

The Role Of Televised Debates In The Dynamics Of Political Communication: A Catalyst For Electoral Competitiveness

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Abstract: This article analyzes the transformative potential of political televised debates in the context of developing democratic processes, focusing on the experiences of Uzbekistan and South Korea. Through empirical analysis based on survey data collected in Tashkent and a comparative review of debate practices in South Korea, the paper highlights the role of debates as a dynamic tool of political communication and voter influence. The research evaluates the impact of debates on electoral competitiveness, digital integration, and democratic culture through the theoretical lenses of agenda-setting and mediatization. Practical recommendations are proposed for improving Uzbekistan's political debate model in line with international standards.

Keywords: Televised debates, political communication, electoral competitiveness, Uzbekistan, South Korea, agenda-setting, media convergence.

Introduction: In the digital age, the mechanisms of political communication are rapidly evolving, and televised debates have become an essential means of delivering campaign messages and engaging with voters. In developed democracies such as South Korea, debates are legally mandated and are integral to campaign strategy, political education, and accountability. In contrast, in emerging democracies like Uzbekistan, debates are only beginning to be recognized as democratic instruments. This article analyzes the role of televised debates in enhancing electoral competitiveness and democratic participation through a comparative study of Uzbekistan and South Korea.

The study is based on foundational theories in political communication. Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) posits that the media shapes the public agenda by focusing attention on certain issues. Framing theory (Entman, 1993) examines how the presentation of information affects public interpretation.

Mediatization theory (Couldry & Hepp, 2013) suggests that political processes are increasingly shaped by media logic. These theories guide the analysis of how televised debates influence political attitudes, voter behavior, and legitimacy.

Televised debates are emerging as a critical and evolving format in modern political communication. They serve not only as a means of information but also as institutional tools that promote competition, transparency, and civic engagement. Research has shown that debates enhance political literacy, clarify candidate differences, and reinforce democratic culture (Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988; Benoit et al., 2003).

In the international context, televised debates have been central to election campaigns in the United States since 1960. The Kennedy-Nixon debate marked a historic moment, significantly influencing public perception. In each subsequent election, debates have impacted candidate approval (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

In France, debates are critical during the two-round presidential elections. In 2017, the Macron–Le Pen debate led to a notable shift in voter preferences. In Germany, the "TV-Duell" format has become a traditional and widely respected practice among chancellor candidates.

In South Korea, since 2004, debates have been legally mandated. The National Election Commission ensures that all candidates are given equal opportunity. Integrated with digital platforms, this model is especially appealing to young and tech-savvy audiences. Studies by Lee (2019) and Park & Cho (2021) confirm that debates have increased youth participation in politics.

Debates are also evolving in line with mediatization theory. Media not only transmits information but also constructs political reality (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). Through debates, the media brings critical issues to the public agenda and assigns them ideological meaning (Entman, 1993).

The primary advantages of televised debates include:

- Enhancing political literacy among voters;
- Facilitating fair competition among candidates;
- Serving as a reliable and balanced information source;
- Integrating with digital tools to provide interactive experiences;
- Reinforcing political legitimacy and civic participation.

These insights suggest that Uzbekistan should develop a nationally appropriate debate model based on international standards and local political realities.

A mixed-method approach was employed, involving quantitative survey data and qualitative comparative analysis. An online survey was conducted in Tashkent in early 2025 with 36 voluntary respondents. The questionnaire covered demographics, viewing habits, platform preferences, and the perceived influence of debates on political decision-making. South Korean data was collected through scholarly literature, news reports, and content analysis.

Survey data showed that 72.2% of respondents acknowledged some influence of televised debates on their political decisions. Of these, 25% reported strong influence, 47.2% partial influence, while 11.1% stated no influence and 16.7% were uncertain. Notably, the 18–24 age group reported the highest levels of influence.

In terms of platforms, 44.4% preferred traditional television, while 41.7% watched debates via digital media like YouTube, Facebook Live, Telegram, and

Instagram. Respondents expressed interest in features such as live polling, interactive comments, and visual data graphics, reflecting a demand for more transparent and engaging debates.

South Korea's debate model is characterized by legal regulation, standardized formats, and multi-platform broadcasting. The National Election Commission ensures fairness and equal access. Debates include real-time polls, expert analysis, and high-quality visuals, increasing trust and engagement. In Uzbekistan, debates lack consistent legal backing and are often ad hoc. Despite recent efforts, there is still variability in format, content depth, and moderator neutrality. Nevertheless, the inclusion of debates in recent parliamentary and presidential elections indicates growing political will. Youth media literacy and increased access to digital platforms present a positive foundation.

Data shows that televised debates in Uzbekistan are partially effective but hold substantial potential. Youth audiences are particularly receptive, indicating a shift in media consumption and civic awareness. The role of platforms like Telegram and YouTube suggests a transition to hybrid political communication. Institutional weaknesses, including the lack of a centralized debate authority and inconsistent production standards, remain barriers. South Korea's model illustrates the benefits of institutional commitment, legal frameworks, and technological innovation.

These findings affirm the relevance of agenda-setting and mediatization theories. As debates become embedded in political culture, their impact on electoral competitiveness and democratic norms increases. Uzbekistan must invest in media infrastructure, professional training, and civic education to realize this potential.

Towards a National Debate Model for Uzbekistan

To establish effective democratic debates, the following steps are recommended:

Legal Mandate: Incorporate televised debates into electoral law at all election levels.

Multi-Platform Access: Broadcast debates on TV, stream online, and provide on-demand availability.

Digital Engagement Tools: Use live polls, interactive comments, QR feedback, and AR graphics.

Moderator Professionalization: Ensure neutral, well-trained moderators with fact-checking skills.

Public Education: Promote the value of debates, especially among youth and first-time voters.

National Debate Commission: Establish an

independent regulatory body under the CEC.

In conclusion, televised debates have significant potential to enhance political communication in Uzbekistan. Although challenges remain, the foundation for progress exists. By adapting South Korea's best practices and aligning with national political realities, Uzbekistan can build a transparent, competitive, and participatory debate culture that strengthens democratic engagement and electoral integrity.

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