After watching Tuesday’s Democratic Presidential Debate, I again was convinced that these are at best pseudo policy debates. As someone who has taught argument for 45 years, the current television debate format doesn’t permit a rigorous and thorough clash of different ideas; 60 second soundbites and lightning round responses are not arguments.

Worse, it makes little sense for the candidates, prompted by the moderators, to get lost in the weeds regarding who has the best policy to solve a problem or who occupies which political lane: moderate, progressive, etc. Presidents are not always people with the best or even fully developed policies entering office.

As a colleague reminded me: Effective presidents—presidents of anything, not just POTUS—often are those who recognize, advance and facilitate the great ideas of others. This is why it is appropriate to pick proven leaders with profound experiences of success at implementation—not just those with big ideas.
Therefore, the question that should have been but wasn’t discussed explicitly is: Which candidate has the best chance of working with a congress that may be controlled by a different political party to get their or other proposals adopted?

To be fair, most of these candidates have good ideas and potentially effective policies, but none of them automatically will have their policies adopted when they are sworn into office in 2021. I think voters want to know who actually will get the job done—and we don’t yet have a clear answer to this important question.

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