

Samuel Bradshaw

Ms. Barnes, Period 1

Document-Based Question

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**Pre-writing**

“TV has had a positive effect on presidential elections” – False (refute).

Source A: TV restores direct contact with candidates; TV hearings, debates, etc.

Source B: TV’s celebrity system makes presidents as celebrities;  
Contempt for politics (cynical TV view).

Source C: TV dumbs down issues (spontaneous response);  
Image more important than ideals – judging book by its cover.

Source E: Even president swayed by TV opinions.

Source F: Only selected/controversial things are broadcast.

Television and Presidential Elections (originally hand-written)

Television has influenced the thinking of Americans since it was first invented. Since the first broadcast of a presidential “debate,” TV has swayed politics away from different public opinions and towards the opinions of the TV producers.

It is true that TV has allowed people to listen to and watch their political candidates and thereby learn more about them, but the television point of view is not an accurate representation of the minds of the candidates. TV often forces candidates to answer interviewers on the spot, giving quick, un-thought-out answers (Sources C and F). Anybody under pressure will occasionally say something that they don’t mean to say. Then, as in all TV programs, only the most controversial and surprising parts are picked out and rebroadcast over and over until they reflect on the minds of the people as a complete representation of the candidate (Source F). This distortion can be completely different from what the candidate thinks.

In addition, TV culture has made those who appear on TV celebrities – treated in new much differently than political candidates should be treated (source B). The lives of celebrities are displayed on the news shamelessly (in 1922 Bill Clinton discussed his underwear on TV; Source B). All of this lack of seriousness gives people a negative view of politics in general (Source B).

With the invention of the TV, rather than the radio, the image became in a way more important than the topic of conversation (Source C). People have a subconscious tendency to “judge a book by its cover.” Also, even the president himself can be influenced by what he sees on TV. President Lyndon Johnson took TV newsman Walter Cronkite’s suggestions and statements as new policy and stopped the Vietnam War (Source E).

Thus we see that television has had a negative impact on politics and elections. People see only the worst and least important of things relating to candidates and vote only according to what they see on TV.