



Presidential Debates: What's Behind the Numbers?

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Presidential Debates: What's Behind the Numbers?

Because they attract large audiences, generate interest in the campaign, help voters understand their choices in the upcoming election, forecast governance, increase the likelihood that voters will cast a vote for the preferred candidate rather than against the opponent, moderate some of the campaigns' tendencies to exaggerate and, in a close contest, may affect an election's outcome, presidential debates have become a centerpiece of presidential general elections in the United States.¹

BACKGROUND

Although audience data have tracked trends in presidential general election debate viewership over the years, they often fail to reveal how much and how many of the debates people actually watch. More importantly, these figures don't provide insight into why people do or do not watch the debates. Using multiple research methods, this Annenberg Public Policy Center white paper draws on detailed Nielsen viewership data, a national survey, and a set of focus groups with debate viewers to answer these questions.

FINDINGS

Viewership across Time

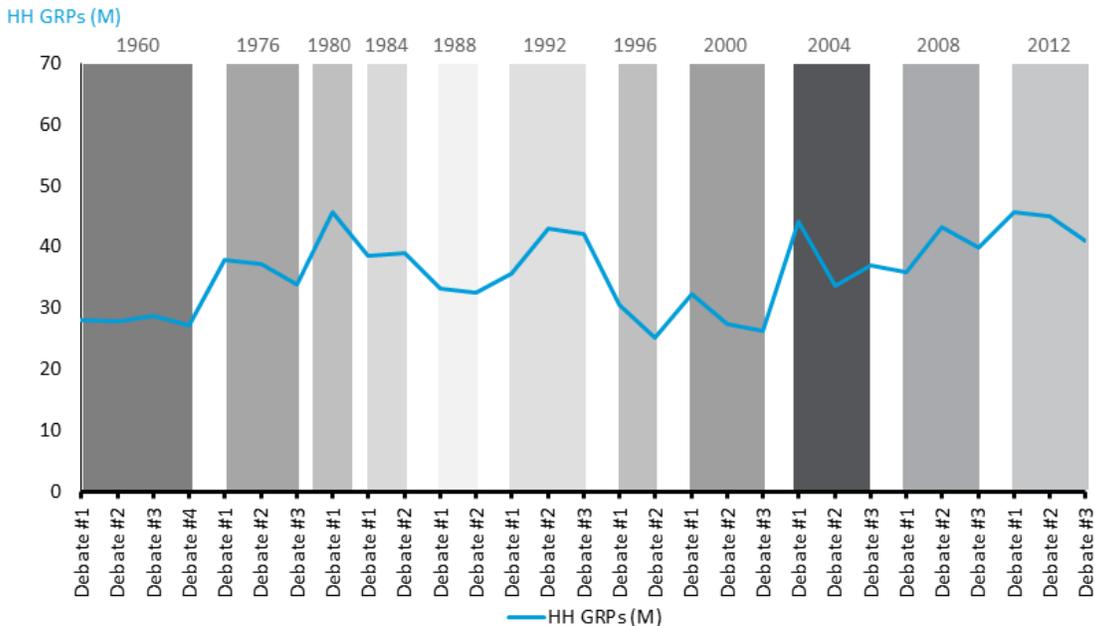
If assessed by the sheer number of viewers who have watched any of the presidential or vice-presidential debates, debate viewership has grown from 27.3 million households for the first debate between Democratic party nominee John F. Kennedy and his Republican counterpart, Richard Nixon, on September 17, 1960, to 46.2 million households for the first debate between incumbent Democratic President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney on October 3, 2012. However, when measured in terms of Nielsen household ratings, which represent a percentage of all U.S. households, the proportion of viewing households has fallen from 59.5% for the first debate in 1960 to 39.9% for the first in 2012.

¹ See, for example, Abramowitz 1978; Benoit, Hansen, and Verser 2003; Blais and Perrella 2008; Lemert 1993; Sears & Chaffee 1979; Chaffee 1978; Jamieson and Adasiewicz 2000; Holbrook 1999; Johnston, Hagen and Jamieson 2004.

Chart #1

1960-2012 HOUSEHOLD IMPRESSIONS TREND

Presidential Debates



Prepared for: Annenberg Public Policy Center
Source: Nielsen Npower

Note: HH GRPs (M)= the sum of impressions for all telecasts

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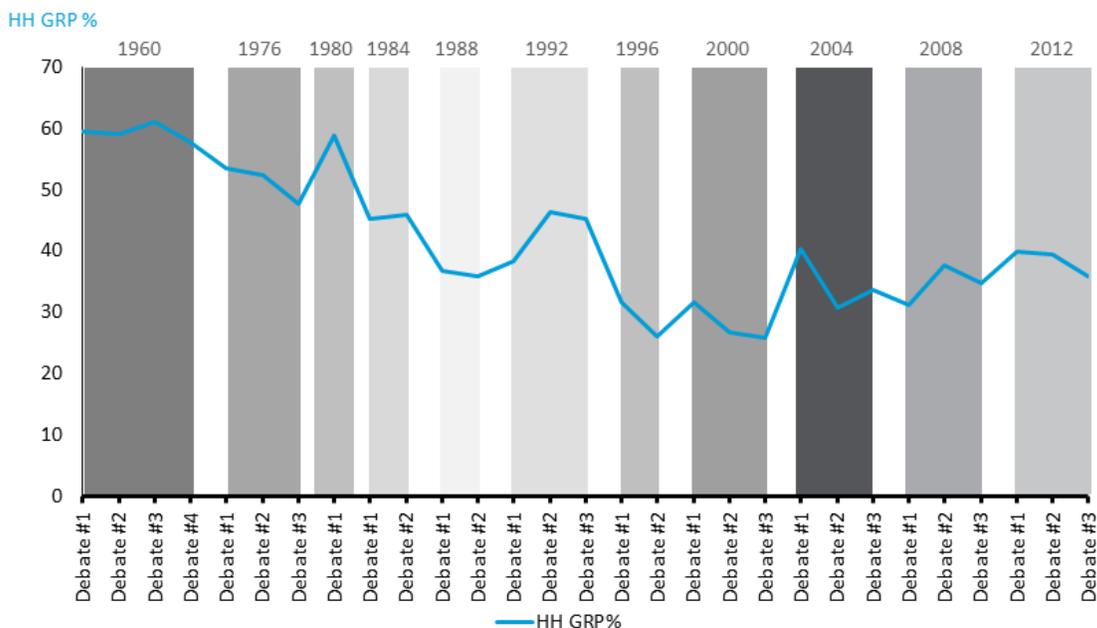
If effect on the possible electorate is the outcome of interest, the decline in the percentage of U.S. households watching the debates is a better measure of impact than the estimated number of viewing households. The increase in the absolute number watching the debates has been a function of the growth in the total number of households owning a TV, which increased by more than 50% from 1980 to 2012, growing from 76.3 million to 114.7 million, according to Nielsen.

This decline in the proportion of the American public that watches the presidential general election debates has occurred even as the debates have become easier to view. In 2008 and 2012 the debates were available on more TV channels than ever before. In addition to the broadcast networks ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, and PBS, several cable channels carried the debates live, including CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, Telemundo, Univision, Mun2 (now NBC Universo),

Chart #2

1960-2012 HOUSEHOLD RATINGS TREND

Presidential Debates



Prepared for: Annenberg Public Policy Center
Source: Nielsen Npower

Note: HH GRP% = The sum of HH ratings for all telecasts of the particular debate.
Rating (%): The percent of the universe of persons tuned to a TV program during the average minute for national data

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CNBC, BBC America, Current, and C-Span.² Furthermore, by 2012 41% of television households could record the debates for later viewing on a DVR. This increase in television availability stemmed the erosion in debate ratings. However, Nielsen data indicate that the growth of DVR ownership did not contribute much to debate ratings in 2012 because 98-99% of viewers watched the debates live or later the same day. This is consistent with other Nielsen data that show very little delayed viewing of news programming in general. Debate viewers in 2012 preferred to see the debates as they were happening.

Explaining the Declining Proportion of Viewers

Two other factors may have contributed to the lack of growth in debate ratings. One is the proliferation of new cable channels over the last two decades. While a few of these new

² C-Span's viewership is not included in Nielsen ratings.

channels did air the debates, many more carried competitive programming, siphoning off less interested viewers who might have watched the debates when there were fewer alternatives. The other factor that may have depressed growth in household ratings for the debates is the proliferation of digital media. In 2012, the presidential debates were streamed live on several websites and apps, including those of ABC News, CBS News, NBC News, Fox News, CNN, Univision, PBS NewsHour, the Huffington Post, Politico, YouTube, Yahoo, Ustream, the Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Post. Though comprehensive data on the number of viewers who streamed the debates in 2012 are not available, YouTube reports that the 2012 debates streamed on that platform drew 27 million views across the globe, with 8.4 million viewing in real time. In the U.S. alone, YouTube reports that the first presidential debate drew over 2 million views, the vice-presidential debate garnered over 1 million views, the second presidential debate saw 1.7 million views, and the final presidential debate drew 1.5 million views. Without better measurement of online viewing on all available sources, there is no completely accurate way to know the true size of the total audience for the 2012 debates.

Changes in the Makeup of the Debate Audience

The demographic composition of the television debate audience has also changed. Since 1996, the earliest year for which reliable Nielsen data on the ages of debate viewers are available, the percentage of debate viewers in the 18-49 age group has declined from 48% to 41%, while the proportion of viewers in the baby boom age range of 50-64 has grown from 23% to 30%. The proportion of debate viewers age 65+ has remained stable at 29-30%. Some of the growth in the proportion of viewers 50-64 is likely attributable to the increase in the baby boomer segment of the population. Another explanation for the aging of the television debate audience is undoubtedly the fact that younger viewers are more likely than those 50+ to have watched the debates online rather than on TV.

Comparative Ratings

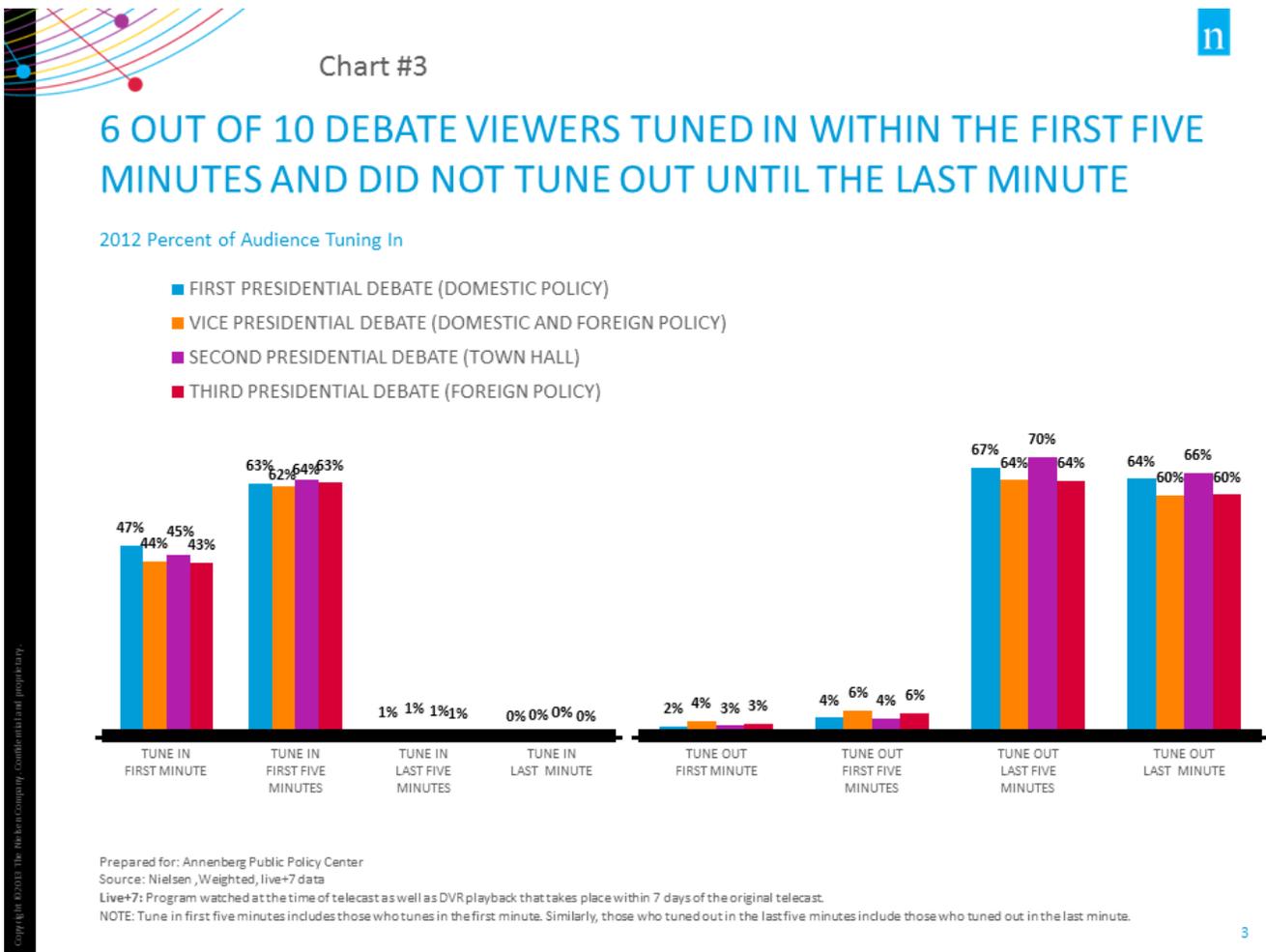
Though the proportion of U.S. TV households watching the presidential debates has declined from a high point of about 60% in 1960, 40% of all U.S. households did watch some of the debates on television in 2012. Ratings in the 40% range are highly unusual now, attained

only by blockbuster programming such as the Super Bowl, which can reach ratings of 46-47%. Ratings for even the more popular shows on the broadcast networks rarely reach double digits.

Two Other Measures of Exposure

Minutes watched per debate

Ratings are a broad metric based on the average audience per minute for television programming and are driven by both the number of viewers tuning in over the course of a program and by the length of continuous time each viewer watches that program. If effect on viewers is the outcome of concern, minutes watched per debate and viewership of multiple debates are better indicators than household ratings. According to Nielsen data for 2012, an average of six out of 10 debate viewers age 18+ tuned in within the first five minutes of each debate, and six out of 10 of that group did not tune out until the final minute.



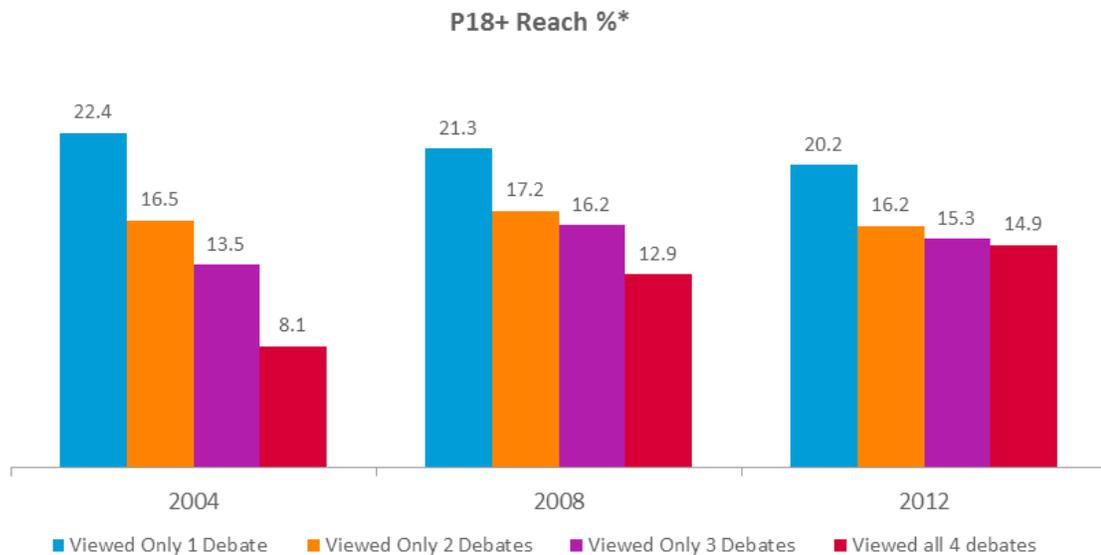
Multiple debate viewing

In 2012, a majority of debate viewers watched more than one debate. More than 30% watched some of at least three of the four debates (presidential/VP) that year, up from 29% in 2008 and about 22% in 2004.

Chart #4

MULTIPLE DEBATE VIEWING: PERSONS 18+

- Across all three election years, a majority of debate viewers watched more than one debate.
- Viewing of all 4 debates grew from 8.1% in 2004 to 14.9% in 2012.



Prepared for: Annenberg Public Policy Center

Source: Nielsen, live+7 data (program watched at the time of telecast as well as DVR playback that takes place within 7 days of the original telecast)

*These percentages represent the proportion of individuals age 18 or older who watched only one debate, only two debates, only three debates, or all four debates, based on viewing of at least one minute of the debate. These percentages are mutually exclusive.

In sum, debate viewing is largely driven by loyal viewers who view multiple debates and usually watch each debate almost all the way through.

Explaining Viewership of Debates: Survey and Focus Group Findings

Nielsen ratings can tell us about the size of the television audience for presidential debates, its demographic makeup, the average number of debates viewed, the pattern of tune-in and tune-out during each debate and trends in these measures over time. But these standard Nielsen metrics reveal little about why viewers watch or don't watch the debates, what they like or don't like about what they see, and what might get more viewers to watch more often. To address questions such as these, APPC commissioned Peter D. Hart and TargetPoint Consulting to conduct a national survey and series of focus groups among registered voters. Combining the survey and focus group results with the Nielsen data sheds additional light on the underlying attitudes driving debate viewership.

Motivations to Watch Debates

Information seeking is a powerful motivator of debate viewing. According to the Hart survey, presidential debates were among the top sources of information helping all age groups with their vote decision and were considered the "most helpful" source of information by a plurality of respondents. These results placed the helpfulness of debates ("extremely" plus "very" helpful) above that of "watching broadcast interviews or seeing the candidates in person," reading "published positions on key issues," and "news coverage of presidential campaigns."

**Table 1: Most Helpful in Deciding How to Vote
By Age**

	18-34 (A)	35-49 (B)	50-64 (C)	65+ (D)	Total
Presidential debates	24%	29%	21% ^B	25%	29%
Watching broadcasted interviews or seeing the candidate in person	16%	10% ^C	17% ^{BD}	9%	13%
News coverage of presidential campaign	10%	10%	12%	12%	11%
Published positions on key issues	2% ^B	8% ^A	9% ^A	6%	6%
Sunday news programs with candidate	8%	5%	7%	7%	6%
Presidential candidates' official digital media outlets, such as official websites, blogs, Twitter feeds, and Facebook pages	8%	5%	7%	7%	6%
Political talk shows	10% ^{CD}	8% ^{CD}	3% ^{AB}	1% ^{AB}	6%
Other/something else (VOL)	4% ^D	5% ^D	6% ^D	12% ^{ABC}	6%
Major speeches like the convention acceptance speech of the candidates	4%	7% ^D	4%	2% ^B	5%
Discussion and commentary on social media outlets such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter	7% ^D	4%	4%	2% ^A	5%
Campaign rallies	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%
Mail you read from the candidates	2%	1%	2%	3%	2%
Party conventions	1%	0%	2%	1%	1%
Campaign advertising spots	1%	0%	1% ^B	0%	0%
All equally helpful (VOL)	0% ^C	1%	3% ^A	2%	2%

A, B, C, D = statistically significant at 95% confidence level (p<.05).

And of those items we just went through, which would you say is the MOST helpful to you?

Most respondents found multiple aspects of the debates helpful. In particular, more than three out of four agreed that “The give-and-take between the candidates during the debate is helpful” (77% strongly or somewhat agree), and “The debates happen at the right time in the election process” (76% strongly or somewhat agree). Other statements with high levels of agreement included, “The debates are interesting and about the right length” (72% strongly or

somewhat agree) and “The debates do a good job of getting the candidate to discuss the major issues” (71% strongly or somewhat agree). There were very few age-specific differences in response to these questions.

In the focus groups, many said they found the debates helpful because they provided a live, direct view of the candidates under pressure, not controlled or mediated by the press or by the candidates’ handlers.

It’s all live, so then you get to see their reaction, their mistakes. Sometimes things slip that they don’t mean to say, but it really shows who they really are. So I think that’s the only time that it’s not filtered like the commercials, where you are bombarded with what they want you to hear.

I like to get the information from the horse’s mouth, so I think that’s a benefit of the debate, and I like to see the back and forth and the challenges and how they respond to those challenges.

Several focus group respondents also mentioned that seeing both candidates respond to the same questions at the same time made it easier to directly compare the candidates.

The survey and focus groups also assessed respondents’ views about various debate formats. The town hall format was deemed most helpful by survey respondents, with the younger adults significantly more likely than older ones to find that format extremely helpful (52% of 18- to 34-year-olds, 38% of 35- to 49-year-olds, 33% of those 50 years or older). The single-moderator format and the three- or four-person panel format were less likely to be rated as extremely helpful across all age groups. In a direct comparison of all three formats, the town hall format emerged at the top (34% versus 28% for a single moderator and 28% for the panel of three or four).

**Table 2: Debate Format that Works Best in Making Vote Decision
By Age**

	18-34 (A)	35-49 (B)	50-64 (C)	65+ (D)	Total
Town hall format	40% ^D	36%	34%	28% ^A	34%
A single moderator	25%	31%	28%	27%	28%
A panel of three or four people alternating questions	29%	26%	26%	32%	28%
No preference/All equally	2%	4%	5%	4%	4%
None	3%	3%	5%	6%	4%
Don't know	3%	1%	1%	2%	2%

A, B, C, D = statistically significant at 95% confidence level (p<.05).

And of all of these formats, which do you feel works the best for you to help you make a decision of how to vote?

Nielsen viewing data confirm the appeal of the town hall format. In 2012, the first presidential debate, which had a single moderator structure, drew the most viewers (by a small margin), but the second presidential debate, which adopted a town hall format, had the longest average and median viewing time per viewer of the four debates that year (59 minutes average, 74 minutes median).³ While more viewers sampled the first debate, which drew the largest audience, the town hall debate held viewers' attention the longest.

Other survey results and focus group comments indicate that the preference for the town hall format stems in large part from concerns about the debate moderators' ability to ask the questions that are on voters' minds and to control the candidates during the debate. Nearly half the survey respondents (47%) agreed with the statement, "The moderators do not control the candidates well enough," and 41% indicated they were extremely/very concerned that "The moderators tend to play favorites, giving one of the candidates the edge." One focus group participant explained his preference for the town hall format in these terms:

[T]he format that I like and wish they would do more of without interference is the town hall style debate where the audience asks the questions instead of moderators who are following prepared scripts. I mean, it's important to have certain things to

³ Each debate was 90 minutes long.

cover, but I think, too, the audience is less afraid of whether or not they might tick off a particular candidate, so they're more willing to ask questions that the country may actually be interested in hearing the answer to, rather than just getting more talking points.

The survey also included questions about changes that might increase debate viewing. A majority strongly favored moving the timing of the first debate into early September before the start of early voting by mail (63%), ensuring that viewers are able to see both candidates simultaneously throughout the entire debate (58%), allowing the debates to be streamed over the internet on external outlets simultaneously as the debate is going on (55%), and having fact-checking on-screen during the debate (51%). Streaming the presidential debate over the internet on external outlets had the greatest resonance with younger people, with 69% of 18- to 34-year-olds strongly favoring this option.

**Table 3: Future Debate Improvements (Strongly Favor)
By Age***

TOP 6 IMPROVEMENTS	18-34 (A)	35-49 (B)	50-64 (C)	65+ (D)	Total
Allow the debates to be streamed over the internet on external outlets simultaneously as the debate is going on.	69% ^{BCD}	55% ^{AD}	56% ^{AD}	36% ^{ABC}	55%
Move the timing of the first debate into early September so that there is a debate before early voting by mail begins.	57%	66%	67%	64%	63%
Have a debate with fact-checking that would be put on the screen for misstatements or false remarks about the opponent.	52%	55% ^D	61% ^D	40% ^{BC}	51%
Ensure that viewers are able to see both candidates simultaneously throughout the entire debate.	46% ^{BC}	66% ^A	64% ^A	54%	58%
Maintain the town hall debate format with the citizen questioners	46%	43%	41%	41%	43%
Allow for interactive feedback from debate viewers, as they view the debate live.	37% ^{CD}	30% ^{CD}	18% ^{AB}	19% ^{AB}	27%

A, B, C, D = statistically significant at 95% confidence level (p<.05).

*Asked of half-sample

Please tell me how you feel about each idea...Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, neither favor nor oppose, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose?

Predictors of Debate Viewing

Two demographic characteristics, age and gender, strongly predicted debate viewing. Being older was associated with more viewing, while being female predicted less viewing. However, the gender association was not significant in the 18-34 age range. Race predicted viewing, with higher levels of viewing for white respondents, but this association had relatively weak statistical significance.

Several political interest and attitude variables also forecast debate viewing among the full sample – interest in presidential elections, prior voting frequency, and awareness of the length of the debates. However, among those in the 18-34 age range, only interest in presidential elections was significantly associated with tuning in to debates.

Media habits were strongly related to debate viewing. Watching TV news regularly, watching the news analysis after the debates, and using social media during the debates were all significant predictors.

Table 4

Correlates of debate viewership (N = 963). Regression coefficients are unstandardized betas and pooled results of five iterations of multiple imputation.

	Model 1 Beta (N = 963) with MI	Model 2 Beta (n = 176) Ages 18-34 with MI
<i>Block 1</i>		
Age (continuous)	.03**	--
Female	-.77*	-.46
White	.96†	.31
Black	-.02	.27
Education	.10	.20
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	5.7***	
<i>Block 2: Political Interests</i>		
Interest in presidential elections	.48***	.51**
Party ID (Republican)	-.05	-.24
Vote (how frequently)	.30*	.10
Debate knowledge (length of debate)	1.14***	.84

<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	<i>10.3***</i>	
<i>Block 3: Media Use</i>		
News viewing	.59**	.32
Use social media during debate	.97*	-.75
Watch news analysis after debate	.66***	.45
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	<i>6.1***</i>	
<i>Block 4: Attitudes toward moderators</i>		
Positive evaluation of moderators	.09	-.07
Use of TV reporters as moderators	-.19	.44
Concern that moderators lose control	.05	.03
Concern that moderators play favorites	.28†	1.19**
Concern moderators don't ask right questions	.22	-.50
Concern moderators overstep their boundaries	.12	-.09
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	<i>0.9†</i>	
<i>Block 5: Satisfaction with debate elements</i>		
Support including third-party candidates	-.12	-.15
Length of the debate	.72***	.21
Format with only one topic covered	.05	-.22
Holding debates on college campuses	.31†	.66†
Room for media and candidate staff to give opinions, post-debate	.12	-.82
Live audience urged to stay quiet/not react	.41**	.47
Citizens asking questions in town hall format	-.34*	.05
Allow immediate rebuttal if attacked by name	.27†	.75*
Allow questions to be submitted online	-.34*	-.83*
Allow candidates to ask each other questions	.01	.33
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	<i>5.5***</i>	
TOTAL R² (%)	28.5***	~37.5**

Incremental and total R² is the mean percentage across five iterations of multiple imputation.

**** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, † < .10*

Note: The results associated with the younger cohort (ages 18 to 34) should be interpreted with caution as this is a small group of respondents (n = 176).

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this research informed the deliberations of the Annenberg Debate Reform Working Group, a bipartisan task force made up of top officials from past presidential campaigns, co-chaired by Anita Dunn, a former White House communications director for President Obama and senior advisor to his campaign, and Beth Myers, senior advisor to Mitt

Romney's 2012 campaign and campaign manager for his 2008 presidential race, and convened by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center.⁴

Recommendations shaped by the research included:

- Increase direct candidate exchanges and otherwise enhance the capacity of candidates to engage each other and communicate views and positions;
- Enlarge the pool of potential moderators to include print journalists, university presidents, retired judges and other experts;
- Expand the role of diverse media outlets and the public in submitting questions for the debates, and increase the representativeness of audiences and questioners at town hall debates;
- Retain the town hall format and use alternate formats for some of the debates, including a chess clock model that gives each candidate an equal amount of time to draw upon;
- Embrace social media platforms, which are the primary source of political information for a growing number of Americans, and facilitate creative use of debate content by social media platforms as well as by major networks by providing unimpeded access to an unedited feed from each of the cameras and a role in framing topics and questions;
- Revise the debate timetable to take into account the rise of early voting.

⁴ In addition to Myers, Dunn and Jamieson, the Working Group includes Robert Barnett; Robert Bauer; Joel Benenson; Charles Black; Rick Davis; Ben Ginsberg; Ron Klain; Zac Moffatt; Neil Newhouse; Jim Perry; Joe Rospars; Michael Sheehan; and Stuart Stevens.

Methodological Appendix

Survey

The survey was conducted by telephone between May 15-21, 2014. Respondents were selected by random-digit dialing (RDD) and were screened to be registered to vote. The sample consisted of 1,000 U.S. registered voters. Respondents reached on cell phones were 30% of the sample. The margin of error for the full sample is +/-3% and is higher for subgroups.

Focus Groups

Five focus groups were completed in Denver among voters who voted in 2012 and watched the presidential/vice-presidential debates (at least some of one or more debates). Two of the groups were conducted among whites (one younger group and one older group); two with Hispanics (one younger voter session done in English with a Spanish moderator and the other done with older voters in Spanish); and the fifth group was conducted among a cross section of all age groups and mixed races.

Analytical Approach for Survey Data

In order to determine which of the survey variables were the best predictors of debate viewing during the 2012 presidential election campaign, multivariate analyses were conducted using hierarchical ordinary least-squares regression, and variables were entered into blocks in their presumed causal order. All potentially relevant independent variables, including behavioral and attitudinal measures, were included in the analyses.

Dependent variable: debate viewing

Likelihood of watching the debates was measured based on two items in the survey:

- “Generally speaking, in most presidential elections, they have a total of four presidential debates – three are the presidential debates and one is the vice-presidential debate ...

While it is hard to remember exactly what we do, give me the most honest assessment of how many of the 2012 presidential and vice-presidential debates you watched live as they were actually occurring...” with possible responses of ‘all four debates,’ ‘three debates,’ ‘two debates,’ ‘one debate,’ ‘or ‘none of them’ (*Median* = 3 debates).

- “When you watch the debate, do you usually watch the whole debate from beginning to end, most of the debate, just some of the debate, or just a little of the debate?”
(*Median* = ‘Most of the debate’).
- The two items were multiplied to form a scale ranging from 0 (did not view any of the debates) to 16 (reported watching the entirety of each of the four debates) of debate viewing ($M = 8.55$, $SD = 5.38$).

Control variables

- Demographic characteristics and attitudinal measures

Several demographic characteristics were incorporated into the multivariate models as controls. These included age ($M = 47.60$, $SD = 16.75$), gender (53.0% female), last grade of school completed (*Median* = ‘some college, more than 2 years’), and race (74.5% white and 12.4% black). We also included some measures of political interests, including interest in American presidential elections, measured on a 0 (‘absolutely no interest’) to 10 (‘extremely interested’) scale ($M = 8.73$, $SD = 1.94$) and tendency to vote in elections (school, local, and primary) on a scale ranging from 0 (coded as ‘none of them’) to 4 (coded as ‘all of them’) (*Median* = 3, ‘less than half of them’). Party identification was included, measured on a 7-point scale from 1 (‘Strong Democrat’) to 7 (‘Strong Republican’), and ‘strictly independent,’ ‘other/something else,’ and ‘not sure/nothing’ all coded with the midpoint value (4) ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 2.10$). We also included an item in the models that assessed knowledge about the debates, asking respondents the length of each debate, with 37.0% answering with the correct answer of ‘one and a half hours.’

- Media use measures

Several measures of respondents’ media habits were included in the analyses, including how often respondents watch local television news, national evening network television news, or cable television news, coded on a four-point scale from 0 (‘Never’) to 3 (‘Often’) ($M = 2.41$, $SD = .96$) and how interested they are in the news analysis and discussion that follows the debate, measured on a scale from 1 (coded as ‘No interest at all’) to 5 (‘A great

deal of interest') ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.25$). We also included whether respondents actively followed the debates through social media outlets like Facebook (10.5%), Twitter (5.6%), or another social media platform (1.1%) while viewing debates. Of all respondents, 15.0% followed along on some social media platform while they watched the debates.

- Attitudes toward moderators

Respondents were asked five items that assessed their satisfaction with or concern about issues related to the moderators of presidential debates. Respondents were asked to evaluate the job moderators do on a 5-point scale from 1 (coded as 'poor') to 5 (coded as 'excellent'). A set of four questions were then asked to assess concern about specific complaints that have been made related to the moderators, which were measured on 5-point scales from 1 ('Have not noticed') to 5 ('extremely concerned'). These items included "The moderators tend to lose control of the debate, and the candidates interrupt one another and go over the time limits" ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.14$), "The moderators tend to play favorites, giving one of the candidates the edge" ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.36$), "The questions moderators pose are not the right questions on the important issues" ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.11$), and "The moderators overstep their boundaries and inject themselves in the debate process" ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.27$).

- Opinions about debate elements

Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they are with several elements of the debates. There were a total of ten elements listed, with two elements (use of television reporters as moderators and length of the debate) read to all respondents and a random six of eight remaining elements read to each respondent. A split sample was used for this set of questions in order to obtain a reliable sample of responses for a diverse array of questions, without overburdening respondents.⁵ Each item was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (coded as 'Very dissatisfied') to 5 (coded as 'Very satisfied'). The statements asked respondents how satisfied they were with, "The use of television reporters to do the moderating" ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.34$), "The length of the debate" ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.13$), "The

⁵ Romer, D., Kenski, K., Winneg, K., Adasiewicz, C., & Jamieson, K. H. (2006). *Capturing Campaign Dynamics, 2000 and 2004: The National Annenberg Election Survey*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

format where only one topic area like the economy or foreign policy is covered” ($M = 3.27, SD = 1.35$), “Holding the debates on college campuses” ($M = 3.44, SD = 1.30$), “Having a room post-debate where the media and the candidate staff give their opinions” ($M = 3.27, SD = 1.23$), “Having a live audience who are urged to stay quiet and not react” ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.37$), “Having average citizens ask questions in a town hall format” ($M = 4.01, SD = 1.19$), “Allowing the candidates to have an immediate rebuttal time if the opponent attacks the candidate by name” ($M = 3.97, SD = 1.17$), “Allowing questions to be submitted by people online” ($M = 3.81, SD = 1.22$), “Allowing the candidate to directly ask each other questions” ($M = 3.95, SD = 1.22$).⁶ An item inquiring how strongly respondents felt about changing rules to make it easier to include third-party candidates in debates was also included, coded on a scale from 1 (indicating a strong feeling that rules for including third-party candidates should not be changed) to 5 (indicating a strong feeling that rules should be relaxed to include these candidates) ($M = 3.50, SD = 1.50$).

Missing values

The missing values resulting from the questions randomly split across the sample and other missing values were imputed using multiple imputation conducted with the SPSS statistical software package. With this method, observed values in the dataset were entered as predictors of the missing values, which yielded five possible complete datasets.⁷ The pooled results of these five iterations of multiple imputation were used in the subsequent analyses.

⁶ Means and standard deviations reported for items divided by split-sample are based on original data. Missing data were replaced using multiple imputation in subsequent analyses.

⁷ Little, R. J., & Rubin, D. B. (2002). *Statistical Analysis with Missing Data*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

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