

AP Synthesis Example Essay, based on the 2020 prompt:

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The impact of television on political matters has been under debate for years. Television provides a low-cost method to stay informed about policy changes and receive important announcements, and it often offers a path to learn more about political figures and their plans for the United States. However, critics of television believe that there is a strong psychological and marketing strategy in play, which presents false images of personalities and is commonly used as a tool to sway public opinion. While there are drawbacks to broadcasting debates and politics, it positively influences presidential elections by providing accessible information to viewers, sharing the candidates' personalities, plans, and ideals during their potential role as president, and ultimately assisting citizens in casting their vote.

The primary benefit of televising politics is that it provides accessible information. Television, as source A explains, provides an opportunity for citizens to be more involved in political matters than ever before, specifically by adding to their knowledge. With public speeches and political events televised, viewers can learn about the structure of the U.S. political system and build a better understanding of how legislation is created, in addition to their representatives' contributions to political matters. The reach of television is clear, as shown in Source D, where millions of viewers tune in every four years for the presidential debates. The data reports that 80.6 million people viewed the debates in 1980, and even in 1996, the chart's lowest year of ratings, 46.1 million viewers tuned in—all who may have been influenced to vote! The data shows that television is unmatched in its ability to reach voters, proving that it is a beneficial tool for providing information to help citizens make their choices.

Television also works as a trust-building tool between the viewer and the presidential candidates. Although the criticism from Source C—which claims that televised debates are largely focused on image instead of content—is noteworthy, we must also consider the relationship development that occurs between the constituent and the politician. For example, consider the story of Walter Cronkite, who performed investigative journalism on-site in Vietnam to deliver a message about his opinion of the war. In doing so, he was able to shift the support for the ongoing war into a national call for closure, resulting in the end of the United States' presence in Vietnam and potentially saving thousands of lives (Source E). For presidents, their arguments, vision, and speeches can establish trust with the viewers, raising citizens' confidence in their ability to do the job successfully. Though televised appearances do result in investment in public relation campaigns and sometimes support an inauthentic view of their subjects, at the same time, television serves as an important tool to connect citizens with their president and candidates.

Perhaps the most troubling element of televising presidential elections is the threat of commercialism. With the variety of issues and complaints regarding legislation and public policy, presidential candidates may use their live airtime to tackle only the most popular economic and social issues. Ted Koppel analyzed this phenomenon during a past presidential debate, in which the television station structured the debate to limit responses from the candidates (Source F). This approach is somewhat deceptive, forcing the candidates to come up with quick answers while masking other issues. For example, only the most popular social issues may have been brought up, sidelining complex political matters and policy problems that may have been ongoing for years. However, while this format surely

limits candidates' ability to share their opinions on a wide variety of issues, television does allow the candidates to connect with the masses, which may not be possible through other forms of communication. If necessary, the format of future debates could be restructured to create more space for complex argumentation without sacrificing the benefits of televised communication.

In summary, the influence of television is unprecedented, allowing presidential candidates and other politicians to connect with viewers from across the nation. The critics are justified in remarking that televised debates may mislead citizens through their emphasis on public image. However, if audiences analyze the debates, announcements, and other such matters with a critical approach, this highly accessible form of communication encourages people to build trust with presidential candidates, enhance their worldview, and feel more involved in political matters.

EXAMPLE