark. Even many Democrats are uncomfortable with the money members of the Biden family have made off the perception that they can influence his decision-making. Trump says he has done many of the things Biden promises to do to combat coronavirus — and that's true, too — but it's absurd to think Biden is advocating for a tradeoff between the strength of the economy and public health.*

*In the fashion of a typical politician, Biden is trying to have it both ways. He's arguing that the economy won't heal until the disease is brought under control. That's what Trump said — at least once — on March 16.*

*"We're not thinking in terms of recession, we're thinking in terms of the virus," [Trump said at the White House](#). "Once we stop — I think there's a tremendous pent-up demand, both in terms of the stock market and in terms of the economy. And once this goes away, once it goes through and we're done with it, I think you're going to see a tremendous — a tremendous surge."*

*But he quickly abandoned that approach, pushing for a reopening of commerce the next month that prioritized economic recovery over slowing the spread of the virus. A typical politician might have stuck to the plan devised by public health experts a little longer.*

*The other way in which Trump is atypical as a politician may have more direct consequences for him. On Thursday night, he said he didn't want to pour more money into "Democrat-run" cities and states to provide economic relief. In the 2018 midterms, which served as a clear rebuke of the direction of his presidency before the coronavirus hit, voters in the key states that provided his electoral college majority in 2016 — Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin — elected Democratic governors.*

*He's essentially saying that he would deny aid to voters in states he needs to win this time around because they rejected his party at the polls two years ago. A typical politician would have interpreted that wave as an indication that he needed to change course — out of his own self-interest, if nothing else — rather than as a reason to withhold federal rescue money from their voters.*

*Since he entered the race, Biden has extolled the virtues of working across the aisle — like a politician of yesteryear — and demonstrated his working knowledge of how the tools of government can be used to effectively serve the public. Those are ways in which a typical politician serves his own interests — to get things done in a manner that attracts, rather than alienates, partners in governance and half the people.*

*Over the next two weeks, Americans will express their preference for president, and part of their decision-making will involve passing judgment on a topic on which the two candidates agree: Biden is a politician — a "public servant" in the parlance of politicians — and Trump is not.*

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