

## Viewers will receive greatest benefit in presidential town hall debate

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Next Tuesday night, Senators John McCain and Barack Obama will meet on the debate stage for their second presidential debate, but this time they will not be alone. The candidates will be joined by dozens of "undecided" citizens eager to interrogate the two presidential hopefuls.

While political strategists and media pundits are busy pondering which candidate is best served by such encounters, Mitchell McKinney, a University of Missouri associate professor of communication and presidential debate expert, says that citizens at home viewing the debate may be the greatest beneficiaries.

McKinney, an international expert on presidential debates, has analyzed the role and effects of citizens questioning candidates during debates.

His research reveals:

- When citizens question candidates during debates, such as town hall debates, their questions are fundamentally different than those asked by journalists.
- Debates in which citizens are involved as questioners result in less candidate clash and elicit more direct candidate responses.
- Viewers of debates in which citizens ask questions report greater learning and higher levels of interest in the on-going campaign.

McKinney also has found that candidate forums and debates that involve innovations, such as the use of video segments and Internet questions, are particularly effective in reaching younger voters.

McKinney has conducted extensive research of various candidates' debate performances, including this year's presidential and vice presidential debates and numerous Democratic and Republican primary debates that featured Barack Obama and John McCain.

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia

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