



Democratizing the Debates: *A Report of the Annenberg Working Group on Presidential Campaign Debate Reform* is a 48-page report written by a bipartisan group of top officials from past presidential campaigns. The group has recommended a wide-ranging series of steps to improve the quality, reach and relevance of debates for the 2016 presidential election and beyond.

The group’s recommendations are designed to increase direct engagement between the candidates, embrace social media, widen the appeal of the debates to younger viewers, Hispanic viewers, and African-American viewers, and make the debates more freely accessible to the public through different media channels.

The recommendations of the Working Group grew out of a shared recognition of the importance of the general election debates to voters seeking information about the candidates, and to the candidates who see the debates as an opportunity to communicate their policy positions directly to voters.

Expanding and Enriching Debate Content

- Increase direct candidate exchanges and otherwise enhance the capacity of candidate to engage each other and communicate views and positions;
- Reduce candidate “gaming” of time-limited answers and create opportunities to clarify an exchange or respond to an attack;
- Enlarge the pool of potential moderators to include print journalists, university presidents, retired judges and other experts;
- 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;
- Expand the role of diverse media outlets and the public in submitting questions for the debates;
- Increase the representativeness of audiences and questioners at town hall debates.

Broadening the Accessibility of the Debates

- 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 such as Univision, Telemundo, and BET, 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.

Improving the Transparency and Accountability of the Debate Process

- Eliminate on-site audiences for debates other than the town hall, and in the process, reduce the need for major financial sponsors and audiences filled with donors;
- Publicly release the Memorandum of Understanding governing the debates as soon as it is signed;
- Require the moderators to be signatories to the MOU to ensure compliance with the agreements about rules and formats;
- Clearly articulate the standards required of polls used to determine eligibility for the debates.

The 16-member Annenberg Debate Reform Working Group was convened by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, the director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania and a scholar of presidential rhetoric and debate. The group was 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.

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.

For a copy of the report [click here](#).

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