

1960. According to reliable public opinion polls,<sup>2</sup> in 1956 those "very much interested" rose in October to 47 percent—an increase of 1 percentage point. But in 1960, in October, after the debates, those "very much interested" rose to 57 percent—an impressive improvement of 12 points.

Besides this considerable increase in direct interest, the confrontations of the two candidates on television and radio in 1960 generated an enormous amount of material bearing upon the issues and personalities of the election in other media. They were the occasion for front-page stories in the newspapers. They were topics for featured treatment in the magazines. They were the subject of discussion, conversation and comment on the national and on the regional and local levels. In short, they breathed life into the campaign and interest into the electorate.

In any event, it should be the purpose of all of us to stimulate a sharing in the governmental process by as many of our citizens as possible. Fundamental as they are, elections are only a first step in the continuing civic responsibility of the people in a democracy. If they commit themselves in the election, they are much more likely to have a clearer sense of responsibility for the subsequent policies and actions of their candidates, thereby considerably broadening the base of national discussion and of the national consensus between elections.

Quantitatively, there is convincing evidence that more people are attracted to a meaningful confrontation of candidates than to the traditional paid political broadcast, with an oratorical set price or staged question-and-answer formula with the answer carefully written before the question ostensibly eliciting it is asked.

Statistical data indicate that, as a rule, when a paid political broadcast replaces a regularly scheduled entertainment program, some 30 percent of the audience drops away. But the confrontation broadcasts in the presidential campaign of 1960 drew an audience that not only did not fall off from that of the program replaced, but was actually, on the average, 20 percent larger than that of the entertainment programs they preempted.

Looked at another way, the paid political broadcast in 1960, generally speaking, drew an audience less than a third in size of that drawn by the presidential debates. Moreover, the tuneout that is customary in the course of long and serious programs did not occur in the case of the presidential debates. To a remarkable degree, the audiences stayed with the broadcasts to the conclusion. The holding power of the debates was 88 percent, compared to 77 percent for entertainment programs in similar time periods.

Even more significantly, the people who tuned in to see the candidate they preferred, or toward whom they leaned, were also given occasion to see and hear the opposition. The importance of this cannot be overestimated. People tend to go to the rallies, read the words, and listen to the speeches of the man whom they already favor or who represents the party to which they already belong. Any restrictions on radio and television that help to preserve this political immobility and inbreeding sap the vitality of the election process. They are simply helping to perpetuate a behavioral pattern that atrophies independent thinking and stagnates voting behavior.

<sup>2</sup> "Election Studies II and III, Concerning Issues and Candidates," October and November 1960, Elmo Roper & Associates, 111 West 50th Street, New York, N.Y.