

## *U.S. Presidential Election Debates*

Since the historic, televised debates between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960 (which many credit with swinging the election to Kennedy), a series of three 90-minute debates between the major parties' presidential nominees and one for their vice-presidential nominees has become a well-established campaign institution, although the Constitution does not mandate that they be held. Each debate is broadcast live and draws between 40-85 million viewers, often a quarter of the entire U.S. population, not including those who watch online.

A Sept. 2016 survey found that 76% of Americans want Third-Party candidates to be on the debate stage. Unlike debates in “the primary season,” however, candidates must have the support of 15% or more of polled voters to be included. This almost always means that only the nominees of the Democratic (D) and Republican (R) parties qualify. In recent elections, Third-Party candidates film and share their own answers to debate questions online, but the vast majority of Americans only watch what's on TV. The bipartisan debate commission, run by members of the two major parties, sets the debate rules and this standard partially because third-party candidates lack “mainstream 主流” support and might make the stage too crowded (see the early 2016 Republican primary debates, with at least 17 “major” candidates) but also because they want the public to focus on their own candidates (they fear losing support to other candidates who gain exposure 公开露面 and support from being seen on TV). Even just 1% support, however, would mean that millions of Americans want someone to be president. Do you think this exclusion is fair to Third-Party candidates and voters? Why/why not?

Presidential debates are always moderated by one or more TV anchors 新闻节目主播 with candidates usually standing still behind a podium, but one of the debates is conducted in the style of a “town hall 市政大厅” meeting, with undecided voters asking questions directly and the candidates walking around the stage freely. In the age of the internet, many viewers also follow a Twitter feed while the debate is in progress to see how people are reacting “in real time 实时” to the candidates' statements. Since the 1980s, a popular comedy program called Saturday Night Live (SNL) will parody 做模仿节目 each of the debates in short sketches 小节目 which capture the highlights and lowlights of the discussion, especially any gaffes 失态/出丑. Especially for young people, the many parodies online are becoming as popular as the debates themselves.

Critics of the debates say that, especially recently, deep policy discussion is neglected in favor of attacking the other candidate. Since policy platforms are readily available online, media trends suggest contemporary viewers may want to be entertained rather than informed. They want a fight or at least a good show, and especially in 2016, that is the direction the debates have gone, despite attempts by moderators to steer the discussion toward substantive issues and force candidates to answer the questions actually asked rather than pivoting 转动 to what they want to talk about. The format of the debate, especially the requirement that candidates structure their statements to be given within a two-minute time limit, are an attempt to prevent anyone from rambling 杂乱无章地说, but it's certainly difficult to explain an issue and propose how to address or fix it in such a short time. Often times, though, the public only hears a snippet of what is actually said, often out of context for dramatic effect, in a soundbyte of just a few seconds. Debate “winners” are chosen by commentators 解说员 in the media, but today's candidates are quick to say they “won” almost immediately after the event concludes.

**Vocabulary:** ·accuse (Sb. of Sth.)指控某人。。。 ·ad hominem (attack...i.e. An insult or attack on one's motives & character)诉诸感情 ·arena (space where the debate is held)竞技场 ·audience reaction/response 听众的反应/收听情况 ·bluster 咆哮 ·body language 身势语/身体语言 ·call Sb. out (on Sth.) (demand someone take responsibility for something they have said) ·comeback (a snappy response to an attack or insult)机智的回答 ·(maintain VS. lose one's) composure 保持/丢镇静 ·crosstalk (talking across one another without listening) ·crossfire 激烈讨论的局面 ·dodge a question 躲避某问题 ·fact-check 检查真实性 ·(hand) gestures 手势 ·“gotcha” question (catches a candidate on an issue they don't know or is a weakness, intends to make the candidate “look bad”) ·hold your applause 请大家不要鼓掌 ·interject VS. interrupt (Sb.) 打断 ·leading question 对答案有诱导性的提问 ·opening/closing statement 开幕词/结束陈词 ·(take Sth./Sb.) out of context 脱离上下文 ·make-up 化妆 ·microphone 话筒 ·misrepresent (Sb.'s position)歪曲 ·moderator 辩论主持人 ·pacing (back and forth)来回走动 ·party affiliation 党籍 ·platitude 陈词滥调 ·pledge to do Sth./not to do Sth.保证, 发誓 ·podium 讲台 ·raise one's voice 调高某人的声音 ·rhetoric 修辞 ·roll one's eyes (at Sb./Sth.)翻眼珠子 ·scoff (at Sb.)嘲笑 ·shifty-eyed 躲躲闪闪的 ·sigh 叹气 ·straw man 稻草人论证/假想的对手 ·stutter 口吃, 结结巴巴地说 ·talk over Sb. (speak more loudly than Sb. else talking at the same time) ·undecided voter 尚未决定投谁的票的选民 ·zinger 有力地反驳