

Real World Graduation: Question 94: Presidential Debates

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Question 95

Why is it important for the voters to watch the Presidential debates?

- a) Because it is one of the few times that the voter gets to hear both candidates explain their policies.
- b) Because the candidates receive sufficient time to show how their policies will work, which is more effective than the usual 30 second commercial.
- c) Because the debates are sponsored by the League of Women Voters, which ensures that the debate is conducted in a non-partisan way.
- d) The debates allow all the candidates equal time.
- e) All of the above.

Answer to Question 95

This is a trick question. All the answers are false. The format of the so-called "Presidential Debates" is either a joint press conference with questions posed by moderators, or a series of call-in questions screened by a moderator.

Answer a) is wrong because politicians thrive on avoiding answering questions, and will often repeat their standard rhetoric regardless of the question. The last thing a politician wants to do is explain their policies, since most of them are either so convoluted that no one can understand them, or so full of optimistic assumptions as to be unrealistic on their face.

Answer b) is wrong because many of the questions do not pertain to policy. Secondly, when the question is about policy, the candidates are typically required to answer within 30 or 60 seconds. How can anyone expect a candidate to explain a complete Middle East policy in 30 seconds? No serious candidate would even try, which is why we get very few serious candidates.

Answer c) is wrong because the moderator(s) choose the questions, regardless of who the sponsor is. The moderator has every opportunity to ask easy or innocuous questions of their favorite, while reserving the hard or impossible ones for the other. Also, moderators rarely ask both candidates the same exact question, so the public does not get to compare answers one-to-one.

Answer d) is wrong because only the candidates of the two main parties are allowed to participate, unless an independent or minor-party candidate is polling at 15% or better among likely voters (a very high threshold). The independents and minor-party candidates are generally shut out of the debates altogether in most races.

These so-called debates are nothing more than opportunities for politicians to present their standard stump speeches to a larger audience, while seeking a chance to come up with a memorable one-liner that will be repeated incessantly until the election. It is also an opportunity for each candidate to reinforce a negative image of his opponent, while carefully avoiding any specific policy discussion or review of his own record. So, why would any intelligent voter waste their precious time listening to what one lying, crooked, divorced-from-reality politician says about another lying, crooked, divorced-from-reality politician? Intelligent voters don't.