

The Problem of Representative Democracy

Guest post by Chris Bassil.

This week will mark the first presidential debate between the incumbent Barack Obama and his challenger, Mitt Romney. Although the two are certain to discuss a number of hot-button issues, major media outlets have begun to suggest that the debate will serve mostly as an evaluation of the candidates themselves. Thus, the winner of the debate is perhaps less likely to be measured by reason and strength of argument than he is by his eloquence and the vague category of “likeability.”

Although they can in this way remain generally uninformative, presidential debates can serve as a vibrant illustration of one of the pitfalls of the particularly American form of democracy. In order to observe this, however, it is important to appreciate exactly what characterizes the variant of democracy in question, and how it differs from democracy qua democracy.

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