POLITICAL ELECTION DEBATES

INFORMING VOTERS ABOUT POLICY AND CHARACTER

WILLIAM L. BENOIT

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Contents

Preface

Political debates are an important component of modern election campaigns; chapter 1 elaborates this argument. This book has a clear and limited focus: investigating data on political campaign debates collected (primarily) using the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse. We have studied American general election presidential debates, presidential primary debates, vice presidential debates gubernatorial debates, U.S. Senate debates, a U.S. House debate, mayoral debates, and debates in several other countries. Because I have occasionally tested other theories (e.g., Petrocik's Issue Ownership Theory; Pederson's Theory of Functional Federalism; and retrospective versus prospective voting) on debates, chapter 8 extends this book beyond Functional Theory. This book summarizes existing research and it presents new data (on the form of character traits discussed in vice presidential, senate, gubernatorial, and non-U.S. debates and on news coverage of debates).

This book draws on the work of many other people. Much of the published data reported here was generated with the help of numerous co-authors, who contributed ideas as well as time and effort: David Airne, Jen Benoit-Bryan, Joe Blaney, LeAnn Brazeal, Sumanna Chattopadhyay, Sooyoung Cho, Yun Son Choi, Jordan Compson, Heather Currie, Corey Davis, Jeff Delbert, Mark Glantz, Allison Harthcock, Glenn Hansen, Kate Hemmer, Jayne Henson, Julio Cesar Herrero, Sungwook Hwang, Andrew Klyukovski, Cheolhan Lee, Glen Leshner, John McGuire, John McHale, John Petrocik, Anji Phillips, Penni Pier, Steve Price, Bryan Reber, Leslie Rill, Tamir Sheafer, Kevin Stein, Leigh Anne Sudbrock, Rebecca Verser, Courtney Vogt, Jack Yu, Bill Wells, John Wen, and Jessica Wilson-Kratzer.

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1

Introduction

Election campaigns are an essential element of representative democracy. Campaigns are simultaneously a means for those who seek elective office to connect with voters and a way for citizens to learn about the candidates who are seeking their votes. Political campaign debates are an integral component of the modern political campaign. Election debates have been staged—and it is clear that they are media events, even if they are useful to voters—in presidential elections (general campaign, primary campaign, and vice presidential debates), in non-presidential elections (including governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and mayor), and in political leaders' debates in other countries (including such countries as Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, the Ukraine, and the United Kingdom; see, e.g., Coleman, 2000, and chapter 5 of this book). Voters have come to expect election debates, particularly in the race for the president of the United States but increasingly for other elective offices as well. The United Kingdom, for example, resisted calls for prime minister debates until 2010, when three election debates were broadcast in the United Kingdom (and debates were also broadcast in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales). The expectation that candidates for elective office will debate has meant that candidates who try to duck participating in debates can expect to be exposed to ridicule by opponents and skepticism by some voters. For example, in 1992 Clinton campaign staffers dressed up as chickens and heckled President Bush at his campaign events (calling him "Chicken George") to embarrass him into debating with Governor Clinton (Kelly, 1992).

Debates are a part of the complex information environment of a modern political campaign. Figure 1 depicts major elements of a political campaign. Debates (like other political campaign messages) reach some voters directly (path 1). Some people watch debates (path 4) and they also pass that information along to other

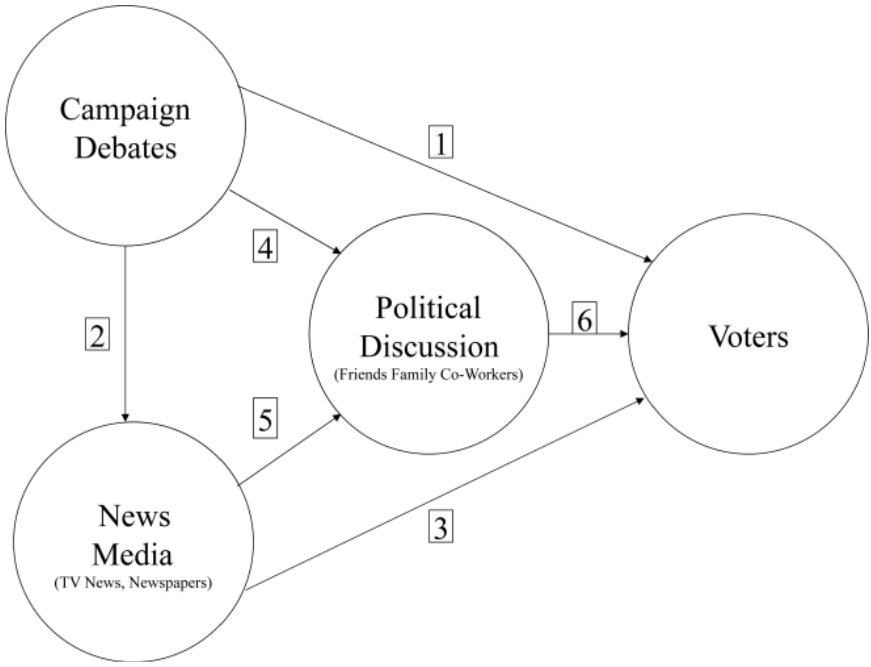

Figure 1

people through political discussion (path 6). Debates (and other campaign messages) are also mediated by the news media (path 2). This information can reach some voters directly when they watch, read, or listen to news (path 3) and reach other voters indirectly via political discussion (path 5, then path 6). Of course, many voters learn about political candidates from many sources and media during a campaign. So, information from political campaign debates can reach voters in a variety of ways.

One question that arises is whether political election debates should be considered debates at all. Jamieson and Birdsell, after Auer (1962), coined the phrase "joint press conference" to describe presidential debates (1988, p. 6). Zarefsky (1992) wrote that debates do not live up to their potential:

> Debates have great potential for focusing the audience's attention, for identifying issues, and for inviting deliberation. Sadly, however, this potential is largely unrealized. The [presidential] debates have been formatted for television—the confrontation with reporter-questioners adds dramatic conflict and the short time limits respond to audience's limited attention span. But these same conventions thwart sustained discussion of serious issues; they encourage one-liners and canned mini-speeches. (p. 412)

The idea that debates are not "real" debates but "joint press conferences" does not mean they are not helpful to voters or that they do not play an important role in de-

mocracy. Candidates have a chance to present their views and respond to opponents in debates and voters learn about the candidates' policy and character from debates, news about debates, and political discussion on debates.

IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

Debates are very significant events in the political campaign for a variety of reasons. First, they offer important benefits for citizens. Debates allow viewers to see the leading candidates in the campaign (of course, some primary debates include other candidates as well). Although candidates display creativity in responding to questions (and to previous statements), usually they do address the same topic, allowing voters to directly compare the two candidates on the issues (unlike, for example, television spots).

Debate rules do not allow candidates to bring notes or scripts into the debate (some debates do permit candidates to make notes about a question or an opponent's remark during the debate). Although candidates usually prepare extensively for debates, an unexpected question or comment from an opponent may offer voters a more candid view of the candidates than carefully scripted speeches or TV spots. Hence, voters may obtain a more accurate view of candidates in a debate than in other message forms.

Debates are longer than other messages, such as TV spots, which are most often thirty seconds long. Every American presidential debate in the general campaign after 1960 has been ninety minutes. Even subtracting introductory remarks by the moderator and questions asked, voters have a chance to hear the candidates speak for half an hour or more (of course, in primary debates, with more candidates, the amount of time per candidate diminishes, but candidates always speak much longer than thirty seconds total in a debate).

Debates also have key benefits for candidates. First, they are free access to television audiences, if you are invited to participate. Currently, the bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates decides who will participate in American general election debates and only once in recent campaigns (Ross Perot in 1992) has a third party candidate been invited to attend. Not surprisingly, third party candidates, such as Green Party nominee Ralph Nader in 2000, and their supporters, complain that they are unfairly excluded from general election debates. Early primary debates, in contrast, sometimes feature as many as ten or more candidates. In other countries, participants in political leaders' debates usually vary between two and four, but at times more candidates participate.

Second, the reach of debates is extended when they are covered in the news or addressed in political discussion among voters. Candidates' access to voters is enhanced by indirect dissemination of their statements via news or political discussion and voters can learn about candidates indirectly as well as directly. Third, debates have far less media gate-keeping than the news. A journalist writing a story can ignore some or all of a candidate's message (and chapter 8 notes that news coverage of campaign

focuses far more on the horse race than on the candidates' policy statements or character). However, everything a candidate says in a debate is broadcast to voters. At times journalists participating in a debate may chide a candidate for not answering a question, but there is no question that journalists have far less power in debates to control which parts of a candidate's message is heard by viewers.

Fourth, candidates have an opportunity to correct (allegedly) false statements from opponents. This chance for a rebuttal is immediate. Even when the aggrieved party does not have the next turn to talk, they often plead with the moderator for a chance to reply to such comments—and moderators often agree to these requests. Jamieson and Birdsell (1988) observe that "the candidate's presence provides a check on the discourse" (p. 12). Fifth, candidates usually do not like voters to hear only their opponent's message. Even if an opponent is not misrepresenting another candidates viewpoint, candidates almost always want voters to hear *their* side along with their opponent's views. Debates, unlike stump speeches or TV spots, allow candidates that opportunity.

In the United States, Electoral College rules dictate campaign choices in presidential campaigns. In recent elections candidates only devote resources to "swing" or "battleground" states. Almost all states follow "winner-take-all" rules in allocating votes to presidential candidates. Candidates receive all of a states' electoral votes regardless of whether they win 50.1 percent of the populat vote or 95 percent of the vote; candidates receive zero votes whether they win 1 percent of the vote or 49.9 percent. No benefit derives from increasing the winner's or the loser's share of the popular vote. This leads candidates to ignore states they are sure to win or sure to lose, focusing their attention (including appearances and television advertising) in the states that are in play. West observed that during the most recent presidential election, "In a swing state, you're part of the presidential campaign, Everywhere else, you're outside." Poll data confirm this view: "In a new *USA Today*/Gallup Poll of swing states, an overwhelming majority of voters remember seeing campaign ads over the past month; most voters in other states say they haven't" (Page, 2012). This means that another reason debates are important because they provide points of common ground in the presidential campaign for the entire country. Voters in non-battleground states do not get to (or have to) see the television spots broadcast in battleground states (and in fact some specific ads may not run in all battleground states). This means that presidential elections in at least one way are fragmented. But election debates are broadcast, and watched, in all states. Unlike TV spots, debates can serve as a point of reference on the candidates' messages for the entire nation.

Importantly, debates also offer substantial benefits for democracy. First, they are an additional channel or medium, another source of information for voters. In addition to speeches, candidate webpages, direct mail advertising, television spots, and other media, debates are an important and unique component of modern election campaigns.

The confrontational format of debate—opposing candidates on the same stage alternating turns at talk—itself generates interest. Debates often produce highly dramatic moments. For example, in the final debate of 1984, President Reagan was

asked about his age. He replied that "I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience." This joke neatly put to rest this concern. In the 1988 vice presidential debate, Senator Quayle declared that "I have as much experience in the Congress as Jack Kennedy did when he sought the presidency." He opponent, Senator Lloyd Bentsen, retorted: "Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy, I knew Jack Kennedy, Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you are no Jack Kennedy." During the November 9, 2011 Republican primary debate, Governor Perry proclaimed that he would streamline the federal government: "And I will tell you, it is three agencies of government when I get there that are gone. Commerce, Education, and the—what's the third one there?" The moderator then asked, "You can't name the third one?" and Perry admitted that "I can't. The third one, I can't. Sorry. Oops." This incident did not enhance Perry's credibility. Other fascinating moments have occurred in debates as well; video clips are available on the Internet to watch them (e.g., Stephey, 2013). Anticipation of moments such as these attracts audiences to debates.

Many people tune in for presidential election debates. The first presidential primary debate, a radio broadcast leading up to the Oregon primary, featured Thomas Dewey and Harold Stassen. An estimated 40 million people listened to the debate (Our Campaign, 2012). Although ostensibly aimed at only those who live in states with upcoming primaries and those who belong to one political party, voters living in other states sometimes tune in to watch primary debates: The combined audience for the presidential primary debates in 2000 was 27 million (Patterson, 2004, p. 240). Benoit, Henson, and Sudbrock (2011) reported that 90 million viewers watched the presidential primary debates of 2008. The Commission on Presidential Debates (2012) reports that the average viewership of general election debates from 1960 to 2008 is 59 million. In 2008, more people watched the vice presidential debate between Joe Biden and Sarah Palin (69.9 million) than any of the three general election debates (52.4, 63.2, and 56.5 million viewers; Commission on Presidential Debates). The grand total for viewers of all presidential and vice presidential debates exceeds one billion through 2012. Chapter 4 shows that people also watch non-presidential debates and chapter 5 establishes that many people watch political leaders' debates in other countries.

Of course, some voters do not tune in to watch debates, but even those citizens may learn something about debate from the news or from discussions around the water cooler or the dinner table, which extends the reach of debates considerably. McKinney and Carlin (2004; citing Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco, 2000) observe that "debates attract the greatest media coverage of any single campaign event" (p. 204). They also note that "debates generate the greatest amount of public interest and more citizen-to-citizen discussion than any other single campaign event (citing Patterson, 2003). The huge audiences for debates, both direct and indirect, means their potential for influence is substantial.

Debates provide another opportunity for candidates to discuss their issue positions and make campaign promises. Research in subsequent chapters shows that

candidates discuss policy more than character in debates and they frequently use two forms of policy future plans (means) and general goals (ends) that lay out what they will do if elected. Some may scoff at the importance of campaign promises; available evidence shows that it is a mistake to dismiss them. Krukones (1984) concluded that "presidential candidates will keep most of the pledges that they make during their campaigns . . . Their average . . . hovers around the seventy-three percent scale and climbs up to eighty percent if 'good faith' efforts are included" (p. 125). At times, of course, presidents are prevented from fulfilling promises by a congress controlled by the opposing party. The situation may change in unexpected ways that alters what the government can and should do (the tragic events of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the BP Gulf Oil spill are but three examples). Nevertheless, Fishel (1985) observed that usually presidents "seek to redeem most of the specific promises they make in their campaigns" (p. 214). Thus, debates are another opportunity for presidential candidates to make policy commitments which allow voters to hold them accountable for their campaign promises.

A famous example of a broken campaign promise involved Vice President George Bush's nomination acceptance address, which included the dramatic line: "Read my lips: No new taxes." However, in 1990 the President agreed to a tax hike. His broken promise came back to haunt him in 1992. For example, Pat Buchanan challenged him for the Republican nomination, attacking him for breaking his "No new taxes" promise. In the general election Governor Bill Clinton picked up this refrain, attacking his Republican opponent on the same grounds. Promises are made, and criticized, in campaign debates as well.

Research has established that debates have several effects on those who watch them (see Holbrook, 1996; McKinney and Carlin, 2004; Racine Group, 2002; Shaw, 1999). Patterson (2003) reported that according to Vanishing Voter surveys, "Citizens learn more about the candidates during the ninety minutes of an October debate than they do in most other weeks of the campaign" (pp. 170–171). Benoit, Hansen, and Verser (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of the effects of watching presidential debates (a meta-analysis is a way to statistically combine the results from several studies). They found that watching general campaign debates can increase issue knowledge and issue salience (the number of issues a voter uses to evaluate candidates). Debates can change voters' preferences for candidates' issue stands. Debates can have an agenda-setting effect, increasing the perceived importance of the issues discussed in debates. Debates can alter perceptions of the candidates' personality (e.g., honesty, compassion) although they have not been shown to affect perceptions of the candidates' competence (leadership ability). Debates can affect vote preference. Primary debates, probably because voters have less information during that stage of the campaign and are less certain about their attitudes, have even larger effects on viewers than general election debates. McKinney (McKinney and Chattopadhyay, 2007; McKinney and Rill, 2009; McKinney, Rill, and Gully, 2011) argues that debates increase political engagement for young viewers. There can be no question that debates have important effects on viewers

and are an essential part of the democratic process. Clearly, debates have effects on the voters who do watch them.

Another potential advantage of political election debates for democracy is the opportunity for clash between candidates. By "clash" I do not just mean attack, but response to attack—and sometimes another comment by the first candidate or a response to follow-up questions. When it happens, clash explores the differences between candidates' positions in greater depth, heightening the contrast between them. At times, candidates stubbornly stay "on message," repeating their pre-planned campaign themes and sound bites remorselessly. However, debates do provide the *opportunity* for clash; when it does happen, it is healthy for democracy.

Furthermore, it is important to realize that all people do not react in the same way to a debate. Each viewer has a different (slightly different to widely different) set of beliefs and values about the candidates that influences their perception of statements by the candidates in debates. Jarman (2005), for example, looked at reactions of the second general election presidential debate in 2004. Viewers reacted more favorably to comments from the candidate representing their own party than to comments by candidates of the other party. Still, debates have effects on viewers (and those who learn about them indirectly) and are a vital part of the modern political campaign process.

DEBATES AS A UNIQUE MESSAGE FORM

Functional Theory has investigated several political campaign message forms, including debates, TV spots, nomination acceptance addresses, and direct mail brochures (Benoit, 2007a). Campaign debates are another medium but they are not *just* another medium: They have unique features. Debates are live events (and, as discussed earlier, candidates may not bring notes or use scripts in debates). They feature the leading candidates (and sometimes other candidates) addressing much the same topics. Candidate can respond directly to opponents, which can mean that they have a chance to correct a misstatement from an opponent or at least to allow voters to hear their view along side their opponent's view. These events are watched by many voters and reach some voters via news coverage or political discussion with friends, family, and co-workers. Debates are also the only opportunity for voters to see the candidates, side-by-side, talking about the same topics. Political campaign debates are an important part of democracy, are viewed by many voters, have effects by voters, and are held around the world and for various elected offices. Clearly, political election debates merit scholarly attention.

The literature is rich with research on both the nature and effects of debates (see, e.g., Loudan, 2013a, b). This book focuses on research on the nature or content of political election debates conducted from the perspective of the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse, Issue Ownership Theory (Petrocik, 1986), Functional Federalism Theory (Peterson, 1995), and retrospective versus prospective voting (e.g., Kiewiet and Rivers, 1984).

The next chapter discusses the theory and research used to generate most of the data discussed in the book. Chapter 3 discusses the content of American presidential primary, general, and vice-presidential debates. Chapter 4 takes up American debates for other political offices: U.S. senate, U.S. House, governor, and mayor. It also reports data on political leaders' campaign debates from around the world. Chapter 5 investigates the role of incumbency in the nature of political campaign debates. Chapter 6 examines the effects of election campaign phase (primary versus general). Chapter 7 looks at news coverage of debate content (and some unpublished data is reported in this chapter). Chapter 8 focuses on political campaign debates analyzed from three other theories: Issue Ownership, Functional Federalism, and Retrospective versus Prospective Voting. Finally, chapter 9 wraps up the book.

2

Theory and Method: Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse

This chapter describes the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse (Benoit, 2007), which was used to produce much of the data discussed in this book (three other theories—Issue Ownership, Functional Federalism, and retrospective versus prospective voting—will be discussed in chapter 8). Then I will describe the advantages inherent in this approach to analyzing political campaign debates. Finally, I will discuss the content analytic method used to generate these data.

A functional analysis is especially appropriate for investigating political campaign debates because candidate statements in debates are meant as a *means* of accomplishing a *goal*: winning the election. Political campaign discourse is therefore inherently instrumental, or functional, in nature. Of course, some candidates campaign in order to espouse a particular point of view. This is presumably the case for some third party candidates; it may also be the case for some of the candidates in the primary who have no realistic chance of willing. However, for those who do have a reasonable chance of winning—which at the presidential level in contemporary campaigns means the Republican or Democratic nominees—campaign messages function as the means to gaining votes (and thus winning public office).

ASSUMPTIONS OF FUNCTIONAL THEORY

Functional Theory is based on five key Axioms. Each of these assumptions will be explicated here.

A1. ***Voting is a comparative act.***

When they enter a voting booth, citizens face a relatively straightforward decision: For whom should I cast my vote? A vote is a choice between two (or more) com-

peting candidates and it clearly entails a comparative judgment. It is unreasonable to expect that any candidate for elective office would be completely without flaws or drawbacks; on the other hand, no candidate is totally without redeeming qualities. This means that in any contested election, a citizen's vote choice is at base a comparative decision that one candidate appears *preferable* to the other candidate(s) on whatever criterion is most important to that voter. Use of the word "appears" acknowledges that our evaluation of a candidate is a perception; it is not possible to have objective knowledge of what a candidate would do if elected (policy) or what kind of person (character) he or she "really" is. Some voters, of course, may be so certain that the candidate they prefer is better that they consider this superiority to be a fact rather than a perception, but nevertheless their candidate preference is still a perception. Voters' candidate choices are best understood as perceptions that they form on the basis of their own attitudes and values and the information they possess that appears relevant to them when they make their vote choice. This means that the ultimate goal sought by candidates, winning elections, is achieved by persuading enough voters to believe that he or she is the better candidate in the race.

This idea that voting is a choice between *competing candidates* is becoming increasingly important as political parties decline in influence. Popkin observed that "in an environment of diminishing party loyalty, campaigns and candidates exert a greater influence on voters than they did in the elections of 1940 and 1948" (1994, p. 12; see also Menefee-Libey, 2000; Wattenberg, 1990, 1991). In earlier contests, the party nominee was selected at the convention. Patterson (1991) noted that in 1952 Estes Kefauver won

> all but one of the twelve primaries he entered and was the clear favorite of rank-and-file Democrats in the final Gallup Poll before the national nominating convention. Nevertheless, the party's leaders chose Adlai Stevenson as the Democratic presidential nominee. (pp. 145–146)

We cannot know if Kefauver could have defeated Eisenhower if he had been the Democratic nominee in 1952 (that seems unlikely), but we know Stevenson lost. In 1968, there were only sixteen Republican and seventeen Democratic primaries (Crotty and Jackson, 1985). By 2012, primaries were scheduled in all fifty states as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia although some occur after the nominee is determined.

The increasing prominence of primary contests has changed the nature of politics. One important consequence is an increased importance of individual candidates and their campaign advisors. Although many voters still cast their votes in the general election for whoever wins their political party's nomination, the individual candidates, and their apparent preferability to voters, play increasingly important roles in election outcomes. Party loyalty is still important but has less influence on voting decisions today (see Benoit, 2007; Menefee-Libey, 2000; Wattenberg, 1991, 1998); the individual candidates and their campaign messages are filling the void left by the

diminishing role of party identification in vote choice. So, voters choose between the competing candidates, and an increasing number do not do so exclusively by party loyalty, but according to their perceptions of the candidates' preferability. Furthermore, political party affiliation cannot help voters decide among the candidates from their own party contesting the nomination: candidate messages provide information to support this decision.

A2. ***Candidates must distinguish themselves from opponents.***

The idea that voting is a comparative act, in which the relative preferability of the contenders determines vote choice, leads to the second assumption of Functional Theory: Candidates must appear different from one another. Voters cannot make a choice, they have no reason to prefer one candidate over another, if the candidates look exactly the same. Candidates need not differ on every possible point of comparison; everyone wants to create jobs, handle the federal deficit, and protect the United States from terrorism. However, if the candidates agreed on *every* issue (and projected all of the same character traits) there would be no basis for preferring one candidate over another. This means that it is essential for candidates in contested races to offer some distinctions between themselves and their opponents.

Candidates may attempt to differentiate themselves from opponents by discussing either policy (what they have done or will do in office) or character (who they are). For example, in the 2008 general election debates, John McCain declared that "I saved the taxpayers $6.8 billion in a deal for an Air Force tanker that was done in a corrupt fashion." Barack Obama, in contrast, argued that we have seen "eight years of failed economic policies promoted by George Bush, supported by senator McCain." McCain addressed character when he stated that Obama "didn't tell the American people the truth." McCain attacked his opponent's character when he said that "I honestly don't believe that Senator Obama has the knowledge or experience" to be president. Each of these four statements implicitly or explicitly draws a contrast between the candidates, providing voters a basis for choosing one as preferable to the other.

Theories of candidate behavior developed in political science have made similar observations. As indicated above, candidates will usually adopt some of the same issue positions. For example, Page (1978) explained that Downs' (1957)

> economic theory of democracy calls for a candidate's policy stands to echo the policy preferences of the public, and many spatial models—especially those of the public opinion variety—predict that the midpoint of public opinion on issues has an important influence upon the stands that a candidate takes. (p. 29)

Page offered evidence from the 1968 campaign that "Across a wide variety of issues, then, both Humphrey and Nixon took positions which corresponded fairly closely with what the average American favored" (p. 47). However, he also found that both

Humphrey and Nixon *disagreed* with the mid-point of public opinion on 15 percent of the seventy-two issues he examined. Specifically, Democrat Humphrey took more liberal positions on some issues whereas Republican Nixon adopted more conservative stands on some issues. This result is, generally, what one would expect. Both candidates took similar issue positions on some issues, close to the majority of the public, but each candidate distinguished himself from the majority opinion on other issues, Humphrey (the Democrat) by moving to the left and Nixon (the Republican) to the right of the ideological spectrum. Page also suggested that in 1964 Goldwater may have been more of an ideologue who did not adapt to public opinion; this is not a winning strategy.

A3. ***Political campaign messages allow candidates to distinguish themselves.***

Once a candidate decides which distinctions between him- or herself and opponents to stress to voters, those points of difference must be conveyed to voters. Citizens must be aware of these differences before such distinctions can influence their candidate preferences. Citizens cannot and should not depend solely on the news media to provide voters with information about the candidates' policy positions. News *may* inform voters, but it may not: research shows that the news concentrates most on the horse race (see, e.g., Benoit, Hemmer, and Stein, 2010; Benoit, Stein, and Hansen, 2005). Patterson and McClure (1976) reported that learning occurs from candidates' campaign messages:

> During the 1972 presidential campaign, people who were heavily exposed to political spots became more informed about the candidates' issue positions . . . On every single issue emphasized in presidential commercials, persons with high exposure to television advertising showed a greater increase in knowledge than persons with low exposure. (pp. 116–117)

It is clear that election campaign messages, such as political campaign debates, are an important source of political information.

Of course, it is not reasonable to assume that presidential candidates will offer a thorough or unbiased discussion of every issue. It is in the candidates' best interests to present themselves in a favorable light and to portray their opponents in an unfavorable light. This could lead to omissions, inaccuracies, and/or misrepresentations of their issue positions and character. The inherent confrontation inherent in the debate format provides an opportunity to correct exaggerations or inaccuracies. A simple and possibly less risky approach when discussing issues is to focus on ends rather than means: "I favor a balanced budget [but I won't tell you whether I will increase taxes and/or reduce spending to achieve it]." A certain amount of strategic ambiguity may be useful to political candidates; however, Alvarez (1998) found that too much ambiguity is undesirable. Still campaign messages help candidates establish the distinctiveness among contenders that gives voters a basis for choosing one candidate over another.

A4. ***Candidates establish preferability through acclaiming, attacking, and defending.***

Of course, it is not sufficient for candidates to be distinctive in their messages, even on the issues that matter most to voters in that election year; a candidate must appear different from his or her opponents *in ways that most voters favor*. For example, a candidate who declared that "I am the only candidate who will raise taxes 60 percent for everyone" would surely stand apart from opponents, but not in a way that is likely to attract many votes. So, candidates must appear different *and better* than opponents; conversely, one can portray opponents as different *and worse*. Popkin (1994) observed that "Somehow, candidates manage to get a large proportion of the citizenry sorted into opposing camps, each of which is convinced that the positions and interests of the other side add up to a less desirable package of benefits" (p. 8). Three kinds of statements or functions of discourse are capable of helping a candidate appear *preferable* to opponents.

Acclaims. First, candidates may offer acclaims (Benoit, 1997), statements that stress a candidate's advantages or benefits. Such self-praise can address the candidate's character or policy record and/or stands. For example, assuming voters value honesty in a presidential candidate, candidates who persuade voters of their honesty will almost certainly enhance their perceived desirability as candidates. Candidates can also acclaim their policy accomplishments. In a 2004 general election debate, President Bush declared that

> Seventy-five percent of known Al Qaida leaders have been brought to justice. The rest of them know we're after them. We've upheld the doctrine that said if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorist. And the Taliban are no longer in power. Ten million people have registered to vote in Afghanistan in the upcoming presidential election.

It is clear that most voters would view these statements as acclaims, as desirable accomplishments. So, one way to increase the likelihood that voters will see a candidate as preferable is for that candidate to produce campaign messages that acclaim, emphasizing the candidate's desirable qualities.

Attacks. Another way to increase one candidate's (net) favorability is to attack or criticize the opponent(s). Stressing an opponent's undesirable attributes or policy missteps should reduce that opponent's desirability, particularly for voters who value the attribute or policy discussed in the attack. Because voters make a comparative judgment about which candidate is preferable (Axiom 1), a successful attack increases the attacker's net favorability by reducing the desirability of an opponent. In a 2004 general debate, President Bush criticized Senator Kerry's character: "I can see why people think that he changes position quite often, because he does." In the same series of debates, Senator Kerry said "This president has left [our alliances with other countries] in shatters across the globe, and we're now 90 percent of the casualties in Iraq and 90 percent of the costs." The idea that the United States is paying such a

high price in casualties, and expenses, is a clear example of criticism of the president. Of course, not every attack is persuasive—or persuasive with all voters. However, if accepted, this attack should reduce Kerry's opponent's apparent desirability.

Of course, some candidates may be reluctant to attack opponents. Voters consistently report that they do not like mudslinging (Merritt, 1984; Stewart, 1975) so some politicians may wish to avoid engaging in excessive character assassination. Candidates may refrain from attacking, attack less often, or even promise to eschew attacks because voters say they dislike mudslinging. However, attacks have the potential to reduce the preferability of an opponent, so candidates use this function in campaign debates. Benoit (1999) found that in political television spots, candidates who trailed throughout the general election campaign tended to attack more than other candidates (those who led; those embroiled in a close campaign). Presumably, those who were behind throughout the campaign were more willing to risk a possible backlash from attacks because they saw no alternative to attacks. Clearly, attacks are an option used strategically by political candidates with the potential to reduce the apparent preferably of opponents.

Complaints about the level of negativity in political campaigns are fairly common (see, e.g., Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; Jamieson, 1992; Pfau and Kenski, 1990). Kamber (1997), for example, notes that "previous eras saw severe personal attacks on political candidates, but they also saw detailed and sometimes inspiring deliberation over the issues. Our present political discourse is nothing but spleen" (p. 4). Of course, vicious attacks are uncalled for and false attacks are detrimental to voters (Benoit, 2013). Still, attacks can provide voters with useful information. Kamber (1997) explained that

> There is an argument to be made in defense of responsible negative advertisements. The voters need to know the whole story, and solely positive arguments do not provide it. A campaign is not going to willingly offer negative information about its own candidate, and yet that is essential information for the voters to make an informed decision. (p. 7; see also Bryant, 2004)

So, accurate criticism of an opponent can be useful for voters who need to consider both the pros and the cons of the candidates when making a vote choice. False attacks, or attacks that are malicious in tone, are not justifiable (but then false acclaims are also wrong). But legitimate criticism is a form of attack that can help voters make an informed choice.

We must realize that just because voters express distaste for attacks does not necessarily mean that attacking messages are never persuasive. Candidates use focus groups and public opinion polls to design messages—including attacking messages—and they obviously believe attacks can be persuasive. It seems clear that attacks are capable of reducing the desirability of the target of those attacks. However, it is possible that some attacks may have a backlash effect and thus hurt both the sponsor (because voters dislike mudslinging) as well as the target. This means the

most important question may be who is likely to suffer the most from an attack: the target of the attack or the attack's sponsor?

The topic of the attack may be one important factor in audience response. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1989) provide evidence that voters tend to consider policy attacks more acceptable than character attacks. Other studies (Pfau and Burgoon, 1989; Roddy and Garramone, 1988) indicate that policy attacks can be more persuasive than character attacks. Benoit (2003), analyzing multiple message forms (primary television spots, debates, and brochures; acceptance addresses; general television spots, debates, and brochures) over the last fifty years, found that winners are significantly more likely to attack more on policy, and less on character, than candidates who lose elections. Of course, this fact does not mean that policy attacks guarantee a win, or even that attacks on character can never be persuasive. It does suggest that it may be prudent to attack more on policy (and less on character) than one's opponent.

Defenses. The third function of campaign messages that is capable of affecting a candidate's apparent preferability is defense. If a candidate is attacked by an opponent—or perhaps it would be more realistic to say *when* one candidate is attacked by another—the recipient of the attack can choose to defend against (refute) that attack in a campaign message (see Bryant, 2004). In the 2004 general election debates, Bush attacked Kerry for saying "he actually did vote for [the $87 billion appropriation] before he voted against it." In defense, Kerry admitted that he had made a mistake and then minimized it by comparing it with an alleged error made by Bush: "Well, you know, when I talked about the $87 billion, I made a mistake in how I talk about the war. But the president made a mistake in invading Iraq. Which is worse?" So, campaign messages such as debates use defenses as well as acclaims and attacks to show preferability.

Defense can be important because a timely and appropriate defense may be able to prevent further damage from an attack and restore some or all of a candidate's damaged preferability. Defense, then, is the third potential function of campaign discourse. It attempts to restore, or prevent additional damage to, a candidate's perceived preferability.

At times candidates may decide to forgo defenses when they are attacked. Some candidates may not wish to "dignify" an opponent's accusations with a response. This reluctance may be related to the fact that defenses have three potential drawbacks. First, it is possible that presenting a response to an attack could make the candidate sound defensive, appearing reactive rather than proactive. Candidates want to project the image that they are in charge of events, not simply reacting to opponents. Second, it seems likely that a candidate is most likely to attack on topics that favor the attacker rather than the target of attack, which means that defending against an attack probably takes a candidate "off-message," devoting precious message time to issues that are probably better for one's opponent. Third, the only way to respond to a particular attack is to identify that criticism. Mentioning the attack, in preparation

for refuting it, could inform or remind voters of the very weakness that the candidate is trying to combat. Defenses therefore have three potential drawbacks. Research has shown that candidates who are attacked more in debates tend to defend more often: Being the target of an attack provides both the opportunity and the motivation to defend (Benoit, 2007b).

Smith (1990) discussed two of these three functions when he explained that in politics "people pursue and defend jobs by publicly boasting and attacking others" (p. 107). Sabato (1981) made a similar point, albeit from the voters' point of view, when he observed that there are a limited number of ways to vote: "for or against either of the party nominees or not voting at all" (p. 324). Scholars who investigate televised political advertising often distinguish between positive and negative spots (see, e.g., Kaid and Johnston, 2001).

Trent and Friedenberg (2000) noted that televised political advertisements can accomplish three basic functions: extol the candidates' own virtues; condemn, attack, and question their opponents; and respond to attacks or innuendos. These three functions obviously correspond to acclaims, attacks, and defenses. Pfau and Kenski (1990) noted that television spots can be categorized in four types: positive, negative, comparative (positive and negative elements together), and response (defense). Gronbeck also identified several instrumental and consummatory functions of presidential campaigning (1978). Some of these functions appear to be uses and gratifications for the audience. Of course, it is important to know how auditors are likely to make use of the discourse produced by political candidates. However, those kinds of functions supplement, rather than compete with, the Functional Theory analysis of political campaign messages. I explicitly privilege the candidate's purposes in this analysis, rather than voters' or reporters' purposes. So, several political scholars have recognized that political campaign messages acclaim and attack—and a few scholars have acknowledged the role of defensive or response advertisements. However, apart from research using the Functional approach, this distinction between positive and negative political advertisements is rarely applied to other forms of campaign discourse, such as debates. Furthermore, only research from the Functional perspective investigates the frequency of defense in campaign messages.

Inspecting the literature on political campaigns reveals that political candidates and their campaign advisors also recognize the fundamental principle that campaign discourse performs multiple functions. For example, H. R. Haldeman gave advice to President Richard M. Nixon on the 1972 reelection campaign: "Getting one of those 20 [percent] who is an undecided type to vote for you on the basis of your positive points is much less likely than getting them to vote against McGovern by scaring them to death about McGovern" (Popkin et al., 1976, p. 794n). Thus, Haldeman argued that the election hinged on the undecided voters and that Nixon could seek their votes by praising himself—acclaiming Nixon's "positive points"—or by attacking his opponent—"scaring them to death about McGovern." Similarly, Vincent Breglio, who was a part of Ronald Reagan's successful 1980 presidential campaign, acknowledged that "It has become vital in campaigns today that you not only present

all the reasons why people ought to vote for you, but you also have an obligation to present the reasons why they should not vote for the opponent" (1987, p. 34). So, political campaign advisors, like political communication scholars, recognize that candidates can praise themselves and attack their opponents.

This is why the Functional approach analyzes political campaign discourse into utterances that *acclaim* the preferred candidate, *attack* the opponent, and *defend* the candidate from opponent's attacks. Although these three functions may not be equally common in discourse, they are three options that every candidate has available for use. These functions are very important because they provide voters a reason to vote for a candidate or against an opponent. A complete understanding of political campaign communication should consider all three functions.

One useful way to think about these three functions is as an informal form of cost-benefit analysis. Acclaims stress a candidate's benefits. Attacks reveal an opponent's costs. Defenses attempt to refute or minimize potential costs. A vote decision requires an understanding of the pros (acclaims) as well as the cons (attacks, defenses) of the contending candidates. This means that attacks serve a useful purpose, identifying costs–as long as they are neither false nor misleading. Political candidates can inform voters of an opponent's potential costs through attacks. Consistent with this analysis Kelley and Mirer (1974), using survey data from the 1952–1968 presidential elections, found that 82–87 percent of citizens voted for the candidate for whom they reported the largest number of reasons for liking that candidate and the smallest number of reasons for disliking that candidate (in other words, benefits and costs).

It is important to acknowledge that characterizing vote choice as similar to cost-benefit analysis does not mean that I assume that every voter takes a rational approach to voting: gathering, weighing, and integrating as much information as possible to guarantee that they make the most rational decision possible. As Zaller (1992) correctly explained, "citizens vary in their habitual attention to politics and hence in their exposure to political information and argumentation in the media" (p. 1). Only political junkies avidly seek out huge amounts of information about the various candidates. As Popkin argued (1994; see also Downs, 1957), many voters use information shortcuts. They do not seek out information about the candidates or they wait until just before the election to do so. They base their voting decisions on the information they happen to encounter, including debates and news coverage of debates. This is why political candidates employ multiple media and repeat their basic campaign message: They want their message out there for whatever voters might be attending to a particular medium at a given point in time. Debates are a message form that many voters watch and learn about from news and political discussion. Furthermore, voters do not quantify bits of information or place the information they obtain about the candidates into mathematical formulas (i.e., benefits—costs) to calculate their votes. Thus, although I believe that deciding how to vote is similar to cost-benefit analysis, I do not claim that voters do so numerically or even that they systematically weigh the pros and cons of competing candidates. Acclaims tend to increase a candidate's perceived preferability, attacks tend to reduce an opponent's

preferability, and defenses may restore lost preferability. All three functions work to make one candidate appear preferable to another.

We must realize that the power of campaign messages has limitations. As noted above, many voters have little interest in political campaigns and are unlikely to watch debates or to read or watch political news. Some voters who do pay attention to candidate messages may not accept a candidate's statements at face value. Candidates may not always address the most prominent concerns of voters, and when that happens it surely would reduce the impact of the message. Different voters may interpret a message in different ways, and their reaction may not be what the candidate hoped (Reinemann and Maurer, 2005, reported that acclaims in German political leaders' debates generated general support in the audience whereas attacks tended to polarize the audience). Furthermore, we should not assume that a single message is capable of making a voter choose the candidate touted in that message. Nevertheless, the messages to which are exposed during a campaign gradually shape their perceptions of the candidates' character and issue stands and, ultimately, a citizen enters a polling place and casts a vote based on those perceptions. Undecided and independent voters, as well as potential vote defectors, may be particularly susceptible to these messages.

Functional Theory argues that these three functions are likely to occur with different frequencies. Acclaims, if persuasive (if accepted by the audience) can increase a candidate's apparent preferability and have no drawbacks. This means that acclaims should be the most common campaign discourse function. In contrast, attacks, if persuasive, can increase a candidate's apparent net favorability by decreasing an opponent's preferability. However, the public is known to dislike mudslinging as noted above (Merritt, 1984; Stewart, 1975) so the risk of backlash may encourage candidates to moderate their attacks. Accordingly, Functional Theory expects attacks to be less common than acclaims. Finally, defenses, if they are accepted by a voter, can help restore a candidate's lost preferability. However, as noted above, defenses have three drawbacks: They are likely to take a candidate off-message (because attacks are likely to concern the target candidate's weaknesses), they risk informing or reminding voters of a potential weakness (a candidate must identify an attack to refute it), and they may create the impression that the candidate is reactive (defensive) rather than proactive. Thus, Functional Theory makes two predictions about the functions of political campaign discourse:

H1. *Candidates will use acclaims more frequently than attacks and attacks more than defenses.*

Studies have investigated this prediction with a variety of American presidential campaign messages. Research on American presidential primary and general TV spots (1952-2004) confirmed that the most common function was acclaims (65 percent); nominating convention Acceptance Addresses from 1952-2004 also emphasized acclaims (62 percent), as do primary and general election direct mail brochures from 1948-2004 (77 percent; Benoit, 2007a). As predicted, attacks were the

second most common function in U.S. TV spots (34 percent), Acceptance Addresses (23 percent), and direct mail (23 percent; Benoit, 2007a). Defenses were the least common function in TV spots (1 percent), Acceptance Addresses (1 percent), and direct mail (0.3 percent; Benoit, 2007a). Subsequent chapters will offer data that test this prediction in different kinds of political election debates (American presidential general, presidential primary, vice-presidential, senate, gubernatorial, and mayoral debates; and political leaders' debates in other countries).

A5. *Campaign discourse occurs on two topics: policy and character.*

The fifth axiom of Functional Theory posits that political discourse can occur on two broad topics: *policy* (issues) and *character* (image). In other words, candidates try to persuade voters of their preferability on policy—what they do—and character—who they are. Pomper (1975), in fact, observed that many voters "change their partisan choice from one election to the next, and these changes are most closely related to their positions on the issues and their assessment of the abilities of the candidates" (p. 10). Policy and character are defined in this fashion:

> *Policy* utterances concern governmental action (past, current, or future) and problems amenable to governmental action.
>
> *Character* utterances address characteristics, traits, abilities, or attributes of the candidates.

Thus, these are the two broad topics on which candidates contend over their preferability (Functional Theory also subdivides policy and character utterances into finer categories, as discussed later). Rountree (1995), for example, distinguishes between *actus* (behavior, action) or what we do and *status* (nature) or who we are in political campaign discourse.

Although Functional Theory dichotomizes the two potential topics of political campaign discourse, it acknowledges that policy and character have a complex and dynamic relationship (Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998). First, it is possible that an utterance which focuses explicitly on policy could have some influence perceptions of the candidate's character. For example, this passage from Bill Clinton's 1996 Acceptance Address discusses his first term successes with the economy:

> Four point four million Americans now living in a home of their own for the first time; hundreds of thousands of women have started their own new businesses; more minorities own businesses than ever before; record numbers of new small businesses and exports. . . . We have the lowest combined rates of unemployment, inflation, and home mortgages in 28 years. . . . Ten million new jobs, over half of them high-wage jobs, ten million workers getting the raise they deserve with the minimum wage law.

Surely this is a policy utterance, for it discusses home ownership, business ownership, exports, unemployment, inflation, mortgages, jobs, and the minimum wage. Of

course, these successes all work to implicitly reinforce Clinton's apparent leadership ability, a character attribute, because they implicitly demonstrate that he possesses the skills necessary to enact legislation (leadership ability is one aspect of character). Similarly, a message that touted programs to help the poor or disadvantaged could serve to create or reinforce an impression of that candidate's compassion (another element of character).

On the other hand, this passage from one of Vice President George Bush's 1988 Republican primary television spots recounted his experience in the military, focusing on his experience and courage: "How does one man come so far? Maybe for George Bush, it began when he became the youngest pilot in the Navy. Or perhaps it began this day in 1944 when he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross for bravery under fire." This passage clearly concerns Bush's character, the personal quality of bravery, not what he will do if elected president. Nevertheless, voters might reasonably infer that this kind of person, a person with this character, is likely to support a strong military.

These two kinds of comments have distinctly different content. One passage (from Clinton) explicitly addresses policy and the other (from Bush) explicitly discusses character. These messages tell us more about Clinton's policies than Bush's policies; we can learn more from them about Bush's personal qualities than Clinton's. However, we should not be surprised if voters form impressions from these passages that are not explicitly addressed in the text (see Hacker, Zakahi, Giles, and McQuitty, 2000).

Furthermore, it appears that candidates sometimes attempt to shift the grounds of discussion from one topic to the other. For example, in the first Clinton/Dole debate of 1996, Jim Lehrer posed this question about Clinton's character: "Mr. President, what do you say to Senator Dole's point that this election is about keeping one's word?" Clinton's honesty (his character) was challenged, and he offered this answer:

> Let's look at that. When I ran for president, I said we'd cut the deficit in half in four years; we cut it by 60 percent. I said that our economic plan would produce eight million jobs, we have ten and a half million new jobs. We're number one in autos again, record numbers of new small businesses. I said we'd put, pass a crime bill that would put 100,000 police on the street, ban assault weapons, and deal with the problems that ought to be dealt with with capital punishment, including capital punishment for drug kingpins, and we did that.
>
> I said we would change the way welfare works, and even before the bill passed we'd moved nearly two million people from welfare to work, working with states and communities. I said we'd get tougher with child support and child support enforcement's up 50 percent. I said that I would work for tax relief for middle class Americans. The deficit was bigger than I thought it was going to be. I think they're better off, all of us are, that we got the interest rates down and the deficit down.

Clinton's response shifted the discussion away from the question of honesty or keeping one's word generally to keeping one's word on *campaign promises*, or policy

accomplishments: jobs, autos, crime, welfare, middle-class tax cuts, interest rates, the deficit. He responded to an attack on character by shifting grounds and acclaiming his past successes on policy.

This process can also work in the other direction, moving from policy to character. For instance in the second debate of 2000, Vice President Gore attacked Governor Bush's record in Texas on the issue of health care.

> Gore: I'm sorry to tell you that, you know, there is a record here, and Texas ranks 49th out of the 50 states in health care–in children with health care, 49th for women with health care, and 50th for families with health care.
>
> Lehrer: Governor, did Vice President–are the vice president's figures correct about Texas?
>
> Bush: *You can quote all the numbers you want, but I'm telling you, we care about our people in Texas*, we spend a lot of money to make sure people get health care in the state of Texas, and we're doing a better job than they are at the national level for reducing uninsured.
>
> Lehrer: Is he right? Are those numbers correct? Are his charges correct?
>
> Bush: *If he's trying to allege that I'm a hard-hearted person and I don't care about children, he's absolutely wrong*. We spend $4.7 billion a year in the state of Texas for uninsured people, and they get health care. (emphasis added)

Bush repeatedly tried to turn this policy question into an issue of character. Bush did talk some about spending in Texas on health care (policy), but there is a clear effort to shift this attack from policy to character: "we care about our people." Bush even responds to character attacks (that Bush is hard-hearted, that he doesn't care about children) that Gore never articulated: "If he's trying to allege that I'm a hard-hearted person and I don't care about children, he's absolutely wrong." Again, this is a clear effort to shift the topic from policy to character.

Functional Theory predicts that, particularly in presidential campaigns, policy will be a more frequent topic of campaign messages than character. We elect presidents to run our government, to implement policy. Although some voters believe that they elect positive role models–and surely we all hope our elected leaders are positive role models–the primary duty of our elected officials is to administer policy. Hofstetter (1976) explains that "issue preferences are key elements in the preferences of most, if not all, voters" (p. 77; see also McClure and Patterson, 1976). Furthermore, public opinion poll data from every campaign we have been able to locate (1976–2004) reveals that the majority of voters believe that policy is more important than character in their vote for president (Benoit, 2003). Also, presidential candidates who discuss policy more, and character less, than their opponents are more likely to win elections (Benoit, 2003). Character does matter, of course. We must trust candidates to work to achieve their campaign promises, and we must trust them to implement suitable policies in unexpected situations on which they did not take policy stands during the campaign. However, King (2002) summarized the results of several studies of the role of character in fifty-one elections held in six countries between 1960 and 2001:

> It is quite unusual for leaders' and candidates' personality and other personal traits to determine election outcomes. . . . [T]he almost universal belief that leaders' and candidates' personalities are almost invariably hugely important in determining the outcomes of elections is simply wrong. (p. 216)

Compare Hinck (1993), who conceptualizes presidential debates "as opportunities for candidates to present and defend desirable images of political character" (p. 213) with Dailey, Hinck, and Hinck (2008), who focus on candidate face and threats to face (attacks). Functional Theory considers policy to be more important, in general, than character. Specifically, Functional Theory holds that candidates are likely to respond to these preferences so that policy will be discussed more frequently in presidential campaign messages than character. Of course character is discussed in debates, and it does matter, but characterizing debates as being essentially about character misses the important element of policy. These considerations lead to a second prediction:

> H2. *Policy comments will be more frequent than character comments in presidential campaign discourse.*

Published research has investigated the topics of presidential campaign messages (Benoit, 2007a). In American presidential primary and general TV spots, policy was 58 percent of statements whereas character was 42 percent. In nominating convention Acceptances, policy was discussed more often than character (55 percent to 45 percent). In direct mail advertising, character (70 percent) was addressed more frequently than character (30 percent). As with the first hypothesis, subsequent chapters will provide evidence on this prediction in a variety of political campaign debates.

A6. *A candidate must win a majority (or a plurality) of the votes cast in an election.*

The last axiom might appear to be so trivial that it is not worth mentioning. However, this proposition implies several key tenets of campaigning. First, candidates do not need to try to win every vote. This is extremely important because some policy positions are inherently divisive and will simultaneously attract some voters and repel others. That is, many issues dichotomize the electorate. For instance, in 2012 Barack Obama and Mitt Romney are likely to disagree on such issues as how health care should be provided or federal tax policy. It is unrealistic to expect either candidate to win the votes of every citizen given the existence of divisive issues such as this one. Luckily, however, candidates need not receive all of the votes that are cast to win the election.

Second, it is important to realize that only those citizens who actually cast votes in the election matter to the outcome. This means that a candidate does not even have to win the votes of *most citizens*, but only of *most citizens who actually vote on election day*. Some candidates have explicitly attempted to encourage turn-out, which seems

to be consistent with the ideals of democracy. For example, in 1964 at least seventeen of Johnson's television spots included the statement "The stakes are too high for you to stay home." Thus, it should be possible to enhance a candidate's chances of winning by increasing the turnout of voters who favor that candidate (or, although this seems reprehensible, reducing the turn-out of voters who favor an opponent).

Third, American presidential elections are peculiar because of the Electoral College and its rules. In a presidential election, a candidate only needs to persuade enough of those who are voting in enough states to win 270 electoral votes. This encourages candidates to maximize their resources by campaigning more vigorously in some states than others. The 2000 presidential election underlined the importance of the electoral college vote. As voting returns came in on Tuesday night Florida was "given" to Gore, taken back, given to Bush, and then taken back again. Then the recounts in Florida made the nation wait for the winner to be determined as the outcome of the election hinged on whether Florida's twenty-five electoral votes belonged to Bush or Gore. The U.S. Supreme Court (in a five to four vote) decided to halt recounts in Florida, giving the Electoral College majority to Bush. Al Gore won the popular balloting by a margin of half a million votes, but because Bush won Florida by 537 votes, he won all of its Electoral College votes and the presidency (*New York Times*, 2001). Thus, a U.S. presidential candidate only needs to win a majority of votes in enough states to amass 270 electoral votes to win the presidency, and that influences the placement of campaign discourse.

These principles suggest six specific strategies candidates can use in an attempt to maximize the probability of winning the election. First, a candidate can attempt to *increase the election day turnout of voters who prefer that candidate*. If a citizen fails to vote, it does not matter which candidate that person prefers. This means that if the same number of people prefer the two leading candidates, but more of one candidate's supporters actually vote, that candidate will win the election (indeed, a candidate with *less* support than a rival could win if his or her supporters vote at a sufficiently higher rate than the other candidate's adherents).

Second, a candidate can *seek the support of undecided voters*. The number of independent voters has increased over time as the importance of parties has diminished. Although there are some vote defectors, most Republicans will vote for the Republican nominee and most Democrats will vote for the Democratic nominee (although there are some vote defectors). Thus, a wise candidate will focus much of the general election campaign on the undecided voters. In 1996, for example, we heard a great deal about the so-called "soccer moms," swing voters who allegedly held the keys to the White House. Independents are less likely to vote than partisans; still, the difference between the number of Republicans and Democrats is so small, and the number of Independents is so large, that Independents are important even if a smaller percentage of Independents vote than partisans.

Third, a candidate can attempt to attract *potential vote-defectors from the other political party*. Candidates are unlikely to attract votes from those partisans who are strongly committed to the other political party, but some party members are willing

to vote for the candidate of the other party (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1999)—*if* they are given an adequate reason to do so in the candidates' campaign messages. This is a surprisingly large group, ranging from 14–27 percent (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1999). Thus, political candidates can try to poach voters who have only soft support from their opponents.

Fourth, a candidate can attempt to *prevent members of his or her own party from defecting*. As just indicated, political candidates are not likely to lose the votes of strong partisans, but some party members may be open to persuasion from opponents. So, candidates can try to keep partisan supporters from defecting to the opposing party's candidate. We do not know how many partisans considered defecting but ultimately decided not to do so. It could be roughly the same as the number who do defect, 14–27 percent.

Fifth, candidates may attempt to *discourage voter turnout from those who support another candidate*. This strategy runs counter to the ideals of democracy and I consider it to be reprehensible, so I would never recommend it to a candidate. However, it is a possible option, and Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) have argued that some negative political advertisements are intended to do so.

So, candidates should adopt some issue positions in an attempt to build a winning coalition of voters. Adopting a desirable position on a particular issue (e.g., private school vouchers, tax cuts) could help the candidate achieve three goals: (1) attracting the votes of independent or third party voters, (2) discouraging one's own party members from defecting or voting for one's opponent, and (3) enticing some members of the opposing party to defect to you.

FORMS OF POLICY AND CHARACTER

Functional Theory offers more detail on the two topics of campaign messages, policy and character. Policy remarks can be divided into three subforms, past deeds, future plans, and general goals. *Past deeds* concern the record in office of an elected official (accomplishments or failures). The second form of policy utterance is *future plans*. Future plans are means to an end, specific proposals for policy action. The third form of policy utterance is *general goals*. Unlike future plans, goals refer to ends rather than means. Cutting taxes, without specifying which how much or which taxes to cut would illustrate a general goal. Both future plans and general goals concern the future, so they facilitate prospective voting (see chapter 8).

Character is divided into three subforms. *Personal qualities* are the personality traits of the candidate, such as honesty, compassion, strength, courage, friendliness. *Leadership ability* usually appears as experience in office, the ability to accomplish things as an elected official. Finally, *ideals* are similar to goals, but they are values or principles rather than policy outcomes (although they relate to the future, and prospective voting, as well). These three forms of character can be used

to acclaim and attack. Appendix II illustrates acclaims and attacks for each form of policy and character.

Functional Theory offers predictions about the forms of policy and character (see also chapter 6 on Incumbency). Broad goals (e.g., creating jobs, keeping America secure, reducing the federal deficit) are easier to acclaim than to attack. Ideals, such as justice or equality, are also easier to acclaim than to attack. For this reason, Functional Theory predicts:

H3. Candidates will use general goals more to acclaim than to attack.

H4. Candidates will use ideals more to acclaim than to attack.

Past research on other campaign message forms (see Benoit, 2007a) confirms these predictions. In primary and general television spots, general goals are more often the basis of acclaims than attacks (87 percent to 13 percent) and ideals are more often acclaims than attacks (85 percent, 15 percent). In Acceptances, general goals more frequently employed more for acclaims (89 percent) than attacks (11 percent); ideals are used more often for acclaims than attacks (85 percent to 15 percent). Finally, general goals in direct mail advertising reveal the same relationship (92 percent acclaims to 8 percent attacks) as do ideals in brochures (86 percent to 14 percent).

Future plans are more specific than goals; they are means to an end (the end being a goal). It is more difficult to attack a goal, such as reducing the deficit, than means to achieve that end, such as raising taxes or reducing Social Security benefits. Accordingly, Functional Theory anticipates that

H5. Candidates will attack more and acclaim less on future plans than general goals.

Research on the functions of these two message forms confirms this prediction. In TV spots, attacks comprise 43 percent of future plans and 13 percent of general goals. Acceptance Addresses experience attacks in 9 percent of future plans and 11 percent of general goals. Finally, direct mail advertising sees attacks in 16 percent of the themes on future plans but only 8 percent of general goals.

Thus, Functional Theory views political campaign discourse as the means to an end—convincing voters to cast votes for a candidate—which is achieved through three functions: acclaiming, attacking, and defending to create the impression that you are the preferable candidate in the race. Functional Theory predicts that these functions are not equally likely to be used in campaign messages: Acclaims should be more common, defenses least common. These functions can address two topics, policy and character. Given the fact that more American voters consider policy more important than character, Functional Theory predicts that American presidential campaign discourse will address policy more often than character. Note that if more voters considered character more important than policy, Functional Theory would then predict that character utterances would outnumber policy comments. Functional Theory divides policy and character comments into more specific topics and

predicts that acclaims will be more common than attacks when both general goals and ideals are discussed and attacks will be more common on future plans than general goals. These predictions are consistently confirmed through content analysis of presidential campaign discourse.

ADVANTAGES OF THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

Functional Theory enjoys several clear advantages over other approaches to studying political campaign discourse. This approach is consistent with other approaches to analyzing televised political advertisements, categorizing statements in spots as negative (attacking) or positive (acclaiming). However, it adds a third function, defense, which is overlooked in most approaches to understanding the nature of televised political spots. For example, a 1960 Nixon commercial started by acknowledging attacks on Nixon, who was running on the record of the Eisenhower/Nixon administration. The announcer then told viewers that "President Eisenhower answers the Kennedy-Johnson charges that America has accomplished nothing in the last eight years." Then viewers saw Eisenhower, who declared that "My friends, never have Americans achieved so much in so short a time," clearly denying the attack. Campaign discourse of this nature cannot be fully understood as negative—even though it rejects the opposition—or as positive—even though it refers to accomplishments. It begins by identifying an attack from an opponent ("the Kennedy-Johnson charges that America has accomplished nothing in the last eight years") and then explicitly rejects that attack: "never have Americans achieved so much in so short a time." Thus, one advantage of the Functional approach is that it extends analysis of campaign messages to include a third function, defenses. Defenses may not be as common as acclaims or attacks, but they are distinctive utterances and they are capable of reducing perceived drawbacks (costs). As subsequent chapters establish, defenses are more common and arguably more important in debates.

A second advantage of the Functional approach stems from its use of the *theme* (idea unit, argument, claim, assertion) as the coding unit instead of the entire spot. Most previous research on political spots classifies entire spots as positive or negative (a few studies add a third category, "comparative ad") or issue versus image. However, many television spots contain multiple utterances which may perform different functions, so each theme in an ad is categorized separately. Many political advertisements are mixed, containing both attacks and acclaims and/or policy and character, and that mix is not always 50/50. More importantly for the current project, it is important to unitize the candidates' statements in debates into themes (one could hardly code the "entire debate" as scholars code the "entire spot").

Using the theme as the coding unit also facilitates comparisons of different campaign messages. For example, if those who content analyze television commercials using the entire spot as the coding unit were to analyze other messages, what would

they use as the coding unit? The entire speech? The entire debate? The entire webpage? Using the theme as the coding unit facilitates comparison of different kinds of campaign messages by content analyzing all messages with the same coding unit.

This book relies heavily on data produced by content analysis of political campaign messages. This method produces nominal or frequency data, which count the number of times certain kinds of content (e.g., acclaims, attacks, or defenses; policy or character), so many predictions will be tested with *chi-square*. This is a non-parametric statistic appropriate for investigating differences using frequency data. As the chapters will make clear, a large amount of data has been generated using Functional Theory. That is obviously desirable because it means that the conclusions drawn here are supported from many campaigns, multiple message forms, multiple elective offices, multiple countries, and many candidates. It also permits comparisons of the nature of various message forms. However, the *chi-square* statistic is sensitive to sample size (*N*); that is, this statistic is more likely to find significance with larger *N*s. It is important to understand the difference between significance and effect size. The *significance test* tells us how likely a given result *would occur by chance*. The statement "$p < .05$" means that these results would occur just by chance fewer than 5 times out of 100. Similarly, "$p < .0001$" means that these results should occur by chance only once out of ten-thousand times. The *effect size*, in contrast, indicates the *magnitude of the relationship* between the independent and dependent variable. For example, these are two different questions:

> Do challengers attack more than incumbents than would be expected by chance?
> H*ow much more* do challengers attack than incumbents?

The possibility that concerns us here is that with a large *N* a result could be statistically significant (say, "significant" even at $p < .0001$) and yet not make much of a difference. Research using parametric statistics increasingly reports both the significance level and the effect size, such as *r*, R^2, or eta^2. I will report comparable statistics for non-parametric data: Cramer's *V* and φ. This statistic, like Pearson's *r*, can vary from 0 (no relationship whatsoever) to 1 (a perfect relationship between two variables). Unlike *r*, however, *V* does not indicate direction of relationship and is always positive (a positive *r* indicates a positive or direct relationship between variables; a negative *r* indicates an inverse or indirect relationship). This approach—reporting significance tests, consistency of effect, and effect size whenever possible—will provide the best insight into the relationships investigated here. φ is comparable to *V* but it is used for 2×2 analyses (e.g., incumbents versus challengers on policy versus character). A *chi-square goodness of fit test* is also used for some predictions, such as "policy is more common than character." Because there is only one variable, topic, no effect size can be calculated for this test (only when two variables are tested, such as policy versus character for incumbents versus challengers, can one estimate the size of the effect of one variable on another variable).

CONTENT ANALYTIC METHOD

There are four basic steps in the coding method used to generate the data discussed in this book. First, the messages must be unitized into themes, the coding unit in this method. A theme is the smallest unit of discourse capable of expressing a coherent idea (in this case, not just any idea, but acclaims, attacks, and defenses). Because discourse is enthymematic (an enthymeme is an argument which is incomplete; the assumption is that the audience will supply the missing parts)—and because several sentences can work together to develop a single idea—themes can vary in length from a phrase to a paragraph (several sentences). Second, themes are classified into function (acclaim, attack, defend). Third, themes are classified by topic (policy, character). Next, the proper sub-form of policy (past deeds, future plans, general goal) or character (personal quality, leadership ability, ideal) is identified.

First, the candidates' utterances must be unitized into themes. For example, a statement which said "I will reduce taxes, create new jobs, and keep our country safe from terrorism" would be unitized into three themes, one for each topic (taxes, jobs, terrorism), even though these are all contained in a single sentence. On the other hand, a statement which said "Jobs are the backbone of a strong economy. We cannot have economic recovery without jobs. That's why I will increase jobs" would be coded as one theme, jobs (the first two sentences explain why jobs are important, but do not comment on a problem or a solution for jobs). Finally, a message which said "The present administration has lost over a million jobs. If elected, I will create new jobs" would be coded as two themes: the problem of lost jobs under the current administration; my solution to create more jobs if elected.

The *context unit*, used to interpret the theme, consists of the rest of the message; the part of the message that preceded and/or followed the theme. In a debate, the context unit could be other statements from the candidate on the same topic as the theme being coded; the context unit in a debate could also include a question prompting a candidate's statement or the statement of an opposing candidate which prompted the theme.

Second, each theme's function is classified as an acclaim, an attack, or a defense. A few themes do not function as acclaims, attacks, or defenses (themes which do not enact these functions are not coded). Coders must decide whether a theme performs one of these functions, and, if so, identify which one.

> *Acclaims* are themes that portray the candidate (or the candidate's political party) in a favorable light.

In the first 1960 Nixon-Kennedy debate, Nixon acclaimed the past deeds of the Eisenhower administration, when he was Vice President:

> We have built more schools in these last seven and a half years than we built in the previous seven and a half.

It is obvious that Nixon believes building more schools is a desirable accomplishment, one that "we" accomplished.

> *Attacks* are themes that portray the opposing candidate (or that candidate's political party) in an unfavorable light.

In the third 1960 debate, Kennedy attacked his opponent by declaring that

> I don't think it's possible for Mr. Nixon to state the record in distortion of the facts with more precision than he just did.

Distorting the record is clearly considered to be an undesirable act. Kennedy adds a touch of humor, saying that Nixon distorts the record with great precision.

> *Defenses* are themes that explicitly respond to a prior attack on the candidate (or the candidate's political party).

Later in the third debate, Nixon responded to Kennedy's accusation, denying that he had distorted the record:

> Senator Kennedy has indicated on several occasions in this program tonight that I have been misstating his record and his figures. I will issue a white paper after this broadcast, quoting exactly what he said. . . and the record will show that I have been correct.

Nixon explicitly denies that he misstated the record, promising to prove this claim later.

Acclaims can be identified in two ways: First, acclaims are positive: Virtually all statements made by a candidate about himself or herself are positive; almost all statements about an opponent are negative. Occasionally, a candidate will say something like, "My honorable opponent," but those statements are throw-away lines designed to show the speaker is a reasonable person. Second, acclaims are about the candidate speaking, whereas attacks are about the opponent. These two statements jointly differentiate acclaims from attacks. To count as a defense, a statement must acknowledge or allude to a criticism and then attempt to refute it.

Third, themes which were classified as acclaims or attacks are then coded by topic (because this theory was developed for campaign discourse generally, rather than just for debates, topic for defenses was not classified because defenses are rare in most message forms).

> *Policy*: Utterances that concern governmental action (past, current, or future) and problems amenable to governmental action.

George Bush touted his past deeds in a TV spot:

> Over the past six years, eighteen million jobs were created, interest rates were cut in half. Today, inflation is down, taxes are down, and the economy is strong ("Bush Positive Economy").

Jobs, interest rates, inflation, taxes, and the economy all concern policy.

> *Character*: Utterances that address characteristics, traits, abilities, or attributes of the candidates (or their parties).

In 1988 George Bush lauded his preparation for office in another ad:

> "Perhaps no one in this century is better prepared to be President of the United States" than Bush (Bush, 1988, "Oath of Office").

This does not tell what he will do (policy) but his (personal) preparation for office.

The next step in the content analytic method is to classify each policy or character utterance according to the forms of policy and character. Policy utterances can address past deeds, future plans, or general goals. Past deeds are, of course, actions taken in the past (a candidate's record in office), whereas future plans are proposed actions (means) and general goals are ends. Character utterances can address personal qualities (e.g., courage, compassion, honesty), leadership ability (e.g., experience, vision), or ideals (i.e., values, principles). As noted earlier, appendix II provides examples of acclaims and attacks on each form of policy and character. As campaign messages are coded, other relevant information is also recorded, such as the candidates' political party, incumbency status, campaign phase (primary or general), office sought, and country.

3

American Presidential Campaign Debates

POLITICAL ELECTION DEBATES IN AMERICA

The earliest presidential debate occurred in a Republican primary campaign in Oregon in 1948 (Kane, 1987). This confrontation was broadcast on radio and featured Thomas Dewey and Harold Stassen. It may be the only debate to feature a proposition ("Should the Communist Party in the United States Be Outlawed?"). An estimated 40 million people listened to the debate, which was broadcast on the ABC, MBS, and NBC networks (but not CBS; Our Campaign, 2012). Each candidate gave a twenty minute speech and then an eight-and-a-half minute rebuttal (no questions were asked of the candidates). Dewey won the Republican nomination and ran against Harry S Truman in the general election. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* published a premature and inaccurate headline: "Dewey defeats Truman" (Dewey Defeats Truman, 2012). President-elect Truman delightedly posed for an iconic photograph holding the erroneous headline.

In Florida in 1956 Adlai Stevenson and Estes Kefauver, who were contesting the Democratic nomination for president, faced off in a primary debate. It was broadcast on May 21 by ABC (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2012); unfortunately, no video or transcript of this debate has survived today. In 1960, two Democratic primary debates were held. On May 3 Hubert Humphrey and John Kennedy debated in West Virginia; Lyndon Johnson and John Kennedy had an encounter on July 12 in California (Benoit et al., 2002). Records indicate that about seven primary debates were held between 1968 and 1976. Starting in 1980, primary debates became more common; sometimes over twenty debates were held. In 2008, a year in which both the Democratic and Republican nominations were contested, thirty-six presidential primary debates were held. In 2012, twenty-six Republican primary debates were

held as Governor Romney successfully pursued the Republican nomination for president. See appendix I for a list of primary debates.

In 1960, Richard Nixon and John Kennedy contended for the oval office (as noted earlier, months earlier, during the 1960 primary campaign, Kennedy engaged in a debate with fellow Democrat Hubert Humphrey in West Virginia; see Berquist, 1960; Stelzner, 1971). Nixon and Kennedy debated four times during the general election campaign and Kennedy won a very close election. In order for this debate to happen, Congress had to suspend the Federal Communications Act of 1934, which guaranteed equal broadcasting time for candidates (otherwise many other candidates would have had to be included). Some scholars believe that those who heard Nixon on the radio thought he did better than those who saw him on television, but this claim has been discredited (Kraus, 1996; Vancil and Pendell, 1987). Lyndon Johnson (who became president after John F. Kennedy was assassinated) did not want to debate in 1964 and the Republican nominee in 1968 and 1973, Richard Nixon, having lost after debating in 1960, did not want to debate again. Congress did not suspend the equal time act so debates could not be held in 1964 or 1968. Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned in 1973 and Gerald Ford was appointed Vice President. Then President Nixon resigned in 1974, making Ford President (one who had never been elected president or vice president). In 1975 the Federal Communications Commission ruled that debates were a news event which meant that the equal time provision did not apply to debates, permitting debates to occur in 1976 between Ford and Carter. The League of Women Voters sponsored debates from 1976 to 1984. In 1980, Governor Ronald Reagan had one debate with President Jimmy Carter and another one with Congressman John Anderson (who had lost the Republican nomination to Reagan during the primary and was running as an Independent at the time of their debate). The bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates has sponsored the debates from 1988 until the present. Apart from 1960 (with four one hour debates) and 1980 (with one ninety-minute debate), two or three debates of ninety minutes have been held since 1976. Primary debates frequently feature multiple candidates, but the only general election debate with more than two contenders occurred in 1992 when H. Ross Perot joined President George Bush and Governor Bill Clinton. Even though Perot ran again in 1996 he was not allowed to participate in those debates. Vice Presidential debates were also held in 1976 and from 1984 to the present (one vice presidential debate per campaign). A list of general election presidential and vice-presidential debates through 2008 and presidential primary debates through 2012 can be found in appendix I.

AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL AND VICE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

The first book on televised debates, about the 1960 Nixon-Kennedy debates, was edited by Sidney Kraus (1962). Chapters in this book discuss the context of the

1960 debates and effects of the debates, and reprints texts of the four debates. Krause edited another volume on the 1976 Carter-Ford debates (1979). Bitzer and Rueter (1980) also wrote about the 1976 debates. This book started by discussing the context of the 1976 debates and the questions posed to the candidates. Then the chapters examined the issues addressed, the strategies employed, and argumentation used by Carter and Ford. Hellweg, Pfau, and Bryden's book (1992) discussed the history of televised political debates, the format of these debates, the verbal and visual dimensions of the debates, and the effects of debates. Jamieson and Birdsell (1988) examined political debate before the advent of televised election debates, the importance of broadcasting to political debates, the power of debates, the problems with debates, and the potential of debates. McKinney and Carlin (2004) reviewed the literature on debate effects and on debate content, address the format of debates, and identify several areas for further inquiry: vice presidential debates, primary debates, non-presidential debates, and debates in other countries. The Commission on Presidential Debates initiated the DebateWatch program to help understand the audience for televised debates. Carlin, McDonald, Vigil, and Buehler (2008; see also Carlin and McKinney, 1994) integrate the findings of three years of this activity, reporting data from focus groups, surveys, and other sources on debate viewers. Friedenberg (1994, 1997, 2005, 2009) presented a critical narrative on presidential debates. McKinney (2005) discussed the importance of format in presidential debates. Minow and LeMay (2008) provide an insider's view of American presidential debates. Newton Minow—former Chair of the FCC—worked with both the League of Women Voters (who sponsored presidential debates 1976–1984) and the Commission on Presidential Debates (who sponsored subsequent presidential debates) provides an insider's view on presidential debates. Schroeder (2000) explored presidential debates from the standpoint of television production. These, and other works, provide a helpful introduction to this area of inquiry. The Commission on Presidential Debates, the bipartisan organization which sponsors American general election debates, has a useful webpage.

This book focuses on content analysis of political election debates. For other kinds of research on this message form, see Berquist (1960), Best and Hubbard (2000), Blankenship, Fine, and Davis (1983), Hellweg and Phillips (1981), Kane (1987), Ray (1961), or Stelzner (1971). Subsequent chapters will extend the literature review to the topics covered in those chapters (e.g., chapter 4 discusses non-presidential debates and reviews that literature; chapter 5 investigates research on debates around the world; chapter 8 investigates news coverage of political campaign debates and reviews literature pertinent to that subject).

FORMAT OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

Political campaign debates are a unique message form, unlike other debates. After the Dewey-Stassen primary debate of 1948 (which featured a resolution about com-

munism), candidates in political campaign debates answered questions instead of giving opposing speeches. Some election debates feature opening statements and/or closing statements but the bulk of the time is devoted to answering questions posed by journalists. Usually questions are asked by a moderator and/or a panel of reporters, occasionally questions are solicited from voters, and in a few instances primary debates allow candidates to question each other. Thus, a more apt description than "debate" might be "joint press conferences" (Auer, 1962; Jamieson and Birdsell, 1988). Debates typically range from one to two hours in length; after 1960 with four one-hour debates, all American presidential debates in the general election campaign have been ninety minutes long. American presidential primary debates at times experiment with format. For example, some debates showed video of TV spots from the candidates in the debates and asked questions about the ads of the sponsor and the other candidates. Some debates are limited to a general topic, such as domestic or foreign policy.

The fact that political debates are built around questions matters because those questions constrain the topics candidates can talk about. Candidates do have some freedom to discuss what they wish. As mentioned earlier, some debates include brief opening statements or closing remarks from each candidate. Furthermore, candidates at times will use part of their time to discuss a topic different form what was asked by a question. President Bill Clinton in 1996 even suggested a topic to the moderator in the first debate of 1996: "Mr. Lehrer, I hope we'll have a chance to discuss drugs later in the program." This suggestion seemed to work because Lehrer's next question was about drugs. Debates sometimes appear to be a struggle between the questioner(s) and the candidates for control over the topic of debates. At times a candidate will ignore the current question and in order to discuss a prior topic. In the November 24, 2003 Iowa Democratic primary debate, Tom Brokaw asked Governor Howard Dean whether he thought "Saudi Arabia is our friend." Dean replied, "Let me first . . . correct an important thing that Dick Gephardt just misinformed us about," concerning legislation authorizing Operation Iraqi Freedom. He ended his interjection by asking, "Now what was the question?" Dean proceeded to address Brokaw's question after it was repeated, but he was determined to refute Gephardt's earlier statement on a different topic.

Sometimes candidates will start with the topic of a question and shift to the message they want to give voters. In that same debate, Tom Brokaw asked Representative Dick Gephardt whether he considered Ariel Sharon, prime minister of Israel, to be "a man of peace." Gephardt began by saying that "we can lead to peace in the Middle East." However, he immediately shifted from Sharon, or the Middle East, to a wide-ranging attack on President Bush: "The president's foreign policy is a horrible failure, discussing Bush's policies in the Middle East, on global warning, with the International Criminal Court, and in North Korea. At this point Brokaw reiterated his question, "My question was do you think that Ariel Sharon is a man of peace?" Gephardt said that "the people in Israel, the great majority, want peace," still refusing to answer Brokaw's question. My point is not to judge which was more useful

to voters, Brokaw's question about Sharon or Gephardt's discussion of Bush's foreign policy, but this exchange illustrates the a struggle that can occur about the topic a candidate should discuss in a debate. In this case, the candidate said what he wanted and the journalist's question went unanswered.

However, criticism has been leveled at questions asked in campaign debates. For example, it is not clear that the information which would best help Democrats choose between the Democratic contenders is whether one of them thinks Ariel Sharon is a man of peace (and Brokaw made no attempt to ask other candidates, so voters could not have compared the candidates on this question even if Gephardt had answered it). Arguably a worse question was asked by Robert Maynard of Jimmy Carter in the third 1976 debate: "Can you tell us what caused the evaporation of [your] lead" in public opinion polls (Benoit and Hansen, 2001)? This question treats Carter as a political pundit, asking him to analyze the horse race, explaining why Carter's lead had decreased. This question has nothing to do with Carter's qualifications for president or his policy proposals. Similarly, in the September 9, 2003 Democratic primary debate, Farai Chideya asked the candidates "What's your favorite song?" Is this really the most useful question that could have been asked of these candidates? Perhaps even more sadly, the candidates appeared to have anticipated this question and prepared answers to it.

A second criticism is that it appears that some journalists, rather than seeking to enlighten voters with their questions, are attempting to embarrass or show up the candidates. Benoit and Hansen (2001) discuss a question Marvin Kalb asked of President Reagan in the second debate of 1984:

> Mr. President, you have often described the Soviet Union as a powerful evil empire intent on world domination. But this year, you have said, and I quote: "If they want to keep their Mickey Mouse system, that's O.K. with me." Which is it, Mr. President—Do you want to contain them within their present borders and perhaps try to reestablish detente or what goes for detente or do you really want to roll back their empire?

Benoit and Hansen (2001) observe that "Kalb is intent on catching Reagan in a contradiction—forcing him to focus on justifying his statements on policy rather than on explaining his policy or on contrasting his policy with Mondale's alternative. . . . The voters' interests can be ignored as journalists pursue personal aggrandizement" (p. 138). Matera and Salwen (1996) suggest a motive for journalists other than helping voters make a decision about who should be president: "Journalists whose questions elicit candidates' gaffes are praised by fellow journalists for their tough, penetrating questions" (p. 309). This self-aggrandizement by journalists is surely not in voters' best interests.

Another criticism of the questions asked in presidential debates is that they ignore the concerns of voters. Benoit and Hansen (2001) content analyzed the topic of questions by issue (e.g., taxes, jobs, defense) and correlated this with the public opinion poll data about which issues were most important to voters at the time of the debates. There was no relationship between which issues were most important

to voters and which issues were addressed most frequently in questions. The results indicate that journalists were not using their questions to enlighten voters on the topics that matter most to voters. McKinney (2005) contrasted the town hall debates in 1992 and 2004: Although both debates featured questions written by voters, in the later debate the moderator selected which questions would be asked before the debate. In 1992, there was a significant relationship between the importance of a topic to voters and the number of questions asked about that topic. However, in 2004, when the moderator decided which citizen question would be asked, there was no relationship between a topic's importance to voters and the number of questions asked on that topic. So, modern election debates rely on a question and answer format but the questions asked are subject to criticism.

VIEWERS OF AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL AND VICE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

Millions of voters watch political campaign debates. Appendix 2 reports information on the number of American general election debates and viewers per year. Three years (1984, 1988, 1996) featured two debates; four campaigns (1976, 1992, 2000, 2004) had three debates, 1960 had four and 1980 saw one debate (between the Republican and Democratic nominees; Ronald Reagan and John Anderson also debated in 1980 when Anderson was running as a third party candidate). Although tens of millions continue to tune in to debates, the number of viewers (and the percentage of voters) who watch them tended to decrease over time. Millions of citizens watch American vice-presidential debates as well. The total of people who watched the American presidential and vice presidential debates is well over 2 billion. Chapter 1 presents evidence that millions of people watch presidential primary debates as well.

SAMPLE OF PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY, GENERAL, AND VICE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

The sample for these analyses include three types of American presidential debates. American presidential primary debates from 1948, 1960, 1968, 1972, and 1980–2012 are represented here (Benoit et al., 2002, 2007; Benoit, Henson, and Sudbrock, 2011; Benoit, Glantz, and Airne, 2013). American general election debates from 1960 and 1976–2012 are part of the data examined here (Benoit et al., 2003, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996; Rill and Benoit, 2009; Benoit and Glantz, in press). Third, American vice presidential debates from 1976 and 1984–2012 comprise part of the sample analyzed here (Benoit and Airne, 2005; Benoit and Henson, 2009; Benoit and Glantz, in press).

FUNCTIONS OF PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

Based on the theory explicated in chapter 2, acclaims should be the most common function in American presidential election debates, followed by attacks, and then defenses. Acclaims have no inherent drawbacks. Attacks could alienate some voters who profess to dislike mudslinging. Defenses have three potential drawbacks (the first two of which operate in debates): responding to an attack often takes a candidate off-message, refuting an attack could make a candidate appear to be reactive rather than proactive, and identifying an attack to refute it could inform or remind some viewers of a possible weakness.

Examples of these three functions can be found in the first 2012 general election debate. For example, Romney promised that "I'll double [oil permits and licenses], and also get the—the oil from offshore and Alaska. And I'll bring that pipeline in from Canada." Promising to increase oil production would be viewed as desirable by many voters, illustrating an acclaim. Obama attacked Romney's economic proposals, declaring that "Governor Romney's central economic plan calls for a $5 trillion tax cut—on top of the extension of the Bush tax cuts—that's another trillion dollars—and $2 trillion in additional military spending that the military hasn't asked for. That's $8 trillion." Many voters, if they accept this characterization of Governor Romney's economic plans, would see this as undesirable. Romney responded by denying this accusation: "I don't have a $5 trillion tax cut. I don't have a tax cut of a scale that you're talking about." This is a clear example of a defense.

Table 3.1[1] displays the results of functional analyses of the American presidential (and vice presidential) debates through 2012. Overall, about two thirds (66 percent) of the themes in primary debates were acclaims, 29 percent were attacks, and 5 percent were defenses. Statistical analysis (a *chi-square goodness-of-fit test*) confirms that these differences were significant (χ^2 [df = 2] = 22051.42, $p < .0001$). In only one year (1972) did attacks occur with the same frequency as acclaims; in no campaign did attacks outnumber acclaims. In every year defenses were the least common function of American primary debates. In general election debates, acclaims overall were the most common function (57 percent of themes), followed by attacks (34 percent) and then defenses (9 percent; Table 3.4). This relationship occurred in each campaign in the sample. A *chi-square goodness of fit* test confirms that these differences were significant (χ^2 [df = 2] = 3387.98, $p < .0001$). Vice presidential debates (Table 3.1) overall conform to this prediction of Functional Theory: 55 percent acclaims, 41 percent attacks, and 4 percent defenses. Once again statistical analysis confirms that these differences were significant (χ^2 *goodness-of-fit* test [df = 2] = 2217.81, $p < .0001$). Inspection of the data in Table 3.1 shows that attacks were more common than acclaims in four of the eight campaigns. This is probably because vice presidential candidates in some ways are similar to surrogate speakers; candidates presumably would rather see their running mates make more attacks than the candidates do (see Carlin and Bicak, 1993, who identify attacking

Table 3.1. Functions of American Presidential Debates

	Acclaims	*Attacks*	*Defenses*
Primary			
1948	**68 (51%)**	58 (44%)	7 (5%)
1960	**125 (71%)**	46 (26%)	6 (3%)
1968	**127 (61%)**	60 (29%)	22 (11%)
1972	79 (44%)	79 (44%)	22 (12%)
1980	**887 (75%)**	259 (22%)	44(3%)
1984	**349 (51%)**	299 (43%)	41 (6%)
1988	**959 (69%)**	412 (29%)	28 (2%)
1992	**814 (65%)**	402 (32%)	38 (3%)
1996	**584 (54%)**	389 (38%)	76 (9%)
2000	**4021 (73%)**	1318 (24%)	159 (3%)
2004	**4931 (60%)**	2911 (35%)	392 (5%)
2008	**8957 (68%)**	3433 (26%)	832 (6%)
2012	**3527 (67%)**	1565 (30%)	141 (3%)
Total	**25428 (66%)**	11231 (29%)	1667 (5%)
General			
1960	**329 (53%)**	258 (41%)	37 (6%)
1976	**363 (52%)**	294 (42%)	47 (7%)
1980	**114 (51%)**	88 (39%)	23 (10%)
1984	**239 (53%)**	164 (36%)	51 (11%)
1988	**550 (59%)**	301 (33%)	75 (8%)
1992	**309 (52%)**	203 (34%)	85 (14%)
1996	**548 (56%)**	346 (36%)	78 (8%)
2000	**860 (74%)**	281 (24%)	24 (2%)
2004	**738 (51%)**	566 (39%)	138 (10%)
2008	**750 (58%)**	457 (35%)	97 (7%)
2012	**719 (63%)**	374 (33%)	52 (5%)
Total	**5519 (57%)**	3332 (34%)	843 (9%)
Vice Presidential			
1976	134 (40%)	**173 (52%)**	25 (8%)
1984	**458 (61%)**	288 (38%)	3 (0.4%)
1988	**438 (70%)**	187 (30%)	4 (0.6%)
1992	217 (39%)	**327 (58%)**	18 (3%)
1996	**534 (60%)**	347 (39%)	4 (0.5%)
2000	**503 (72%)**	192 (27%)	6 (1%)
2004	201 (43%)	**218 (47%)**	48 (10%)
2008	**225 (56%)**	150 (37%)	27 (7%)
2012	205 (39%)	**255 (48%)**	72 (14%)
Total	**2912 (55%)**	2137 (41%)	297 (4%)
Grand Total	**33859 (63%)**	16700 (31%)	2807 (5%)

Primary: χ^2 (df = 2) = 22051.42, $p < .0001$; general: χ^2 (df = 2) = 3387.98, $p < .0001$; vice presidential: χ^2 (df = 2) = 2217.81, $p < .0001$; grand total: χ^2 (df = 2) = 27202.22, $p < .0001$.

as one of the functions of vice presidential candidates). So, American presidential debates (primary and general) and American vice presidential debates tend to support Functional Theory's prediction concerning the relative frequency of the three functions. It is not surprising that a few candidates attacked more than they acclaimed: Functional Theory does not argue that political candidates *must* acclaim more than they attack, only that there are *reasons* for candidates, in general, to acclaim more than they attack. Most candidates follow this prediction.

TOPICS OF PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

Functional theory predicts that policy will be discussed more often by candidates in debates than character. In the first general debate of 2012, Romney discussed policy: "we ought to bring the tax rates down." Taxation is a clear example of a policy topic. Romney offered an example of a character utterance when he declared that "We need to have leadership—leadership in Washington." See Table 3.2 for these data.

In presidential primary debates 69 percent of themes addressed policy and 31 percent character (χ^2 [df = 1] = 5431.28, $p < .0001$). Only in the 1948 debate was character discussed more often than policy. American general election debates also stressed policy (74 percent) more than character (26 percent). Table 3.2 reports these data. Statistical analysis shows that these differences are significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 2071.58, $p < .0001$). The same pattern can be found in vice presidential debates (Table 3.2), with 68 percent of statements on policy and 32 percent on character. No presidential or vice presidential debate in this sample had more character than policy utterances. These differences are statistically significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 682.6, $p < .0001$). So, American presidential (primary and general) and vice presidential debates conform to the prediction from Functional Theory that policy will be more common than character.

FORMS OF POLICY AND CHARACTER

Research has delved more deeply into the topics of election debates to try to flesh out our understanding of policy and character. This section will take up four topics: functions of general goals, functions of ideals, attacks on future plans and general goals, and personal qualities. Past deeds are discussed in chapter 5 on incumbency and presidential debates.

Functions of General Goals

Functional Theory predicts that general goals will more often be used as the basis of acclaims rather than attacks. In all three samples this prediction was upheld: 89

Table 3.2. Topics of American Presidential Debates

	Policy	*Character*
Primary		
1948	61 (48%)	**65 (52%)**
1960	**102 (60%)**	69 (40%)
1968	**126 (64%)**	71 (36%)
1972	**124 (78%)**	34 (22%)
1980	**744 (65%)**	402 (35%)
1984	**455 (70%)**	193 (30%)
1988	**808 (59%)**	563 (41%)
1992	**842 (68%)**	401 (32%)
1996	**578 (58%)**	176 (42%)
2000	**3628 (68%)**	1711 (32%)
2004	**5783 (74%)**	2053 (26%)
2008	**8581 (70%)**	3730 (30%)
2012	**3394 (67%)**	1698 (33%)
Total	**25226 (69%)**	11166 (31%)
Presidential		
1960	**458 (78%)**	129 (22%)
1976	**565 (86%)**	92 (14%)
1980	**188 (93%)**	14 (7%)
1984	**321 (80%)**	82 (20%)
1988	**561 (66%)**	290 (34%)
1992	**374 (73%)**	138 (27%)
1996	**620 (69%)**	274 (31%)
2000	**865 (76%)**	276 (24%)
2004	**933 (72%)**	371 (28%)
2008	**295 (65%)**	162 (35%)
2012	**832 (76%)**	261 (24%)
Total	**6567 (74%)**	2284 (26%)
Vice Presidential		
1976	**193 (63%)**	114 (37%)
1984	**464 (62%)**	282 (38%)
1988	**371 (59%)**	254 (41%)
1992	**358 (66%)**	186 (34%)
1996	**744 (84%)**	137 (16%)
2000	**487 (70%)**	208 (30%)
2004	**286 (68%)**	133 (32%)
2008	**253 (67%)**	122 (33%)
2012	**299 (65%)**	161 (35%)
Total	**3455 (68%)**	1597 (32%)
Grand Total	**35248 (70%)**	15047 (30%)

Primary: χ^2 (df = 1) = 5431.28, $p < .0001$, general: χ^2 (df = 1) = 2071.58, $p < .0001$; vice presidential: χ^2 (df = 1) = 682.6, $p < .0001$; grand total: χ^2 (df = 1) = 8113.74, $p < .0001$.

Table 3.3. Functions of Themes Using General Goals

	Acclaims	*Attacks*
U.S. Presidential	**2041 (85%)**	230 (15%)
U.S. Presidential Primary	**12096 (90%)**	1309 (10%)
Vice Presidential	**1042 (81%)**	247 (19%)
Total	**15179 (89%)**	1786 (11%)

χ^2 (*df* = 1) = 10573.09, $p < .0001$

percent of general goals were used to acclaim and 11 percent were used to attack (see Table 3.3). The first 2012 general election debate provides examples of utterances on general goals. Romney acclaimed a general goal when he stated that "we ought to bring the tax rates down." Obama criticized his opponent's policy goals by saying

> The approach that Governor Romney's talking about is the same sales pitch that was made in 2001 and 2003, and we ended up with the slowest job growth in 50 years, we ended up moving from surplus to deficits, and it all culminated in the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

A *chi-square goodness-of-fit* test confirms that these differences are significant (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 10573.09, $p < .0001$). Candidates are far more likely to use general goals as the basis for acclaims than attacks.

Analysis of these debates provides data which confirm a similar prediction that ideals would be used more often for acclaims than attacks. This prediction was also confirmed in each of the three samples (77 percent acclaim and 23 percent attacks were based on ideals). Obama said in debate one of 2012 said that I believe we should "make sure that the American people . . . have an opportunity to succeed. And everybody's getting a fair shot. And everybody's getting a fair share—everybody's doing a fair share, and everybody's playing by the same rules." Opportunity and fairness are examples of ideals. An attack on ideals came from Romney, who said that "The federal government taking over health care for the entire nation and whisking aside the Tenth Amendment, which gives states the rights for these kinds of things, is not the course for America." Criticizing the president for violating states' rights is an example of an attack on ideals. Statistical analysis reveals that these differences are significant (χ^2 *goodness-of-fit* test [*df* = 1] = 784.98, $p < .0001$). These data are displayed in Table 3.4. As with general goals, candidates use ideals more for acclaims than attacks.

Table 3.4. Functions of Themes Using Ideals

	Acclaims	*Attacks*
U.S. Presidential	**534 (82%)**	120 (18%)
U.S. Presidential Primary	**1370 (76%)**	443 (24%)
Vice Presidential	**169 (78%)**	49 (22%)
Total	**2073 (77%)**	612 (23%)

χ^2 (*df* = 1) = 784.98, $p < .0001$

Table 3.5. Functions of Themes using Future Plans versus General Goals

	Future Plans	*General Goals*
U.S. Presidential		
Acclaims	870 (67%)	**2041 (85%)**
Attacks	**423 (33%)**	230 (15%)
U.S. Presidential Primary		
Acclaims	2581 (72%)	**12096 (90%)**
Attacks	**1016 (28%)**	1309 (10%)
Vice Presidential		
Acclaims	154 (46%)	**1042 (81%)**
Attacks	**181 (54%)**	247 (19%)
Total		
Acclaims	3605 (69%)	**15179 (89%)**
Attacks	1620 **(31%)**	1786 (11%)

χ^2 (*df* = 1) = 1289.16, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .24$

Attacks on Future Plans and General Goals

Next, as predicted by Functional Theory, attacks were used more often on future plans (means) than on general goals (ends). This hypothesis was confirmed on each of the three samples of debates examined here (Table 3.5): 31 percent of future plans themes were attacks whereas 11 percent of general goals were attacks. In 2012, Obama attacked the health care voucher proposal advocated by Romney and Ryan:

> The idea, which was originally presented by Congressman Ryan, your running mate, is that we would give a voucher to seniors and they could go out in the private marketplace and buy their own health insurance. The problem is that because the voucher wouldn't necessarily keep up with health care inflation, it was estimated that this would cost the average senior about $6,000 a year.

At a more general level, Romney criticized Obama's general goals:

> The president has a view very similar to the view he had when he ran four years, that a bigger government, spending more, taxing more, regulating more—if you will, trickle-down government—would work. That's not the right answer for America.

A *chi-square* confirmed this prediction (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 1289.16, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .24$). Specific future plans (means) attract more attacks than general goals (ends).

Personal Qualities

Benoit and McHale (2003) used grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to develop a typology of personal qualities or character traits discussed by presidential candidates: morality, empathy, sincerity, and drive. Each trait was operationalized

with terms found in presidential television spots (e.g., morality included such words as decent, ethical, moral, and integrity; sincerity included words such as false, phoney, dishonest, and lies). This typology was applied to presidential primary (1984–2000) and general (1960, 1976–2000) debates using computer content analysis (Benoit and McHale, 2004). They found that morality (38 percent) was the most common form of personal quality discussed in presidential debates. In general debates, morality accounted for 38 percent of instances of personal qualities, followed by drive (25 percent), sincerity (21 percent), and empathy (15 percent). In primary debates morality was also the most common character trait discussed (41 percent), followed by empathy (24 percent, and then sincerity and drive (both at 17 percent). The distribution of character traits was significant in both samples of debates.

To extend this line of inquiry a new analysis was conducted using vice presidential debates (1976, 1984–2012). These texts were edited to remove comments from moderators and journalists (this limits the results to the qualities candidates, not moderators or questioners, chose to address). Then the edited texts were subjected to the same form of computer content analysis employed by Benoit and McHale (2004). Results indicate that once again, morality (49 percent) was the most common trait discussed in vice presidential debates, followed by empathy (30 percent), sincerity (30 percent), and drive (2 percent). This distribution is significant (χ^2 [df = 3] 806.7, $p < .0001$). It is clear that when American presidential candidates discuss personal qualities in election debates, they most commonly talk about morality. Perhaps morality is discussed most often because if you believe a person is moral, you are likely to assume that they will try to do the right thing generally. However, convincing people that you are sincere (or hard-working) may not lead them to assume that you will pursue the ends they value.

CONCLUSION

These debates include many candidates and numerous campaigns spanning decades. The data provide strong support for predictions made by Functional Theory from the samples of debates examined here: The ordering of functions, the relative frequency of topics, functions of general goals, functions of ideals, and the relative frequency of attacks on future plans and general goals. This chapter also discusses research into the nature of personal qualities discussed by candidates in debates, finding that morality is consistently the most common trait discussed by candidates in debates. These results are also consistent with analyses of other kinds of presidential campaign messages (e.g., TV spots, direct mail advertising; Benoit, 2007). Chapter 4 examines data on these predictions from non-presidential campaign debates; chapter 5 investigates these hypotheses in election debates for president, chancellor, and prime minister in non-U.S. countries. These consistent findings are evidence that the basic situation identified by Functional Theory—candidates seeking office must distinguish themselves on policy and or character in ways that encourage voters to

conclude that they are preferable to opponents. Similarly, the ideas that some kinds of utterances (general goals, ideals) are easier to acclaim than attack, that means are easier to attack than ends, and that candidates have a proclivity to discuss morality, transcend candidate, campaign, campaign phase, and office (president, vice president).

NOTE

1. All tables draw on the following sources: American presidential primary debates: Benoit et al., 2002, 2007; Benoit, Henson, and Sudbrock, 2011; Benoit, Glantz, and Airne, 2013; American general election debates: Benoit et al., 2003, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996; Rill and Benoit, 2009; Benoit and Glantz, in press; American vice presidential debates from 1976 and 1984–2012: Benoit and Airne, 2005; Benoit and Henson, 2009; Benoit and Glantz, in press.

4

American Non-Presidential and World Political Campaign Debates

Most research on political campaigns has focused on U.S. presidential elections. However, some studies have investigated non-presidential discourse in the United States as well as campaign discourse in other countries. Each area of inquiry will be discussed in this chapter. I will offer additional evidence from these campaigns which bears on the predictions developed for U.S. presidential campaign discourse, evidence which indicates that some elements of election campaigns transcend office and culture.

AMERICAN NON-PRESIDENTIAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

Political campaign debates have a long history in the United States. In 1858, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas ran against one another for a U.S. Senate seat from Illinois. At that point in our history, senators were selected by the state legislature; only after 1914 did voters get to elect their senators. Still, Lincoln and Douglas engaged in a series of public debates in each of Illinois' seven congressional districts (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2012). Douglas won that election. However, two years later they competed for the presidency without debating and Lincoln won (see Benoit and Delbert, 2009). The format of these debates was unlike modern debates: no questions were asked and included three speeches: an hour from the first speaker, an hour and a half from the second speaker, and then a half hour from the first candidate. In more recent years, election debates have been held for various non-presidential offices such as U.S. Senate, U.S. House, governor, and mayor.

Research has indicated that non-presidential debates have effects on viewers. Philport and Balon (1975) studied the Democratic primary contest between John Glenn and Howard Metzenbaum for Ohio Senate in 1974, indicating that Glenn's

image was affected by the debate. Lichtenstein (1982) found that non-presidential debates were thought to be more useful than presidential debates. Just, Crigler, and Wallach (1990) reported that viewers learned about the issue positions in a Connecticut House debate in 1984. Bystrom, Roper, Gobetz, Massey, and Beall (1991) argued that viewing an Oklahoma gubernatorial debate in 1990 affected perceptions of the candidates' images and issue positions and, particularly for undecided viewers, assisted in the decision-making process. Hullett and Louden (1998) found that those who watched 1994 Congressional debate tended to recall more statements from their preferred candidate. Robertson (2005) found that 2004 debates for the Senate in South Dakota affected viewer vote choice, perceptions of the candidates' character, and preferences for candidate policy positions. So, non-presidential debates have the potential to influence viewers, another reason for studying them.

As Graber (1989) explained non-presidential candidates are often overlooked in the news. Similarly, Stempel (1994) observed that there is greater coverage of presidential than state or local campaigns. This means that non-presidential debates have a greater potential to inform and influence those who do view them because voters know less about non-presidential than presidential candidates.

AMERICAN NON-PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

Some scholars have investigated non-presidential political campaigns (e.g., Herrnson, 1998; Jacobson, 2001; Kahn and Kenney, 1999). However, that work tends to focus on television spots rather than on debates. Although the presidency is the most important elected office in the United States, elections are held for 435 U.S. Representatives (each running every two years), one-hundred Senators (one-third campaigning every six years), and thousands of mayors and other elected officials. Clearly elections for these offices, and debates for them, deserve scholarly attention along with presidential elections and debates.

Few studies to this point have analyzed the content of non-presidential debates. Much less scholarship exists on non-presidential than presidential campaign debates. For the most part studies on non-presidential campaign discourse focus on TV spots, so non-presidential debates have yet to receive much scholarly attention. McKinney and Carlin (2004) call for more work on non-presidential debates. Pfau (1983), in a very early study of non-presidential debates, investigated format in debates. Ornstein (1987) presented a conceptual discussion of non-presidential debates. Conrad (1993) executed a rhetorical analysis of narrative form in the 1984 Helms-Hunt Senate debate. Johnson (1996) studied intertextuality in a gubernatorial and a senate debate. Airne and Benoit (2005) examined the 2004 Illinois Senate debates between Keyes and Obama. They found results that are general in line with the functions of presidential debates: acclaims were 59 percent, attacks 37 percent, and defenses 4 percent. As in presidential debates, these Senate debates focused more on policy (65 percent) than character (35 percent). Banwart and McKinney (2005) investigated

two U.S. senate and two gubernatorial debates from 2000 and 2002, reporting that positive comments (79 percent) and policy discussion (82 percent) dominated these encounters. These studies are a useful beginning, but the sample of non-presidential debates, candidates, and years is still very small.

Sample of Debates

The sample examined here includes data from the seven Lincoln-Douglas debates (Benoit and Delbert, 2009), twenty-one U.S. Senate debates from 1998–2006 (Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007), fifteen gubernatorial debates between 1994 and 2004 (Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007), ten mayoral debates (Brookfield, WI; Frederick, MI; Laurel, MS; New Orleans, LA; New York City, NY; Pittsburgh, PA; San Francisco, CA; Waukesha, WI; Benoit, Henson, and Maltos, 2007), and fout primary debates (two gubernatorial, one Senate, one House; Benoit and Henson, 2006).

Functions of American Non-Presidential Political Campaign Debates

Functional Theory predicts that acclaims will be more common than attacks and attacks more frequent than defenses. Acclaims—although not automatically persuasive with every voter—have no inherent drawbacks. Attacks risk creating backlash from voters who dislike mudslinging. This means candidates have a reason to attack less than they acclaim. Defenses have three potential drawbacks: they usually take a candidate off-message, they can make a candidate appear reactive rather than proactive, and they may remind or inform voters of a possible weakness of a candidate. Note that the last drawback does not apply to statements in debates because the audience would have just heard the attack being refuted in a defense. This is why defenses, while less common than acclaims or attacks, occur more often in debates than other media (Benoit, 2007a).

These functions can be illustrated from non-presidential debates. For example, Brad Carson used an acclaim in a Senate debate when he noted that "I've also proposed eliminating unnecessary and outdated governmental agencies" (OK, 10/3/04). The prospect of savings from cuts in "unnecessary" and "outdated" programs should appear desirable to voters. On the other hand, John Thune attacked his opponent for a U.S. Senate seat, Tom Daschle, for delaying judicial confirmations: "The filibuster has never been used in the history of this country to deny appellate court nominees an opportunity for an up-and-down vote in the United States Senate. Under Tom Daschle, that is the first time that has happened" (SD, 9/19/04). This statement clearly blames Daschle for the delay in judicial confirmation. Daschle responded with a clear example of a defense: "That's not true" (SD, 9/1904).

The data reported in Table 4.1[1] shows that, except for the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1848, acclaims were more common than attacks, which were in turn more frequent than defenses. Overall, 62 percent of themes in this sample were acclaims, 31 percent were attacks, and 7 percent were defenses. A *chi-square goodness-of-fit* test

Table 4.1. Functions of Non-Presidential Campaign Debates

	Acclaims	*Attacks*	*Defenses*
Lincoln-Douglas	837 (45%)	**912 (49%)**	117 (6%)
U.S. Senate	**2370 (56%)**	1275 (30%)	593 (14%)
Gubernatorial	**3007 (68%)**	1309 (30%)	94 (2%)
Mayoral	**1285 (75%)**	326 (19%)	113 (7%)
Primary (Governor, Senate, House)	**699 (71%)**	211 (22%)	68 (7%)
Total	**8198 (62%)**	4033 (31%)	985 (7%)

χ^2 (df = 2) = 5952.25, $p < .0001$

found that these differences were statistically significant (χ^2 [df = 2] = 5952.25, $p <$ .0001). So, this prediction was confirmed in modern political campaign debates for U.S. Senate, U.S. House, governor, and mayor.

Topics of American Non-Presidential Political Campaign Debates

This research investigated the topics of utterances in the non-presidential campaign debates studied here. Functional Theory predicts that policy will be discussed more often than character because more voters see elected officials as policy makers than role models. For example, Paul Van Dam discussed governmental spending during his opponent Bob Bennett's time in the Senate: "The senator voted to desert what they had in the 1990's, which was called pay as you go" (UT, 10/20/04). Fiscal responsibility is a issue of policy. Tom Coburn illustrated a character utterance when he criticized his opponent Brad Carson's veracity, asserting that "Brad's very good at creating a half-truth" (OK, 10/3/04). The data reported in Table 4.2—again with the exception of the Lincoln-Douglas debates—conform to Functional Theory's prediction about the relative frequency of statements on policy and character: 68 percent policy and 32 percent character. Statistical analysis shows that these differences were significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 1501.89, $p < .0001$). Again, modern political campaign debates for American non-presidential offices discuss policy more often than character.

Table 4.2. Topics of Non-Presidential Campaign Debates

	Policy	*Character*
Lincoln-Douglas	849 (49%)	**900 (51%)**
U.S. Senate	**2537 (70%)**	1064 (30%)
Gubernatorial	**3166 (73%)**	1150 (27%)
Mayoral	**1132 (70%)**	479 (30%)
Primary (Governor, Senate, House)	**531 (60%)**	349 (40%)
Total	**8215 (68%)**	3942 (32%)

χ^2 (df = 1) = 1501.89, $p < .0001$

Table 4.3. Functions of Themes Using General Goals

	Acclaims	*Attacks*
Senate	**1294 (85%)**	220 (15%)
Gubernatorial	**1267 (87%)**	187 (13%)
Mayoral	**611 (97%)**	20 (3%)
Total	**3172 (88%)**	427 (12%)

χ^2 (df = 1) = 2093.64, $p < .0001$

Forms of Policy and Character

Functional Theory expects that general goals will be used more to acclaim than to attack. It is easier to acclaim some goals such as creating jobs or protecting American than to attack those goals. An example of an acclaim on general goals can be found in the 2000 Senate debate between Snowe and Lawrence. Lawrence acclaimed a general goal: "I strongly support guaranteeing equal rights to everyone regardless of sexual orientation." Snowe, in contrast, attacked her opponent's goals "We can do something now. It's not like the commissions like Mark is suggesting, proposing a commission down the road." Next, consider the data in Table 4.3 on candidates use of acclaims and attacks on general goals in non-presidential campaign debates. In each sample general goals were used to acclaim more than to attack. Overall, 88 percent of general goals in these samples were acclaims and 12 percent were attacks. A *chi-square goodness-of-fit* test found that these differences were statistically significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 2093.64, $p < .0001$). This confirms the third general prediction of Functional Theory.

As with general goals, Functional Theory predicts that it is easier to acclaim on ideals (such as justice, equality) than to attack. Lawrence, in the 2000 Snowe-Lawrence debate, used an acclaim on ideals: "I think it is a fundamental right that people be secure in their place of employment." In the 2002 Senate debate between Allard and Strickland, Strickland attacked his opponent's ideals: "The *Congressional Quarterly* rated him the most partisan Republican in the Senate." Table 4.4 presents data on the functions of ideals in American non-presidential campaign debates. In each of these three samples acclaims are more common than attacks. Combined, 85 percent of ideals were acclaims whereas 15 percent were attacks. Statistical analysis reveals that these differences are significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 198.48, $p < .0001$). This prediction of Functional Theory is confirmed in these data.

Table 4.4. Functions of Themes Using Ideals

	Acclaims	*Attacks*
Senate	**179 (79%)**	47 (21%)
Gubernatorial	**102 (92%)**	9 (8%)
Mayoral	**70 (90%)**	8 (10%)
Total	**351 (85%)**	64 (15%)

χ^2 (df = 1) = 198.48, $p < .0001$

Functional Theory anticipates that attacks will be more common on future plans (means) than general goals (ends). It is easier to attack specific means (e.g., implementing a new 10 percent tax on computers, reducing the budget of Homeland Security by 35 percent) than a goal such as balancing the budget. In the 2000 Snowe-Lawrence debate, Lawrence used an attack on future plans when he argued that "I think the [prescription drug] plan, which Senator Snowe backs. . . will not work." This contrasts with the attack on general goals by Snowe quoted earlier. Finally, the data displayed in Table 4.5 test H5: Attacks will be used more often for future plans than general goals. Each of the three samples confirm this expectation. Overall, 26 percent of future plans were attacks but only 16 percent of general goals were attacks. A *chi-square goodness-of-fit* test demonstrates that these differences were statistically significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 88.99, p < .0001, φ = 15). So, this prediction is consistently confirmed in data from non-presidential debates for U.S. Senate, governor, and mayor.

Functional Theory has also investigated the nature of personal qualities, or character traits, discussed by political candidates. Benoit and McHale (2003) developed a typology of four traits—morality, sincerity, empathy, and drive—along with a list of terms associated with each trait. Benoit and McHale (2004) applied this approach to presidential primary and general debates; chapter 3 applied it to vice presidential debates. New data on the character traits discussed in U.S. senate and gubernatorial debates will be presented here. The sample consisted of twenty-four non-presidential debates: twelve from gubernatorial contests and twelve from senate races. For senate races, debates in the sample were held in Colorado, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Illinois (2004); Iowa, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee (2002); and California, Maine, Virginia, and Washington (2000). For governors' races, debates in

Table 4.5. Functions of Themes on Future Plans versus General Goals

	Future Plans	*General Goals*
Senate		
Acclaims	89 (57%)	**1294 (85%)**
Attacks	**68 (43%)**	220 (15%)
Gubernatorial		
Acclaims	242 (76%)	**1267 (87%)**
Attacks	**76 (24%)**	187 (13%)
Mayoral		
Acclaims	113 (89%)	**611 (97%)**
Attacks	**14 (11%)**	20 (3%)
Total		
Acclaims	444 (74%)	**2172 (84%)**
Attacks	**158 (26%)**	427 (16%)

χ^2 (df = 1) = 88.99, p < .0001, φ = 15

the sample occurred in Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, and Utah (2004); California, Iowa, New York, and Pennsylvania (2002); and Montana, New Hampshire, Virginia, and Utah (2000, except a debate in Virginia was held in 2001).

Computer content analysis on the texts of these debates (with comments and questions from non-candidates deleted) found that in both samples morality was the most common character trait discussed (41 percent in senate debates; 39 percent in gubernatorial debates). In senate debates, sincerity (22 percent), drive (20 percent), and empathy (19 percent) occurred at relatively similar frequencies (these frequencies are significantly different: χ^2 [*df* = 3] = 195.84). In gubernatorial debates, empathy (23 percent), drive (19 percent), and sincerity (17 percent) also occurred at fairly similar rates (these frequencies are significantly different: χ^2 [*df* = 3] = 194.88). As in American presidential and vice presidential debates, senate and gubernatorial debates discuss morality much more often than other character traits.

Conclusion

This section investigates the content of non-presidential debates. With the exception of the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1848, all five tested predictions were confirmed with these samples. U.S. Senate debates, gubernatorial debates, and mayoral debates shared several commonalities with American presidential and vice-presidential debates: acclaims were more common than attacks and attacks more common than defenses; policy was discussed more than character; general goals were used more to acclaim than attack; ideals were used more frequently to acclaim than to attack; attacks were based more often on future plans than general goals, and morality was the character trait most often discussed. Research on non-presidential TV spots show the same patterns (Benoit, 2007). The next section addresses the question of whether these five predictions are confirmed in political leaders' debates around the world.

WORLD POLITICAL ELECTION DEBATES

Election campaign debates are popular in other countries besides the United States. Televised political leaders' debates for president, prime minister, and chancellor have occurred in many countries, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, the Ukraine, the United Kingdom. In May of 2012 the first ever Egyptian presidential debate was televised. As with American presidential debates, evidence indicates that these debates have effects on voters. Lanoue (1991) reported that the 1984 Canadian prime minister debates influenced the voting behavior of viewers. Blais and Boyer (1996) found that the 1988 Canadian debates altered vote choice and voters' perceptions. Maier and Faas (2003) indicated that the 2002 German debates had effects on candidates' images. Blais, Gidengil, Nadeau, and Nevitte (2003) characterized the 2003 Canadian debates as "critical in the Con-

servative surge" (p. 49). Blais and Perrella (2008) report that Canadian and American debates produced effects on viewers. A study of German television campaign debates from 2002–2009 found that those events had the greatest effects on party choice for independent voters and that the largest mobilizing effect occurred for those with less political interest (Maier and Faas, 2011). Survey data from the 2010 British Prime Minister debates (Coleman, 2011) found that

> two-thirds of survey respondents said that they had learnt something from the debate; three-quarters felt that they knew more about: "the qualities of the party leaders" after the debates; and large majorities . . . felt that they knew more "about the policies of each party." (p. 4)

Nagel, Maurer, and Reinemann (2012) found that the 2005 German chancellor's debate (particularly the verbal component) had effects on impressions of the candidates. So, studies of political leaders' debates around the world has established that these campaign events do have effects on those who watch them.

Political election debates tend to attract large audiences—for example, 68 percent of respondents watched the 2000 German debate and 57 percent viewed the 1983 debates (Baker and Norpoth, 1990), half of eligible Canadian voters watched the 1979 debate (LeDuc and Price, 1985), 59 percent watched the Israeli debate in 1996 (Blum-Kulka and Liebes, 2000), and 65 percent watched one of the German chancellor debates in 2002 (Faas and Maier, 2004). Maier and Fass (2011) reported that over 15 million watched each of the two German chancellor debates of 2002; 21 million tuned in for the debate in 2005, and over 14 million saw the debate in 2009 (the audience rating for these debates ranged from 42.5 percent to 58.9 percent). This means that these campaign events have a tremendous potential to inform and influence voters. They clearly merit scholarly attention. McKinney and Carlin (2004) argue that more research in this area is necessary.

Coleman's (2000) volume compiles essays about international debate; these are historical or conceptual pieces. Galasinski (1998) examined rule breaking in the 1995 Polish debates. Matsaganis and Weingarten (2001) studied a 2000 Greek prime minister debate, examining issues, strategy, and style. Khang (2008) applied Kaid and Johnston's (2001) video-style to South Korean and U.S. debates. Baker and Norpoth (1981) reported that the 1972 West German debates focused more on issues than ethics (character). They observed that the candidates supporting the government tended to defend their record while opposition party candidates were prone to attack the government's record. Gomard and Krogstad (2001) edited a volume on discourse and gender in televised election debates in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Isotalus analyzed a 2006 presidential debate in Finland. Policy was more common than character and the challenger attacked more than the incumbent. However, he found that defenses were the most common utterance, followed by attacks and then acclaims. Isolatus explains that in these debates, the candidates had to defend themselves from the moderators' questions as well as from attacks by one's opponent. He also suggested that in Finnish culture, direct attacking of an opponent

and acclaiming of self "are often avoided" (p. 41). Jalilifar and Alvi-Nia (2012) examined hedges (expressions of reservation) and boosters (discourse that intensifies) in debate utterances from the winners of the most recent Iranian (Amadinejad) and American (Obama) election winners.

Sample of Debates

This analysis includes data from content analysis of debates in several countries: Australia (2007, 2011; Benoit and Henson, 2007; Benoit and Benoit-Bryan, 2012). Canada (2006, 2010; Benoit and Henson, 2007; Benoit, 2011), France (1988, 1995; Choi and Benoit, 2009), Germany (2002, 2005; Benoit and Hemmer, 2007), Israel (1984, 1992, 1996, 1999; Benoit and Sheafer, 2007), South Korea (1997, 2002; Choi and Benoit, 2009), Spain (2008; Herrero and Benoit, 2009), Taiwan (2004; Benoit, Wen, and Yu, 2007), Ukraine (2004; Benoit and Klyukovski, 2006), United Kingdom (2010; Benoit and Benoit-Bryan, in press), United States (1960, 1976-2008; Benoit et al., 2003, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996; Rill and Benoit, 2009). This sample provides a strong basis for examining the content of political leaders' debates around the world.

Functions of Political Leaders' Campaign Debates

Acclaims should be more common than attacks and attacks, in turn, should occur more frequently than defenses. Functional Theory argues that acclaims have no drawbacks, attacks have one drawback (voters dislike mudslinging), and defenses have three potential disadvantages (taking candidates off message, creating the impression that candidates are reactive, and potentially informing/reminding voters of a potential drawback—the last does not apply to campaign debates). The Australian Prime Minister debate of 2010 provides examples of these three functions in an election debate. Gillard noted that Australia was "getting new occupational health and safety laws. Laws around the country. Businesses been complaining for thirty years that they have different obligations in different states. And at the same time, not every individual worker had the same safety standards. Now, I've delivered that." This action is likely to be seen as positive outcomes by voters. Abbott illustrated an attack when he charged that "it's the current Government which has presided over immigration numbers of 300,000 a year, and something needs to be done about an unsustainable rate of increase." Immigration was a hot topic and this number was probably seen as too high by voters. Gillard responded by explaining that "we brought the immigration numbers down . . . to 230,000. And then for the year we're in now, they're predicted to be 175,000, and then next year, predicted to be 145,000." So, her government has reduced, and arguably will continue to reduce, the size of this problem, a clear illustration of a defense. Overall, political leaders election debates around the world use acclaims (55 percent) more than attacks (37 percent)

Table 4.6. Functions of Political Leaders' Debates Around the World

	Acclaims	*Attacks*	*Defenses*
Australia	**342 (56%)**	234 (38%)	33 (5%)
Canada	**1176 (62%)**	607 (32%)	119 (6%)
France	**716 (61%)**	386 (33%)	66 (6%)
Germany	**304 (56%)**	187 (34%)	53 (10%)
Israel	**165 (50%)**	124 (38%)	38 (12%)
South Korea	**1044 (55%)**	668 (35%)	180 (10%)
Spain	591 (46%)	**627 (49%)**	59 (4%)
Taiwan	**320 (49%)**	303 (46%)	35 (5%)
Ukraine	256 (43%)	**290 (48%)**	52 (9%)
United Kingdom	**1000 (60%)**	604 (36%)	75 (4%)
United States	**5064 (55%)**	3268 (35%)	884 (10%)
Total	**10978 (55%)**	7298 (37%)	1594 (8%)

χ^2 (df = 2) = 6750.75, $p < .0001$

or defenses (8 percent). See Table 4.6[2] for these data. This relationship among functions holds true in every country except Spain and the Ukraine. In those countries the challenger employed more attacks than acclaims but not the incumbent. The fact that the challenger attacks so much in these two cases is not very surprising: chapter 5 explains why challengers tend to attack more and acclaim less than incumbents. A *chi-square goodness of fit* test reveals that this distribution of functions is statistically significant (χ^2 [df = 2] = 6750.75, $p < .0001$).

Topics of Political Leaders' Campaign Debates

According to Functional Theory, election utterances are likely to discuss policy more often than character. Most voters consider their leaders to be policy makers instead of role models. Gillard illustrated a policy comment when she declared that "We've delivered tax cuts three years in a row. We created the Education Tax Rebate, and I've recently said we'd extend it to school uniforms, help with those costs of getting kids to school. We increased the Child Care Tax Rebate to 50 percent of out of pocket cost. Give that extra helping hand with the cost of child care. We did a major increase in the pension to help older Australians particularly with the pressures that are on them. These are measures to help with cost of living." These topics—taxation, education, senior citizens—are clear illustrations of policy. On several occasions Abbott talked about the importance of honesty, being "fair dinkum." This is a character trait and illustrates an utterance on character. The political campaign debates in every country examined here discussed policy (82 percent) more often than character (18 percent). Table 4.7 reports these data. A *chi-square goodness of fit* test reveals that these differences are statistically significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 4287.86, $p < .0001$).

Table 4.7. Topics of Political Leaders' Debates Around the World

	Policy	*Character*
Australia	**406 (70%)**	170 (30%)
Canada	**1122 (63%)**	660 (37%)
France	**981 (89%)**	121 (11%)
Germany	**302 (62%)**	189 (38%)
Israel	**222 (77%)**	67 (23%)
South Korea	**1443 (84%)**	269 (16%)
Spain	**923 (76%)**	296 (24%)
Taiwan	**372 (60%)**	251 (40%)
Ukraine	**333 (61%)**	213 (39%)
United Kingdom	**1259 (78%)**	345 (22%)
United States	**6152 (75%)**	2100 (25%)
Total	**13515 (74%)**	4681 (26%)

χ^2 (df = 1) = 4287.86, $p < .0001$

Forms of Policy and Character

The third general prediction from Functional Theory concerns the functions of themes on general goals: Such utterances should be used more to acclaim than to attack. The 2010 United Kingdom Prime Minister debates offer this example of an acclaim on general goals by Nick Clegg: "We need to invest in the kinds of things we need in the future anyway: affordable housing, green energy, renewable energy, public transport, the kind of things which create jobs for young people, help manufacturing and create the green infrastructure that I think we need as a country." Tony Brown made an attack on general goals: "As late as last year, Nick Clegg was saying the Euro would be an anchor for our economy. If we were in the Euro now, your taxes, your National Insurance would not be going to hospitals and schools and police officers, it would be goig to Greece and possibly other countries as well." In these debates general goals were employed more often to acclaim (84 percent) than to attack (16 percent). Statistical analysis indicates that this difference is significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 1481.72, $p < .0001$).

H4 anticipated that, like general goals, ideals would be used more as the basis of acclaims than attacks. In the 2010 British Prime Minister debate, Tony Brown provided examples of ideals. When he said "Now I believe in work too, because I've been brought up that work is the way you reward people but it is also the way you find self-esteem" he illustrated an acclaim. His statement that "It's simply unfair and immoral for the Conservatives to put this [inheritance tax cut at the same time as Child Tax Credits] as their election manifesto" is an example of an attack. In the debates examined here, policy was much more common than character, 84 percent to 16 percent. A *chi-square goodness-of-fit* test confirms that this difference is significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 273.04, $p < .0001$).

Table 4.8. Functions of Future Plans versus General Goals in World Debates

	Future Plans	*General Goals*
Acclaims	1037 (72%)	**2674 (84%)**
Attacks	**399 (28%)**	504 (16%)

χ^2 (*df* = 1) = 89.38, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .19$

The fifth general prediction expected that attacks would be more common when candidates discussed future plans rather than general goals. In contrast to the attack on general goals above, Tony Brown provided an illustration of an attack on future plans: "One thing I don't believe in is the Conservative policy which would cut child tax credits, but at the same time give an inheritance tax cut to the 3,000 richest people in the country of £200,000." According to Table 4.8, attacks constituted 28 percent of the themes on future plans and 16 percent on general goals. Statistical analysis confirms this prediction is significant (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 89.38, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .19$).

Functional Theory has also investigated personal qualities in American presidential and vice presidential debates (chapter 3). New data were collected on the frequency of the four character traits identified by Benoit and McHale (2003)—morality, empathy, sincerity, and drive—in political leaders' debates from Australia (2007, 2010), Canada (2006, 2011), and the United Kingdom (2010). The same procedures developed in Benoit and McHale (2004) and used again in chapter 3 were used to investigate the nature of personal qualities in select non-U.S. debates. Transcripts were prepared by deleting all statements and questions from non-candidates. Then computer content analysis using the word lists developed in this line of work was applied to these texts. As in American presidential and vice presidential debates, morality was the character trait most frequently discussed in these debates (43 percent), followed by drive (23 percent) and then empathy and sincerity (17 percent). These frequencies were significantly different (χ^2 [*df* = 3] = 424.92). This sample of countries is limited to English-speaking countries (Quebec notwithstanding) and we must be careful not to generalize these results to political leaders' debates. Nevertheless, every test conducted thus far found that political candidates in debates discuss morality most often. These findings are also consistent with the data from U.S. senate and gubernatorial debates reported above.

Conclusion

This section has expanded our view of political leaders' debates to other countries besides the United States. The predictions of Functional Theory were confirmed in these data (only two countries, Spain and the Ukraine, contained more attacks than acclaims and both were limited to utterances from challengers; chapter 5 explains why challengers attack more than incumbents). The candidates in this sample consistently discussed policy more than character, attacked more than they acclaimed on general goals and ideals, attacked more on future plans than general goals, and

discussed morality more often than other character traits. Although there are surely differences in political campaign debates around the world, the basis tenets of Functional Theory were confirmed in this sample, in American presidential and vice presidential debates, and in non-presidential debates in the United States.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses research on election campaign debates for American non-presidential offices (senate, gubernatorial, house, and mayoral) and political leaders' debates in other countries (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, South Korea, Spain, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom). The data from different levels of offices and different countries is remarkably consistent (e.g., only in two countries did attacks outnumber acclaims, and that was for only the challenger). Political election debates generally use acclaims more than attacks and attacks more than defense; discuss policy more than character, acclaim more than attack on general goals and ideals, attack more on means (future plans) than ends (general goals), and discuss morality more often than other character traits. This represents strong evidence the basic elements of an election campaign (identified by Functional Theory) operate similarly across time, candidate, level of office, and country.

NOTES

1. Tables 4.1–4.5 draw on the following sources: Lincoln-Douglas debates: Benoit and Delbert, 2009; U.S. Senate and gubernatorial debates: Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007; mayoral debates: Benoit and Henson, 2006; Benoit, Henson, and Maltos, 2007.

2. Tables 4.6–4.8 draw on the following sources: Australia: Benoit and Henson, 2007; Benoit and Benoit-Bryan, 2012; Canada: Benoit and Henson, 2007; Benoit, 2011; France: Choi and Benoit, 2009; Germany: Benoit and Hemmer, 2007; Israel: Benoit and Sheafer, 2007; South Korea: Choi and Benoit, 2009; Spain: Herrero and Benoit, 2009; Taiwan: Benoit, Wen, and Yu, 2007; Ukraine: Benoit and Klyukovski, 2006; United Kingdom: Benoit and Benoit-Bryan, in press; United States: Benoit et al., 2003, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996; Rill and Benoit, 2009.

5

Incumbency in Political Campaign Debates

This chapter examines an important variable that influences the content of political campaign debates: incumbency. Many elections feature an incumbent who is seeking another term in office; only incumbents have a record in the office sought which is a basis for acclaims by the incumbent and attacks by the challenger. At times the elected president runs for re-election, including Dwight Eisenhower in 1956, Richard Nixon in 1972, Jimmy Carter in 1980, Ronald Reagan in 1984, George Bush in 1992, Bill Clinton in 1996, George W. Bush in 2004, and Barack Obama in 2012. In other elections the Vice President seeks to move up to the top spot (e.g., Richard Nixon in 1960, Hubert Humphrey in 1968, George Bush in 1988, Al Gore in 2000). Incumbents also often run for reelection to other offices, such as Senate, House, and governor, as well.

Between 1952 and 2012, incumbent party candidates won half of the presidential elections. Petrocik (2004) reports that considering all levels of office incumbents won 94 percent of general elections over the last fifty years. The incumbency advantage is important in presidential elections, but it can be even more so at lower levels of offices. Functional Theory argues that incumbency status influences the nature or content of campaign messages produced by incumbents and challengers.

Salamore and Salamore (1995) report that the three most important advantages for incumbents are recognition, ability to raise campaign funds, and the ability to start campaigning early. Usually, incumbent party candidates are better known than challenger party candidates. Although Mitt Romney was fairly well-known in 2011 and 2012 (and run unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination for president in 2008), surely Barack Obama was even better known than his rival. This means that beliefs about and attitudes toward a candidate are probably easier to change for challengers than incumbents. Campaign messages, such as election debates, should have greater influence on knowledge and perceptions for challengers than incumbents.

Benoit and Hansen (2004) investigated the effects of watching general election presidential debates on issue knowledge using National Elections Study data from 1976–1984 and 1996–2000. They found no significant increase in issue knowledge for candidates who were serving as president during the campaign (Ford in 1976, Carter in 1980, Reagan in 1984, Clinton in 1996). On the other hand, voters experienced significant learning for all of the challengers but one (Carter in 1976). They also learned significantly about Al Gore, who was the incumbent party candidate (but not a sitting president) in 2000. Voters know less about challengers and therefore they are likely to learn more about them than incumbents. Incumbents are also likely to receive more attention from the press than challengers (see, e.g., Trent and Trent, 1974, 1995; Trent and Friedenberg, 2004). Smith (Smith 2005; Smith and Mansharamani, 2002) also discusses incumbency in recent presidential campaigns.

The nomination of the challenging party is always contested at the presidential level and almost always challenged for other offices; one advantage many incumbents have is that they do not have to fight for their party's nomination. For example, Reagan in 1984, Clinton in 1996, Bush in 2004, and Obama in 2012 were not contested when they sought their party's nomination for a second term in office. This means that they are not subjected to attacks from others in their own party. It also means that they can spend the primary acclaiming themselves and, if they choose, attacking their likely opponent in the upcoming general election. In contrast, in 1980, for example, Senator Ted Kennedy challenged President Jimmy Carter for the Democratic nomination. One of Kennedy's ads sharply criticized his fellow Democrat:

> This man has misled the American public into the worst economic crisis since the Depression. He's broken promises and cost New York a billion dollars a year. In his latest foreign policy blunder he betrayed Israel at the UN.

Similarly, in 1992 Pat Buchanan challenged President Bush for the Republican nomination. His ads also attacked the president, beginning with Bush's dramatic promise in 1988 that he would not raise taxes (which he broke):

> Bush promised.
>
> Bush: Read my lips, no new taxes. Bush promised to cut spending, but our national debt has bone up 1.1 trillion dollars. Bush promised us jobs, but our unemployment has tripled. Now Bush is promising to fix the recession. Can we afford four more years of broken promises?

Incumbents have a substantial advantage when they are not challenged in the primary and subjected to attacks such as the ones just reported.

The fact that many incumbents are not challenged in the primary also means that they can spend more time than challengers undermining their opponent. For example, in twenty-one of Republican Bob Dole's 1996 primary ads, two attacked President Bill Clinton and eleven attacked other Republicans. Bill Clinton in 1996 did not have any

Democratic opponents to criticize, so he could focus his attacks on Dole, the Republican front-runner. In 2012, President Barack Obama watched (and raised money) while the Republicans attacked each other during the primary campaign.

In the past, another advantage for the incumbent party candidate is the fact that the challenger's party nominating convention is always held first. The two major party candidates receive the same amount of money (assuming they accept federal campaign funds) for the general election campaign. However, they cannot spend this money until they formally accept their party's nomination. Furthermore, candidates are not allowed to spend any other funds (e.g., money left over from the primary). This meant, for example, that in 2004 challenger John Kerry had to stretch his federal primary funds for a month longer than incumbent George Bush. Bush could continue to spend his primary money during the month between the Democratic and Republican conventions, so he had more money left for the final part of the general election campaign than Kerry. However, Barack Obama in 2008 became the first presidential candidate to decline public financing for the general election campaign. This meant that his spending in that phase of the campaign was not restricted. It seems likely that, unless the rules governing public financing for presidential campaigns change again, future Democratic and Republican nominees will decline public financing for the general election campaign. This means that which party's nominating convention occurs first will be less important in the future.

Another important advantage is that only the incumbent candidate has a record in the office sought. Challengers usually have records in other offices. For example, in 2012 Mitt Romney has served as governor, as had George W. Bush in 2000, Bill Clinton in 1992, Ronald Reagan in 1980, and Jimmy Carter in 1976. John Kerry, the Democratic challenger in 2004, John McCain, the Republican nominee in 1996, and Bob Dole, the Republican nominee in 1996, were all Senators. However, only the incumbent has a record *in the office sought*. Arguably, one's record *as a president* is better evidence of how one will do as president than one's record as a senator or a governor. In American presidential debates from the general campaign (1960, 1976–2012), 78 percent of the incumbents' and challengers' statements talked about the incumbents' record (past deeds) whereas 22 percent of the utterances about past deeds addressed the challengers' record. As we will see, incumbents and challengers use this information quite differently in their campaign messages.

Trent, Friedenberg, and Denton (2011) discuss the nature of campaign discourse produced by incumbents and challengers, identifying two contrasting styles of messages. The incumbent style is characterized by four symbolic strategies (the symbolic aspects of the Oval Office, the office holder's legitimacy, the incumbent's competence, the office holder's charisma) and eleven pragmatic strategies (staging pseudo-events, making job appointments, appointing special task forces, appropriating money, meeting with world leaders, manipulating domestic issues, accepting endorsements, stressing accomplishments, adopting a persona of a statesman rather than a candidate, using surrogates, and portraying a foreign policy situation as a crisis). The challenger style has seven elements (attacking the incumbent's record,

adopting offensive positions, stressing the need for change, being optimistic about the future, advocating traditional values, characterizing their position as the center of the party, relying on surrogates for harsh attacks). This analysis is a useful foundation for contrasting messages produced by incumbents and challengers. For example, in 2012 Barack Obama could hold press conferences and produce TV spots from the White House; Mitt Romney could not do so. Barack Obama could sign laws and issue directives to the Executive Branch of government; Mitt Romney could not. However, some of these characteristics are not distinctive. Both incumbent and challenger can accept endorsements. Both groups of candidates can emphasize their accomplishments (although, as suggested earlier, accomplishments by a president probably appear to be better evidence for how one will perform as president than accomplishments in other offices). Also, both groups of candidates surely prefer to see harsh attacks from surrogates. Nor is it entirely clear why challengers would endorse traditional values rather than seeking alternative values, particularly when they want to change an important element of the *status quo* [who is president]—or why incumbents would not endorse traditional values.

Functional Theory predicts that differences will arise in the campaign discourse produced by incumbent-party and challenger-party candidates. These differences tend to stem from the essential difference in situation: As noted earlier, unlike challengers, incumbents have a record in the office sought. Of course, challengers have other kinds of records. For example, Barack Obama touted his record as President during the third 2012 debate:

> You can't have 23 million people struggling to get a job. You can't have an economy that over the last three years keeps slowing down its growth rate. You can't have kids coming out of college, half of them can't find a job today, or a job that's commensurate with their college degree.

When they do not have a record as President, candidates can acclaim their record in other offices. For example, Ronald Reagan ran a television spot about his accomplishments as Governor of California:

> This is a man whose time has come. A strong leader with a proven record. In 1966, answering the call of his party, Ronald Reagan was elected Governor of California—next to President, the biggest job in the nation. What the new Governor inherited was a state of crisis. California was faced with a $194 million deficit, and was spending a million dollars a day more than it was taking in. The state was on the brink of bankruptcy. Governor Reagan became the greatest tax reformer in the state's history. When Governor Reagan left office, the $194 million deficit had been transformed into a $550 million surplus. The *San Francisco Chronicle* said, Governor Reagan has saved the state from bankruptcy. The time is now for strong leadership. Reagan for President. (Reagan, "Record," 1980)

This messages emphasized Reagan's success at turning his state's budget deficit into a surplus (and it suggests he is a strong leader). Steve Forbes, who sought the Re-

publican nomination in 1996 and 2000, was a successful businessman who lacked experience in elective office. In 1996 one of Forbes' TV spots explicitly acclaimed his record in the corporate world: "He is Steve Forbes. And under his leadership, *Forbes* magazine has become the most successful business magazine in the world." This message suggests that a person who has experience successfully running a large business could effectively run the United States. All of these candidates called on their experience to some extent. Still, none of these forms of experience (senator, governor, business) quite matches the experience gained from actually serving as president.

What is interesting about having a record in office is that it is certain to contain both good and bad elements. A president's record is so vast—terms are four years long and the federal government deals with a vast array of issues, domestic and foreign—that there are inevitably both successes and failures to be found in the incumbent's record. Incumbents seeking re-election to other offices also surely have both successes and failures in their record. The incumbent can use his own record as a resource for *acclaims*, dwelling on the successes. For example, in 2004, President Bush acclaimed his accomplishments in a debate: "added 1.9 million new jobs over the past thirteen months. The farm income in America is high. Small businesses are flourishing. Home ownership rate is at an all-time high in America." Such topics as jobs, small businesses, and home ownership are clear examples of policy and the President is acclaiming his record, his successes, on these issues (past deeds). In the same debate, John Kerry attacked Bush's record in office: "He's lost jobs . . . We've got 5 million Americans who have lost their health care . . . He didn't fund no child left behind." These three attacks (on jobs, health care, and education) criticize the president's record, his failures, in office (past deeds). The key point here that the incumbent's record can be used a source of *acclaims by the incumbent* and of *attacks by the challenger*. Functional Theory makes two predictions about messages from incumbents and challengers:

1. *Incumbents acclaim and defend more, and attack less, than challengers.*
2. *Incumbents acclaim more, and attack less, on past deeds than challengers.*

SAMPLE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

The sample of debates for investigating the effects of incumbency on election debate discourse includes: U.S. Presidential General Debates 1960, 1976–2008 (Benoit et al., 2003, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996; Rill and Benoit, 2009); U.S. Vice Presidential Debates 1976, 1984–2008 (Benoit and Airne, 2005; Benoit and Henson, 2009); U.S. Senate Debates 21, 1998–2006 (Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007); U.S. Gubernatorial Debates 15, 1994–2004 (Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007); U.S. Mayoral Debates 8, 2005–2007 (Benoit, Henson, and Maltos, 2007); Political Leaders' Debates: Australia (2007, 2011; Benoit and Henson, 2007; Benoit

and Benoit-Bryan, 2012). Canada (2006, 2010; Benoit and Henson, 2007; Benoit, 2012), France (1988, 1995; Choi and Benoit, 2009), Germany (2002, 2005; Benoit and Hemmer, 2007), Israel (1984, 1992, 1996, 1999; Benoit and Sheafer, 2007), South Korea (1997, 2002; Choi and Benoit, 2009), Spain (2008; Herrero and Benoit, 2009), Taiwan (2004; Benoit, Wen, and Yu, 2007), Ukraine (2004; Benoit and Klyukovski, 2006), United Kingdom (2010; Benoit and Benoit-Bryan, in press). This is a powerful sample for testing these predictions.

FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

Hypothesis 1 predicts that incumbents acclaim more, and attack less, than challengers. The data on incumbency and functions of political election debates can be found in Table 5.1.[1]

Overall, incumbents in political campaign debates acclaim more (63 percent to 53 percent) and attack less (38 percent to 42 percent) than challengers. This relationship holds true in six different samples of campaign debates: American presidential debates, American vice-presidential debates, U.S. Senate debates, U.S. gubernato-

Table 5.1. Incumbency and Functions of Political Leaders' Debates

	Acclaims	*Attacks*	*Defenses*
U.S. Presidential			
Incumbents	**2458 (63%)**	1031 (26%)	**405 (10%)**
Challengers	2342 (51%)	**1927 (42%)**	296 (6%)
U.S. Vice Presidential			
Incumbents	**1568 (60%)**	915 (35%)	121 (5%)
Challengers	1397 (55%)	**1085 (43%)**	88 (3%)
U.S. Senate Debates			
Incumbents	**844 (61%)**	286 (21%)	**251 (18%)**
Challengers	771 (51%)	**584 (39%)**	182 (13%)
U.S. Governor			
Incumbents	**820 (68%)**	348 (29%)	41 (3%)
Challengers	672 (57%)	**466 (40%)**	38 (3%)
U.S. Mayor			
Incumbents	**318 (76%)**	28 (7%)	**74 (18%)**
Challengers	334 (71%)	**123 (26%)**	13 (3%)
Non-U.S.			
Incumbents	**2634 (61%)**	1288 (30%)	**389 (9%)**
Challengers	3279 (52%)	**2742 (43%)**	322 (5%)
Total			
Incumbents	**8642 (63%)**	3896 (28%)	**1281 (9%)**
Challengers	8795 (53%)	**6927 (42%)**	939 (6%)

χ^2 (df = 2) = 643.47, $p < .0001$, $V = .15$

rial debates, U.S. mayoral debates, and debates around the world. A *chi-square* test confirms that these differences are statistically significant (χ^2 [df = 2] = 647.15, p < .0001, V = .19). The effect size, V = .19, is sizeable. These data provide strong support for this hypothesis. The results of this research is consistent with Morello's (1988a) findings that in 1984 challenger Walter Mondale attacked more than incumbent Ronald Reagan and that Reagan produced more defenses than Mondale. In five of the six samples, incumbents offered more defenses than challengers, providing support for this part of the hypothesis. Benoit (2007b) argues that attacks provide both motivation and opportunity to defend; I also found a significant correlation between attacks and defenses: The number of attacks directed at a candidate is significantly related to the number of defenses produced by that candidate.

Longitudinal data for presidential and vice presidential debates can be used to illustrate attacks by incumbents versus challengers. Figure 5.1 (on presidential general election debates) and Figure 5.2 (on vice presidential debates) contrasts the percentage of attacks in these debates by incumbency status. The specific percentage of attacks in general election debates ranges from 15 percent (Reagan, 1984) to 56 percent (Carter, 1976) and in vice presidential debates percentage of attacks vary from 20 percent (Lieberman, 2000) to 64 percent (Quayle, 1992). Nevertheless, a clear pattern emerges in both kinds of debates in which challengers usually attack more than incumbents.

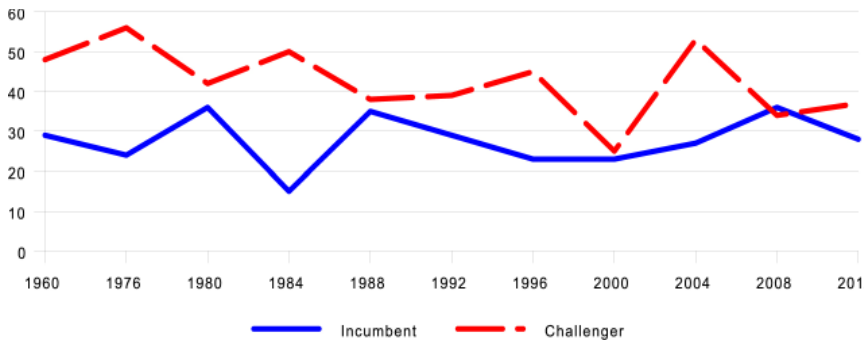

Figure 5.1

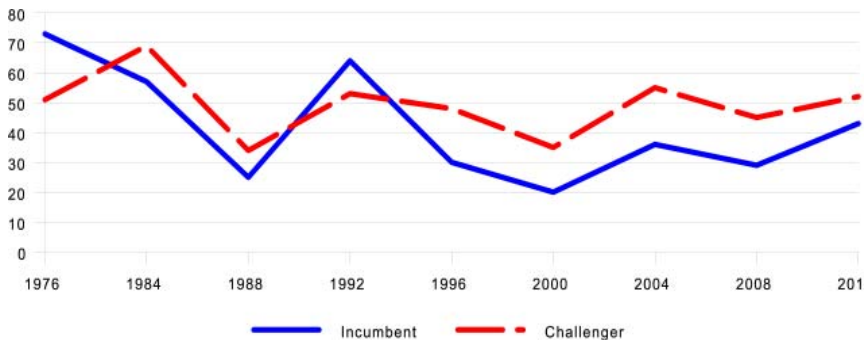

Figure 5.2

FUNCTIONS OF PAST DEEDS IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

Hypothesis 2 predicts that, when discussing their record in office (past deeds), incumbents will acclaim more, and attack less, than challengers. Looking just at the candidates' discussion of record in office (past deeds), we can see that both incumbents and challengers focus most on the incumbents' record. Overall, this contrast is quite sharp as incumbents mostly acclaim their past deeds (68 percent) whereas challengers mainly attack the incumbents' past deeds (79 percent). See Table 5.2 for these data This relationship, again, can be found in every sample of debates examined here: American presidential debates, American vice-presidential debates, U.S. Senate debates, U.S. gubernatorial debates, U.S. mayoral debates, and debates around the world. A *chi-square* test shows that these differences are significant (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 1939.24, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .47$). The effect size is very large at $\varphi = .47$. Again, support for this prediction in this sample of political election debates is very strong.

Table 5.2. Incumbency and Past Deeds in Political Leaders' Debates

	Acclaims	*Attacks*
U.S. Presidential		
Incumbents	**799 (69%)**	362 (31%)
Challengers	242 (17%)	**1153 (83%)**
U.S. Vice Presidential		
Incumbents	**514 (62%)**	318 (38%)
Challengers	188 (19%)	**811 (81%)**
U.S. Senate Debates		
Incumbents	**206 (69%)**	91 (31%)
Challengers	125 (30%)	**285 (70%)**
U.S. Governor		
Incumbents	**403 (75%)**	131 (25%)
Challengers	84 (21%)	**311 (79%)**
U.S. Mayor		
Incumbents	**107 (94%)**	7 (6%)
Challengers	24 (28%)	**63 (72%)**
Non-U.S.		
Incumbents	**656 (63%)**	383 (37%)
Challengers	365 (22%)	**1325 (78%)**
Total		
Incumbents	**2685 (68%)**	1292 (32%)
Challengers	1028 (21%)	**3948 (79%)**

χ^2 (*df* = 1) = 1999.14, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .47$

CONCLUSION

This chapter examines data on the functions of campaign debate discourse from incumbents versus challengers. Both predictions advanced were confirmed here. Incumbents acclaim more, and attack less, than challengers. This contrast is particularly sharp when they discuss their records in office (past deeds). Incumbents are prone to acclaim past deeds whereas challengers are likely to attack on past deeds. This relationship was found in debates for various offices and in a variety of countries. It has also been confirmed in other campaign messages, such as nomination acceptance addresses, television spots, and direct mail brochures (Benoit, 2007). The evidence presented here shows that incumbency status has a substantial influence on the content of political election debates. Again, we see that some elements of the fundamental situation in political campaign debates transcends time, candidate, level of office, and culture.

NOTES

1. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 draw on the following sources: Lincoln-Douglas debates: Benoit and Delbert, 2009; U.S. Senate and gubernatorial debates: Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007; mayoral debates: Benoit and Henson, 2006; Benoit, Henson, and Maltos, 2007. American general presidential: Benoit et al., 2003, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996; Rill and Benoit, 2009; American vice presidential: Benoit and Airne, 2005; Benoit and Henson, 2009; American Senate and gubernatorial: Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007; American mayoral: Benoit, Henson, and Maltos, 2007; Australia: Benoit and Henson, 2007; Benoit and Benoit-Bryan, 2012; Canada: Benoit and Henson, 2007; Benoit, 2012); France: Choi and Benoit, 2009; Germany: Benoit and Hemmer, 2007; Israel: Benoit and Sheafer, 2007; South Korea: Choi and Benoit, 2009; Spain: Herrero and Benoit, 2009; Taiwan: Benoit, Wen, and Yu, 2007; Ukraine: Benoit and Klyukovski, 2006; United Kingdom: Benoit and Benoit-Bryan, in press.

6

Campaign Phase in Political Campaign Debates

Modern general elections in the United States are contested by the nominees of the Democratic and Republican Parties and, occasionally, by candidates representing other political parties. Candidates must first win the primary phase of the campaign in order to obtain their party's nomination for office; then they can run for that office in the general election campaign. Each phase has distinctive characteristics and these differences engender differences in the political campaign debates produced in each campaign phase.

The primary phase of the presidential campaign has been unjustly neglected by political scholars; research on primary campaigns for other elected offices is even less common. The fact that scholars usually focus on the general election campaign is reasonable, just as the greatest emphasis in sports is accorded to the championship (e.g., the Superbowl in football, the World Series in baseball). Presidential primaries are an important way for party members to learn about their leaders and then select the candidate who will represent their party in the Fall. Notice that political party affiliation in one important sense does not determine the winner of primary campaigns: Democrats only compete with Democrats, and Republicans with Republicans, in the primary campaign. Each candidate may argue that he or she is the best Democrat or the best Republican, but it is not possible for a citizen to use political party affiliation as a shortcut to decide how to vote in the primary as in the general election. These campaigns for the party's nomination are significant because they are an opportunity for party members to participate in democracy and exert influence on the direction their party will take. Davis (1997) observed that "in no other Western country do so many people take part in the party nominating process" as in the United States (p. 2).

PRIMARY VERSUS GENERAL CAMPAIGN PHASE

The primary campaign phase merits scholarly attention for several reasons. First, in recent history, it has been essential for a presidential candidate to secure the nomination of the Republican or Democratic Party in order to win the White House. Various candidates—including George Wallace, John Anderson, Ross Perot, and Ralph Nader—have discovered the truth of this assertion. Davis argued that "the presidential nominating process narrows the alternatives from a theoretical potential candidate pool of . . . millions . . . to only two candidates, one Republican and one Democrat, with a realistic chance of winning the White House" (p. 1). So, winning the primary campaign and securing the Democratic or Republican party nomination for president is a necessary (although not a sufficient) condition for becoming president. Third party candidates occasionally win election to lower offices but this is rare: Only 0.5 percent of the 380 U.S. senate races since 1990 were won by third party candidates; only 2 percent of 302 U.S. gubernatorial races were not won by Democratic or Republican candidates (Wikipedia, 2012). So, election primary campaigns for lower offices are also important for scholars to study.

Second, changes in the nomination process have made the primary campaign increasingly important in recent years. Bartels (1988) summarized these changes in the primary campaign:

> The new system is dominated by candidates and by the news media; the old system was dominated by professional party politicians. The central decision-making mechanism in the new system is mass voting; the central mechanism in the old system was face-to-face bargaining. The locus of choice in the new system is the primary ballot box; the locus of choice in the old system was the convention backroom. (p. 13; see also Pious, 2006)

Because political party bosses controlled the nomination, support of primary voters was a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Candidates did not run in past primaries in order to win a majority of the delegates to the nominating conventions; they ran to demonstrate their *ability to garner votes*. For example, John F. Kennedy's 1960 West Virginia primary campaign was important "because it convinced powerful party leaders . . . that Kennedy [a Catholic] could win Protestant votes" (Bartels, 1988, p. 15). Levine noted that in the past "presidential hopefuls generally did not even need to campaign in primaries, which were relatively few in number" (1995, p. 56). As recently as 1968 after President Johnson dropped out of the race Hubert Humphrey became his party's nominee without campaigning in a single primary (Levine, 1995). The Democratic National Convention in 1968, complete with televised riots, is a notorious example of a bitterly disputed convention that may have damaged the Democratic party and contributed to a win by Republican Richard Nixon. To reduce conflict at the nominating conventions and to decrease perceptions that party leaders instead of rank and file party members determined the nomination, both parties increased their use of

primaries and caucuses to select their nominees (Davis, 1997; Kendall, 2000). In 1968, there were only sixteen Republican and seventeen Democratic primaries (Crotty and Jackson, 1985). In 2000, primaries or caucuses were held in all states and the District of Columbia (Federal Election Commission, 2000).

Another reason why presidential primary campaigns are important is that some years feature vulnerable incumbents, such as Ford in 1976, Carter in 1980, or Bush in 1992. It is distinctly possible that a Democrat other than Jimmy Carter could have defeated Gerald Ford in the 1976 general election, that another Republican besides Ronald Reagan could have unseated Carter four years later, or that Bill Clinton was not the only Democrat who could beaten ousted George Bush in the 1992 general election. However, because these three candidates won their parties' nominations in the primary phase, they were the only ones who were entitled to challenge those arguably weak opponents. So, in a very real sense, the primary campaign in these cases may have decided who would ultimately become the president by determining who had the right to run against a vulnerable incumbent. To revisit the sports metaphor used earlier, if one conference is weaker than the other, then the playoff game or games to determine the winner of the stronger conference (semi-finals) may in a real sense determine the overall champion, because that game determines who gets to face the representative of the weaker conference.

Finally, messages in the primary campaign can influence voters. Bartels (1988) offers the following example to illustrate this point:

> At the beginning of 1976, Jimmy Carter was a relatively unknown one-term ex-governor of a medium-sized southern state. Although he had been running for president full-time for more than a year . . . [a] Gallup poll indicated that fewer than 5 percent of the Democratic party rank and file considered him their first choice for the party's nomination.
>
> Five months later, Carter was quite clearly about to become his party's nominee. . . . Carter was the first choice of an absolute majority of Democrats—leading his nearest rival by a margin of almost forty percentage points—and a winner by almost twenty percentage points in trial heats against the incumbent Republican president. (p.3)

Carter's campaign, directly via his messages and indirectly as mediated by news coverage of his campaign, clearly influenced voters and made a difference. Benoit, Hansen, and Verser (2003) conducted a meta-analysis which found that primary election debates have significant effects on viewers; in fact primary debates have even larger effects on viewers than general debates.

The idea that the primary phase merits scholarly attention is important because the two phases of a political campaign—primary and general—have substantial differences. The next section discusses these factors, elucidate additional principles of the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse that pertain to campaign phase, and compare campaign messages to test predictions about the nature of discourse produced in these two phases.

Differences Between Primary and General Campaigns

Primary campaigns differ from general election campaigns in several important ways. I will discuss four of these separately in this section.

Party of opponent. In contested primaries, when more than one candidate seeks the nomination of his or her political party, it is important to realize that those fellow party members are the immediate opponents. For example, Mitt Romney and Barack Obama were opponents in the 2012 general election campaign, but, in a very real sense, they were not opponents in the primary. Romney first had to defeat his Republican rivals in the primary campaign: Michele Bachmann, Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, Jon Huntsman, Gary Johnson, Ron Paul, Tim Pawlenty, Rick Perry, and Rick Santorum. A candidate must win his or her party's nomination first: In a 1980 primary debate in New Hampshire, Ronald Reagan discussed the "eleventh commandment," that Republicans should not attack Republicans in the primary. However, primary candidates must distinguish themselves from immediate opponents, and they must convince voters that they are preferable to those opponents, and attacks on fellow party members are a means of achieving these goals. Functional Theory predicts that acclaims tend to be more common than attacks, but attacks are an important way to distinguish a candidate from his or her opponents.

For example, in the 1992 primaries, President George Bush was still enjoying support from the success of Operation Desert Storm. However, Pat Buchanan challenged Bush for the Republican nomination and Bush had to survive Buchanan's attack and win the Republican nomination before he could run in the general campaign. Similarly, in the early part of the 2000 primary campaign it appeared as if George W. Bush did not fully appreciate this principle, looking past McCain, his most serious challenge, to Gore, mistakenly thinking that his real opponent was Gore at that point in time. McCain won primaries in New Hampshire and Michigan, and for a time threatened to win South Carolina as well (McCain also won Arizona, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont). These events forced the Bush campaign to turn its attention to defeating McCain. The Bush camp refocused his campaign (e.g., his slogan became "A Reformer with Results" instead of a "Compassionate Conservative"). The point is, if a political party's nomination is contested, the candidates' real or immediate opponents are fellow party members, rather than the presumed nominee of the other party.

The nature of one's opponent influences the nature of campaign discourse. For example, compare Bill Clinton's primary campaigns in 1992 and 1996. In his first presidential campaign, the Democratic nomination was sought by Clinton as well as by other Democrats such as Jerry Brown, Tom Harkin, and Paul Tsongas. Clinton mentioned his Democratic opponents in ten of forty primary spots and mentioned the presumed Republican nominee, President George Bush, in but four primary spots. Clinton also responded to attacks from his fellow Democrats in other spots. Here is just one example of these 1992 primary television spots, which focused on one of his Democratic opponents:

> Jerry Brown says he'll fight for we the people. Question is, which people? He says he is for working families. But his tax proposal has been called a flat-out fraud. It cuts taxes for the very rich in half and raised taxes on the middle class. Jerry Brown says he'll clean up politics and limit campaign contributions. But a year ago he helped lead the fight that killed campaign reform and contribution limits in California. So the next time Jerry Brown says he's fighting for the people, ask him which people and which Jerry Brown. (Clinton, 1992 Primary, "Which")

Thus, Clinton, who needed to defeat his Democratic opponents in the primary, could do little to help his general campaign in his 1992 primary messages. He waited until after he had secured the Democratic nomination to focus on attacking his Republican opponent, President Bush.

In contrast, Clinton's bid for re-election in 1996 was not contested in Democratic primaries. Thus, he could, and did, focus his primary campaign on attacking Bob Dole (the presumptive Republican nominee) instead of other Democrats. For example, in this campaign, Clinton and Democratic National Committee (DNC) spots run during the primary season that mentioned Dole or showed his picture in twenty-five out of forty television spots, such as this one:

> The Oval Office. If it were Bob Dole sitting here, he would have already cut Medicare $270 billion. Toxic polluters off the hook. No to the Brady Bill; 60,000 criminals allowed to buy handguns. Slashed education. President Clinton stood firm and defended our values. But next year, if Newt Gingrich controls Congress and his partner, Bob Dole, enters the Oval Office, there'll be nobody there to stop them. (Clinton, 1996, "Nobody")

Clearly, Clinton started his general campaign early with spots such as this one. He did not need to expend effort or money getting past primary candidates from his own political party. As noted earlier, Buchanan challenged President Bush in 1992. At least five of Bush's primary television spots explicitly responded to Buchanan. Thus, except in the case of uncontested primaries, it is vital for candidates, as well as theorists and analysts, to focus on the candidate's immediate opponent (or opponents). There is no question that the primary campaign phase differs from the general election campaign.

Number of opponents. The number of candidates, and therefore the number of opponents, usually varies by campaign phase. Although there are numerous third party candidates in the general campaign, there are usually only two viable candidates in that phase. In recent years, only George Wallace in 1968 and Ross Perot in 1992 attracted substantial support: Humphrey attacked Wallace in television spots and Perot was invited to the debates in 1992. Ralph Nader ran in 2000 (and some thought he drained support away from Vice President Al Gore, giving Bush the election). When there are only two viable contenders, as is usually the case in the general campaign, there is really no choice about whom to attack: The Republican nominee attacks the Democratic nominee and vice versa. However, contested primaries may have at least four or five serious contenders and at times far more than that participate

in a given debate (and in such encounters even non-viable candidates are difficult to ignore). In 2012, ten candidates contested the Republican nomination (Michele Bachmann, Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, Jon Huntsman, Gary Johnson, Ron Paul, Tim Pawlenty, Rick Perry, Rick Santorum, and Mitt Romney); only two candidates, Obama and Romney, were viable contenders in the general election.

Target audience. In the primary campaign, the candidates' goal is to win the most votes from fellow-party members (a partial exception would be McCain's appeal to non-Republicans to vote for him in "open" primaries in 2000). Primary votes determine how delegates to the parties' national nominating convention will vote (which candidate they support). This means that the target audience in this phase of the campaign should be members of one's own party. Republican candidates need to secure the approval of their party members in the primary, on the right of the ideological spectrum, whereas Democratic candidates must persuade their party members, on the left. Of course, in an uncontested primary, as with Clinton in 1996, Bush in 2004, or Obama in 2012, candidates can start the general campaign early, appealing to voters beyond those in their own political party.

However, in the general campaign, the party nominees can count on the support of most of their party members. They may wish to try to increase the likelihood that their party members will actually vote on election day; they may also attempt to keep potential vote defectors from their own party from defecting, or try to attract potential vote defectors from the other party. But most effort in the general campaign should be directed toward winning the support of the independent and undecided voters who often cluster at the middle of the political spectrum. No candidate can assure a win relying only on votes from his own political party because neither political party has the support of a majority of voters. Thus, the audience which matters most in a contested primary are members of one's own political party; in the general campaign, the target audience shifts to focus more on independent or undecided voters and potential vote defectors.

This analysis explains why candidates are sometimes said to "run to the right (or left) in primaries and then to the center in the general campaign." The principal audience in these two campaign phases is quite different. In order to obtain their party's nomination, a candidate must convince the majority of *his or her party members* that he or she is preferable to members of his own political party. For Republicans, this means emphasizing issues on the right of the political spectrum; for Democrats, it means stressing issues on the left of the political spectrum. However, after the party nominees have been selected and they turn to the general campaign, they can for the most part take for granted the votes of most partisans (worrying only about potential vote defectors). But to win the general phase of the election, candidates must appeal to *other groups of voters*—undecided, independent, and potential vote defectors—voters whose concerns may be quite different from those of committed partisans. Benoit and Hansen (2001) found evidence that presidential candidates' television spots focus more on their own party's issues in the primary than the general campaign, evidence that this message adaption does occur. Thus, candidates should

emphasize different issues and take positions that lie more in the middle of the political spectrum in the general than the primary campaign. In other words, the shift in target audience explains a related shift in campaign discourse.

Voter knowledge. Voters know less about the candidates in the primary phase than the general campaign. This is one of the reasons primary debates have larger effects than general debates (Benoit, Hansen, and Verser, 2003). Voters have less knowledge about primary than general candidates for two reasons. First, many of the primary contenders are simply not particularly well-known. In 2000, for example, most voters knew little about Republican candidates Gary Bauer or Orrin Hatch. In 2004, Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Senator Carol Moseley Braun, and Reverend Al Shapton were not household names. Voters know little about many of the candidates who are active participants in the primary campaign. For example, at the start of the 1992 presidential primary season, Mayer and Busch (2004) reported that "in October 1991 more than 75 percent of all registered voters admitted that they did not know enough about Bill Clinton, Paul Tsongas, Bob Kerrey, or Tom Harkin to provide an evaluation of them; another 10 percent said they were 'undecided'" (p. 57). So, voters have relatively little knowledge of the presidential candidates in the primary.

Second, the two candidates who become their parties' nominees are better known to voters in the general campaign than they were in the primary. For example, because of spots, debates, other messages, and news coverage of the primary campaign, voters in 2012 knew more about Mitt Romney in September, during the general campaign, than they did in February, during the primary. President Obama was very well-known in 2012. So, the two main candidates in the general campaign were better known in the Fall than any of the Republican contenders during the primaries. The need to introduce the candidates—who are less well-known in the primary—encourages an emphasis on character in that phase of the campaign.

Primary and General Campaign Messages

Based on this analysis of the nature of the presidential primary campaign, Functional Theory makes four predictions about primary campaign discourse. Three reasons can be adduced to expect fewer attacks in the primary than the general phase of the campaign. First, there are fewer policy differences between members of the same political party (i.e., in the primary campaign) which means there are fewer opportunities to attack primary opponents. Second, the eventual nominee will want to have the support of the other candidates in the general election. That is, in 2012 Mitt Romney surely hoped that Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, Rick Perry, Ron Paul, and the other contenders for the Republican nomination would support him in the general campaign, just as they would have wanted Romney's support if they had won the Republican nomination. Thus, a desire to have the support of one's primary opponents may be a reason to moderate attacks in the primary; there is no similar reason to hold back in the general campaign. Perhaps more importantly, a third

reason to moderate attacks in the primary is the desire to win over the support of those citizens who voted for and donated money to your primary opponents. Thus, Functional Theory predicts that acclaims should be more common, and attacks less common, in the primary than the general campaign.

P1. *Acclaims are more common, and attacks are less common, in primary than general campaign messages.*

There are two reasons to expect character to be discussed more frequently, and policy less often, in the primary than the general campaign. As suggested earlier, candidates are less well-known in the primary phase, which means they need to introduce themselves to the voters. Second, as noted above, there are fewer policy differences between candidates who belong to the same party. All Republicans—or all Democrats—do not agree on every issue. Nevertheless, there are more differences between two candidates from different political parties than between two candidates from the same party. This means fewer opportunities to attack on policy—because it would be silly, of course, for one candidate to attack an opponent who advocated the same policy as the attacker—and fewer places to acclaim distinctiveness on policy.

P2. *Character is more common, and policy less common, in primary than general campaign messages.*

Primary campaigns usually include more than two candidates. For example, ten candidates participated in at least one of the 2012 Republican presidential primary debates: Michele Bachmann, Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, Jon Huntsman, Gary Johnson, Ron Paul, Tim Pawlenty, Rick Perry, Mitt Romney, and Rick Santorum. In this situation, when they attack, candidates must decide which opponent to attack. Some attacks are principled (made because one candidate disagrees with an opponent), some are personal (made when one candidate simply dislikes another), and some attacks are strategic (made to try to win the nomination). In the example discussed earlier (ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, Real Clear Politics, 2012), here is one ordering of the candidates still in play at one point during the primary campaign.

Romney	33 percent
Santorum	29 percent
Gingrich	14 percent
Paul	12 percent

Every candidate has a strategic reason to attack Romney: The other three have to manage to overtake Romney to win. Attacks, if persuasive (and if backlash from the attack does not unduly hurt the attacker), can reduce the desirability of other candidates. Paul has a strategic reason to also attack Gingrich and Santorm; Gingrich has a strategic reason to attack Santorum. No candidate has a strategic reason to attack

Paul—every other candidate was already ahead of Santorum in the polls. Candidates can attack for other reasons. They may genuinely dislike another candidate and his or her policies. However, strategic considerations are one factor influencing target of attacks in the primary campaign. For this reason, Functional Theory predicts that:

P3. More attacks are targeted at the front-runner than at other primary candidates.

Of course, candidates are not limited to attacking opponents from their own political party. They can, and sometimes do, attack the presumed nominee of the opposing party. During the 2012 Republican primary, candidates attacked one another and they attacked President Obama. However, as just explained, the front-runner has no strategic reason to attack other Republicans whereas every other Republican has a strategic reason to target one or more fellow-Republicans. So, Functional Theory predicts that the front-runner is significantly more likely to attack the other party than other candidates.

P4. The front-runner is more likely to attack the presumed nominee of the opposing party than other primary candidates.

Testing these hypotheses will add to our understanding of campaign phase and political campaign debates.

SAMPLE OF DEBATES

The sample used to contrast the content of debates in these two campaign phases comes from U.S. presidential primary versus general debates (primary debates: 1948, 1960, 1960, 1976–2012; Benoit et al., 2002, 2007; Benoit, Glantz, and Airne, 2013; Benoit, Henson, and Sudbrock, 2011; general debates: 1960, 1976–2012; Benoit et al., 2003, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Glantz, in press; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996; Rill and Benoit, 2009); non-presidential debates (twenty-one U.S. Senate debates from 1998-2006; Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007; fifteen gubernatorial debates between 1994 and 2004; Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007; and four primary debates two gubernatorial, one Senate, one House; Benoit and Henson, 2006). We have no data on primary debates from other countries so debates from around the world cannot be employed to test these predictions.

FUNCTIONS OF PRIMARY AND GENERAL DEBATES

The data presented in Table 6.1[1] confirm the first prediction. American presidential primary debates use acclaims more (66 percent to 57 percent) and attacks less (29 percent to 35 percent) than general election debates. In non-presidential debates,

Table 6.1. Functions of Political Debates by Campaign Phase

	Acclaims	*Attacks*	*Defenses*
American Presidential			
Primary	**21901 (66%)**	9666 (29%)	1667 (5%)
General	4800 (57%)	**2958 (35%)**	655 (8%)
Non-Presidential			
Primary	**699 (71%)**	211 (22%)	68 (7%)
General	5377 (58%)	**3584 (37%)**	687 (7%)
Total			
Primary	**22600 (66%)**	9877 (29%)	1735 (5%)
General	10177 (56%)	**6542 (36%)**	1342 (7%)

χ^2 (df = 2) = 492.92, $p < .0001$, $V = .1$

the same relationship occurs: more acclaims (71 percent to 58 percent) and fewer attacks (29 percent to 36 percent) in primary than general debates. Statistical analysis shows that these differences are significant (χ^2 [df = 2] = 492.92, $p < .0001$, $V = .1$). It is unfortunate that we do not have a larger sample of non-presidential primary debates, although the sample does include primary debates from the U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and governor.

TOPICS OF PRIMARY AND GENERAL DEBATES

Turning to the second prediction, the data reported here support the greater emphasis on character (and less on policy) in the primary campaign phase. In every grouping, policy is a more common topic than character. However, in presidential primary debates, character is discussed more (30 percent to 26 percent) and policy less (70 percent to 74 percent) than in general election debates (see Table 6.2). In non-presidential campaign debates, the same relationship occurs: more discussion of character (40 percent

Table 6.2. Topics of Political Debates by Campaign Phase

	Policy	*Character*
American Presidential		
Primary	21832 (70%)	**9468 (30%)**
General	**5180 (74%)**	1828 (26%)
Non-Presidential		
Primary	531 (60%)	**349 (40%)**
General	**5703 (72%)**	2214 (28%)
Total		
Primary	22363 (69%)	**9817 (31%)**
General	**10883 (73%)**	4042 (27%)

χ^2 (df = 1) = 57.58, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .03$

to 28 percent) than policy (60 percent to 72 percent) in primary than general election debates. Statistical analysis confirms that these are significant differences (χ^2 [df = 1] = 57.58, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .03$), although the effect size is moderate.

TARGET OF ATTACK IN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATES

Benoit et al. (2002) investigated the target of attack in American presidential primary debates. Benoit et al. (2002) provide two kinds of evidence to support this expectation. First, the front-runner was the target of more attacks than other candidates. They found that in campaign debates:

> The front-runner, on average, received 16.2 attacks in these primary debates. Non-front-runners, again on average, received 5.7 attacks. Thus, front-runners are about three times more likely to be the target of an attack in primary debates as the other candidates. (p. 126)

Second, they located public opinion data on the relative popularity of candidates in debates, omitting primary debates with only two candidates participating. They report a significant positive correlation between a candidate's position in the polls at the time of a debate and the number of attacks aimed at that candidate in a debate ($r = .428$, $p < .001$, $n = 59$). This confirms the third prediction on campaign phase.

Given that the front-runner has less reason to attack the other candidates of his or her political party, it seems likely that front-runners would be more likely than other debate participants to target the presumed nominee of the opposing party. Their data support this expectation:

> Front-runners directed 51 percent of their attacks toward the other party, while other candidates aimed only 37 percent of their attacks at the other party. Another way to say this is that non-front-runners devote 63 percent of their attacks to their own party, while front-runners target only 49 percent of their attacks to fellow party members. A *chi-square* calculated on target of attack from front-runners and other candidates was significant (χ^2[df = 1] = 22.32, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .12$; Benoit et al., 2002, pp. 127–128).

Thus, the data indicate that candidates in primary debates use at least some of their attacks strategically. Front-runners are significantly more likely to attack the other party compared with other candidates.

CONCLUSION

These data support the predictions of Functional Theory on content of messages in primary and general election campaigns. Data from primary and general presidential debates as well as primary and general non-presidential debates confirm the first two

predictions. Primary campaign messages tend to acclaim more and attack less than general campaign messages. Primary messages stress character more and policy less than messages from the general election campaign. The data on functions and topics of primary versus general debates are consistent with findings on American presidential television spots (Benoit, 2007). Data from presidential primary debates support the other two predictions, showing that campaign attacks have a strategic element. Front-runners are the target of more attack than other candidates and front-runners are more likely to attack the opposing party than other candidates. Clearly, campaign phase has an influence on the nature of campaign messages. The relationship between campaign phase and the nature of political election debates occurs across time, candidates, and level of office.

NOTE

1. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 draw on the following sources: American presidential primary: Benoit et al., 2002, 2007; Benoit, Glantz, and Airne, 2013; Benoit, Henson, and Sudbrock, 2011; American presidential general: Benoit et al., 2003, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Glantz, in press; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996; Rill and Benoit, 2009; non-presidential debates: Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007; Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007; Benoit and Henson, 2006.

7

News Coverage of Political Campaign Debates

Historically, newspapers have been an important resource for citizens to learn about political candidates. Hollihan (2009) explained that "for national political news coverage, the most thorough, comprehensive, and substantive political information regarding political campaigns, political issues, and public policies is available to readers of comprehensive large city daily papers" (p. 104). The news media can supplement knowledge about the candidates and their policy positions provided by candidates themselves; newspapers can offer a less biased view than that presented by the candidates (albeit not an entirely unbiased point of view), and, for those who do not pay attention to the candidates' messages, the news coverage is a particularly important source of information for voters. Hansen's (2004) analysis of National Election Studies data found that newspaper use was related to higher levels of knowledge. And there is no question that newspaper readers are an extremely important group of voters. NES data from 2000 reveals that those who read newspapers are more likely to vote in presidential elections than those who do not ($\chi^2[df = 1] = 101.93$, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .26$), so newspaper readers have a disproportionate impact at the polls. Those who watch a debate can have their perceptions influenced by a news story about that debate. Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan (2005) found that paying attention to the news was positively related to knowledge of the candidates' issue stands and were more concerned about the issues when choosing a presidential candidate. Kendall (1997) argued that "there is much evidence of the influence of the media's interpretation of the debates" (p. 1). Hellweg, Pfau, and Brydon (1992) concluded that "news commentary does influence viewers' perceptions about debates" (p. 99). Studies show that the amount of news coverage devoted to candidates, the tone of that coverage, and the amount of horse race coverage concerning a candidate can influence voters' perceptions of candidates (Ross, 1992). Even today, with the importance of the Internet so high, newspapers remain an important source of information

about political campaigns—and of course newspapers have been busy developing online versions. Recall from chapter 1 that news reports about debates can supplement information obtained from watching a debate or provide information to voters who did not tune in for a debate.

Election debates are extremely important events in modern political campaigns. Chapter 1 demonstrated the importance of campaign debates; research shows that debates have multiple effects on viewers. Given the drama inherent in debates, with candidates confronting one another face-to-face, it should be no surprise that newspapers lavish attention on debates. A vital question is the extent to which news coverage of a campaign debate accurately reflects the nature of the debate. Patterson (1994) explained, "The news is not a mirror held up to society. It is a selective rendition of events" (p. 60). This chapter investigates news coverage of election debates.

NEWS COVERAGE OF CAMPAIGN DEBATES

Considerable research has investigated news coverage of presidential campaigns generally. Some studies look at television campaign coverage of campaigns (e.g., Farnsworth and Lichter, 2003; Lichter, Noyes, and Kaid, 1999). Other research has examined presidential primary campaign news (Steger, 1999; Vinson and Moore, 2007). News about the political parties' nominating conventions (e.g., Adams; 1985; Patterson, 1980) has been investigated. Coverage of the general election campaign (e.g., Robinson and Sheehan, 1983; Sigelman and Bullock, 1991) has been investigated. Other studies have analyzed news coverage of non-presidential political races (e.g., Graber, 1989; Kahn and Kenney, 1999; Serini, Powers, and Johnson, 1998; West, 1994). News coverage of British elections has also been studied (Sinclair, 1982).

Benoit, Hemmer, and Stein (2010) compared newspaper coverage of American presidential primary campaigns from 1952–2004. The primary campaign news stories in this sample reported attacks (42 percent) more often than they occurred in candidate TV spots (29 percent), debates (35 percent), or direct mail advertising (15 percent). Horse race (e.g., polls, campaign strategy, or campaign events) was the most common topic of these stories; after that, character was a more common topic than policy. Considering just policy and character, primary campaign stories addressed character in 58 percent of utterances; more than in television ads (46 percent), debates (31 percent), or direct mail advertising (38 percent). Benoit, Stein, and Henson (2005) investigated newspaper coverage of American presidential general elections, 1952–2000. Unlike candidates messages (TV spots, debates, brochures), these stories stressed attacks more than acclaims: 59 percent of evaluative statements in stories were negative whereas attacks were 24 percent of acceptance addresses, 39 percent of TV spots, 37 percent of debates, and 30 percent of direct mail advertising. Furthermore, (after horse race), news stories devoted more utterances to character (55 percent) than acceptance addresses (45 percent), television advertising (39 percent), debates (25 percent), or direct mail advertising (24 percent). This

means that news coverage of both primary and general election campaigns report attacks more often than they occur in candidates messages and discuss character more than the candidates themselves.

Considerable research investigates the question of whether media coverage contains an ideological balance (see, e.g., the meta-analysis by D'Alessio, 2012 and D'Alessio and Allen, 2000, or the review by Niven, 2003). However, most research does not investigate stories that focus on campaign debates in particular. One exception is Kendall's (1997) study, which investigated television network news coverage of the 1996 presidential debates:

> Media interpretations have been found to follow a pattern: They devote little time to the content of the debates, and much time to the personalities of the candidates and the process by which they make the decision to debate, prepare to debate, and "spin" the stories about expectations for and effects of the debate. (p. 1)

She reported that the stories tended to discuss the relationship of the debates to the campaign and that "the candidates' own words in the debates" were "seldom shown" (p. 5). This chapter compares the content (functions and topics) of campaign debates with newspaper stories *about these debates*. Benoit and Currie (2001) explain that timing of television news influences the nature of TV coverage of debates:

> Presidential debates are always held in the evening after the network news. By the time the evening news has the opportunity to discuss the debates—on the day *after* the debate—the debates are now roughly twenty hours old and hardly news. Thus, television news has already moved on to discussion of reactions to the debates. It is unfortunate that this means that the evening news rarely reports on what transpired in the debates. (p. 37)

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on newspaper coverage of election debates rather than television news coverage. Because past research has established that news coverage of political campaigns generally tends to stress attacks, the same pattern should occur in news coverage of debates:

> H1. Newspaper stories about political election debates will discuss attacks more, and acclaims less, than candidates use these functions in the debates.

Similarly, past research has established that news on political campaigns usually emphasizes character more than policy, stories about election debates are likely to stress character more than policy:

> H2. Newspaper stories about political election debates will discuss character more, and policy less, than candidates address these topics in the debates.

These hypotheses will add to our understanding of the nature of newspaper coverage of political election debates.

SAMPLE OF NEWS COVERAGE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

The sample in the literature consists of U.S. presidential primary election debates 1980–2004 (Benoit, Hemmer, and Stein, 2004), U.S. presidential general election campaign debates 1980–2004 (Benoit, Stein, and Hansen, 2004), and U.S. Senate debates 1998–2004 (Benoit and Davis, 2007). This chapter also offers new data were collected for five U.S. gubernatorial debates (comparative debate data was used from Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007) and seven Prime Minister debates from Australia (two debates, comparative debate data from Benoit and Henson, 2007, and Benoit and Benoit-Bryan 2012), Canada (two debates, comparative debate data from Benoit and Henson, 2007, and Benoit, 2012), and the United Kingdom (three debates, comparative debate data from Benoit and Benoit-Bryan, in press).

The new sample includes three newspaper stories per debate, located by searching newspapers the day following a debate and using as search terms the candidates' names and "debate." In these stories only reports of the candidates' statements in the debates were coded (both quotations and paraphrases). Other kinds of statements were not coded, including statements by others (e.g., spin from campaign staff, observations by voters), polls about the debates, statements by candidates before or after the debate, evaluative comments by reporters about the debates or the candidates, and reports of the questions asked of the candidates.

To illustrate the elements of newspaper coverage of campaign debates studied here, examples of the three functions and two topics from stories about these debates are offered (all examples from Associated Press, 2002). In the 2002 debate in Iowa between Vilsack and Gross, this passage illustrates a report of an acclaim: "Vilsack said that he has steered the state through tough economic times without boosting taxes." The reporter discusses a candidate's acclaim of an accomplishment. The article reports a different perspective on the incumbent's record, illustrating an attack: "Gross said Vilsack bungled the state's budget and didn't see the economic recession coming, adding that thousands of jobs have been lost in recent months, while Vilsack stood idly by and did nothing." Furthermore, Gross alleged that Vilsack would advocate a tax increase after the election. Vilsack provided an example of a defense when he replied that "'We have no plans to raise income taxes or sales taxes in this state,' said Vilsack." Gross's discussion of jobs in the debate is an example of a story's coverage of policy: "We'll establish a hot line for good-paying jobs in Iowa. When the phone rings for good jobs in Iowa we'll answer." Reports about both candidates illustrated character when they attacked each other's honesty: "'Doug, what is it with you and the truth?' asked Vilsack. 'You're strangers.'" "'Speaking of strangers and the truth, you're a country mile away from it,' Gross shot back." So, these passages illustrate reporting of the three functions and two topics of campaign discourse.

Before testing the hypotheses investigated in this chapter I want to determine how much of the debate is reported in an average newspaper story about debates. Not surprisingly, the news is highly selective in its reporting of the content of debates.

The mean article discusses 7 percent of the themes articulated by candidates in a debate. This average ranges from 4 percent in non-U.S. political leaders' debates to 11 percent in American general debates and U.S. Senate debates. Clearly, newspaper stories written about debates do not present the entire content of debates; they select portions of the debate to report. Next, I present the results of the data testing the two hypotheses addressed here: the question of whether these stories accurately reflect the content of debates (functions and topics).

FUNCTIONS OF NEWS COVERAGE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

The data reported in Table 7.1[1] concern the functions of political campaign debates compared with newspaper stories about those debates. In every case—American

Table 7.1. Functions of News Coverage of Political Campaign Debates

	Acclaims	*Attacks*	*Defenses*
Presidential General Debates			
Debates	**2690 (61%)**	1363 (31%)	336 (8%)
News	969 (41%)	**1160 (50%)**	214 (9%)
Presidential Primary Debates			
Debates	**5959 (66%)**	2719 (30%)	337 (4%)
News	1419 (43%)	**1689 (52%)**	170 (5%)
U.S. Senate Debates			
Debates	**1346 (60%)**	597 (29%)	218 (11%)
News	163 (39%)	**200 (48%)**	57 (14%)
Gubernatorial Debates			
Debates	**657 (68%)**	276 (28%)	37 (4%)
News	148 (47%)	**154 (49%)**	14 (4%)
Australian Debates			
Debates	**342 (56%)**	234 (38%)	33 (5%)
News	73 (50%)	**68 (47%)**	5 (3%)
Canadian Debates			
Debates	**1175 (62%)**	607 (32%)	119 (6%)
News	33 (26%)	**87 (69%)**	66 (4%)
United Kingdom Debates			
Debates	**1000 (60%)**	604 (36%)	75 (4%)
News	115 (49%)	**115 (49%)**	4 (2%)
Total			
Debates	**13169 (64%)**	6400 (31%)	1155 (6%)
News	2920 (42%)	**3473 (50%)**	530 (8%)

χ^2 (df = 2) = 984.42, $p < .0001$, V =.19

presidential primary debates, American general election debates, U.S. senate debates, U.S. gubernatorial debates, and non-U.S. debates—the candidates debate messages contained more acclaims, and fewer attacks, than the newspaper stories about these debates. Overall, candidates use acclaims in 64 percent of statements whereas newspaper stories report on acclaims in only 42 percent of themes. On the other hand, candidates attack in but 31 percent of their debate statements; news stories about these encounters report attacks in 50 percent of their themes. Clearly, the first hypothesis is confirmed: News stories about the debates report attacks more, and acclaims less, than the candidates use these functions. Statistical analysis confirms that these differences are significant (χ^2 [df = 2] = 984.42, $p < .0001$, V =.19). This relationship (fewer acclaims and more attacks in newspaper stories) occurs consistently and has a fairly large effect size; the average difference in coverage of attacks is 19 percent.

TOPICS OF NEWS COVERAGE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN DEBATES

Table 7.2 shows the data on topics of debates and newspaper coverage of debates. In the sample of debates investigated here (American presidential primary debates, American general election debates, U.S. senate debates, U.S. gubernatorial debates, and United Kingdom but not Australian debates) candidates discuss policy more and character less than newspaper stories about those debates. Overall, candidates discussed policy in 68 percent of their utterances whereas news stories discussed policy in 63 percent of themes. Candidates discussed character in 32 percent of their debate themes whereas newspaper stories addressed character in 37 percent of statements. Statistical analysis shows that these differences are statistically significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 70.5, $p < .0001$, φ= .05). Although the relationship is consistent across these debates, the effect size is not as large here as for functions. The average difference in topics is 5 percent (68 percent versus 63 percent, 32 percent versus 37 percent).

CONCLUSION

This chapter compares the content of debates for a variety of offices (American presidential primary debates, American general election debates, U.S. senate debates, U.S. gubernatorial debates, and non-U.S. debates) with the content of newspaper stories about those debates. Results indicate that newspaper stories about political election debates are very selective—and quantifies this selectivity. On average, a newspaper story about a debate reports only 7 percent of the statements made by candidates in a debate. Furthermore, news reports about debates have a pronounced tendency to accentuate attacks—reporting attacks more and acclaims less than candidates use these functions—and character—discussing character less and policy more than the candidates address these topics. These conclusions are

Table 7.2. Topics of News Coverage of Political Campaign Debates

	Policy	*Character*
Presidential General Debates		
Debates	**2918 (74%)**	1006 (26%)
News	1542 (69%)	**702 (31%)**
Presidential Primary Debates		
Debates	**5312 (65%)**	2844 (35%)
News	1873 (60%)	**1240 (40%)**
U.S. Senate Debates		
Debates	**1307 (71%)**	536 (29%)
News	210 (57%)	**156 (43%)**
Gubernatorial		
Debates	**569 (61%)**	364 (39%)
News	154 (52%)	**144 (48%)**
Australian Debates		
Debates	82 (55%)	**67 (45%)**
News	**406 (70%)**	170 (30%)
Canadian Debates		
Debates	**1122 (63%)**	660 (37%)
News	50 (42%)	**70 (58%)**
United Kingdom Debates		
Debates	**1259 (78%)**	345 (22%)
News	126 (55%)	**104 (45%)**
Total		
Debates	**12569 (68%)**	5822 (32%)
News	4361 (63%)	**2586 (37%)**

χ^2 (df = 1) = 70.5, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .05$

supported by analysis of political campaign debates for various offices (president, prime minister, senator, governor), in various countries (Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, United States [predictions on topic were not supported for Australia]), in both primary and general election campaigns. So, those who rely on the news for their knowledge of campaign debates, or even for those who supplement watching debates with newspaper stories about them, receive a clearly slanted picture. And the same false impression—that campaign messages are mainly attacks and mostly about character—is fostered by news coverage of political campaigns generally (Benoit, Hemmer, and Stein, 2010; Benoit, Stein, and Hansen, 2005) is encouraged by news coverage of political campaign debates. If people think campaigns are negative and focus on image (character), those impressions are fostered by news coverage. News coverage about debates is an important means for information to reach voters, but it is important to realize that journalists have a significant tendency to over-represent attacks and character in their stories.

NOTE

1. Tables 7.1 and 7.2 draw on the following sources: American presidential primary election debate news coverage: Benoit, Hemmer, and Stein, 2004; American presidential general election debate news coverage: Benoit, Stein, and Hansen, 2004; and U.S. Senate debates: Benoit and Davis, 2007. These tables also report previously unpublished data on news coverage of gubernatorial debates and Prime Minister debates in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

8

Issue Ownership, Functional Federalism, and Retrospective versus Prospective Voting in American Political Campaign Debates

Data from the study of political debates have been used to investigate three theories that were developed in political science: Issue Ownership, Functional Federalism, and Retrospective versus Prospective voting. These theories and the associated data will be discussed in this chapter. The data for research on Issue Ownership and Functional Federalism were generated with computer content analysis. One study (Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen, 2003–2004) produced a list of words (generated from American presidential TV spots) of words for various issues such as jobs, education, crime, foreign policy, and health care. These topics were divided into issues owned by Democrats and Republicans (for Issue Ownership) and into national and state issues (for Functional Federalism). The transcripts of political debates were edited to eliminate all statements that were not made by candidates; for issue ownership separate files were created for statements by Democratic and Republican candidates. Software counted the number of times the words in each issue list occurred in a file (Concordance, 2012).

ISSUE OWNERSHIP

Petrocik (1996) focuses on problems (issues) and argues that a political party has an advantage to exploit when voters perceive that it is better able to handle a problem than the opposing party. Issue ownership arises in two ways. First, over time, political parties can acquire ownership of an issue:

> Party constituency ownership of an issue is much more long-term (although it can change and occasionally exhibits fluctuation) because its foundation is (1) the relatively stable, but different social bases, that distinguish party constituencies in modern party systems and (2) the link between political conflict and social structure. (p. 827)

Second, the "record of the incumbent creates a handling advantage when one party can be blamed for current difficulties" (p. 827). Such difficulties as "wars, failed international or domestic policies, unemployment and inflation, or official corruption" can provide the out party with a "'lease'—short-term ownership—of a performance issue" (p. 827). Although the forms of issue ownership vary in the length of advantage they confer on a political party, owning or leasing an issue has the same potential advantage.

Petrocik notes that "the campaigns waged by the candidates increase the salience of some problems, and, in doing so, cause voters to use their party linkage perception of the issue handling ability of the candidates to choose between (or among) them" (p. 827). Essentially, the argument is that when a candidate stresses an issue during the campaign that emphasis should have an agenda-setting effect (see, e.g., McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Weaver, McCombs, and Shaw, 2004), increasing the salience of that issue for voters. Presumably, issues of higher salience will exert a greater influence on voting behavior. An ABC news poll (9/23–26/2002) reported that 51 percent of respondents believed that Republicans could do a better job handling crime compared with 30 percent who believed Democrats fought crime better than Republicans. In the same poll people said that Democrats did a better job handling Social Security than Republicans, 50 percent to 33 percent. If the attitudes reported in this poll were held by voters on election day in 2004, President Bush would have a decided advantage over Senator Kerry if crime was uppermost in the minds of citizens. In contrast, Kerry would have enjoyed a distinct advantage if Social Security mattered most to the electorate on the day they voted. So, candidates have a reason to stress the issues owned by their party in messages hoping that those issues will become more important to voters, advantaging them at the polls.

Damore (2005) discusses the concept of "issue convergence," the idea that opposing candidates can talk about the same issues (see also Pfau and Kenski, 1990 or Sigelman and Buell, 2004). Although they see this as a criticism of Issue Ownership Theory, Petrocik did not argue that presidential candidates never discuss the same issues or claimed that candidates would only discuss the issues owned by their political party; he claimed that Democratic and Republican candidates emphasized different issues. The data reported here clearly shows that candidates from both political parties discuss many of the same issues (as advocates of issue convergence claim) and that Democratic candidates emphasize Democratic issues more, and Republican issues less, than Republican candidates.

Several studies offer evidence that bears on Issue Ownership theory. Petrocik (1996) provided public opinion polls from 1988–1991 on a number of issues to indicate which parties owned those issues at that point in time.

> Democrats are seen as better able to handle welfare problems. Perceptions of the parties on moral issues (e.g., crime and protecting moral values) favor the GOP. The data also document the GOP's hold on foreign policy and defense through the late 1980s. Opinions were mixed on economic matters, but were generally a GOP asset (by an aver-

> age of about thirteen points). Government spending, inflation, and taxation were also Republican issues. (p. 831)

The data confirmed the existence of issue ownership patterns among voters during this time period.

Petrocik (1996) investigated the question of whether candidates tend to use campaigns to stress issues owned by their own political party. Content analysis of *New York Times* coverage of the presidential campaign from 1952–1988 revealed that "presidential candidates emphasize issues owned by their party, although there are notable election and party differences" (p. 833). Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen (2003–2004), employing data from 1952–2000, found that both nomination acceptance addresses and general television spots confirm issue ownership predictions (although they noted a tendency for presidential candidates to emphasize Republican issues more than Democratic issues overall, arguing that Republicans tend to own more national issues than Democrats). Similarly, a tendency for presidential candidates to emphasize their own party's issues more than their opponents has been demonstrated in presidential primary television spots (Benoit and Hansen, 2002)—and they note that candidates have a tendency to stress their own party's issues even more in the primary than the general campaign (Benoit and Hansen, 2004). Other research reveals issue ownership patterns in non-presidential spots (Benoit and Airne, 2005; Brazeal and Benoit, 2008) and in *New York Times*' coverage of non-presidential spots (Brasher, 2003). Thus, various data confirm the prediction of Issue Ownership Theory that candidates exhibit a tendency to emphasize the issues owned by their own political party in their campaign messages.

Other research has investigated the effects of issue ownership on voters. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994) found that messages on Democratic issues were more effective when they were attributed to Democratic than Republican sources (and messages on GOP issues were more persuasive when the source was a Republican rather than a Democrat). Simon (2002) found that candidates were less persuasive when they engaged in "dialogue" on the other party's issues. Abbe, Goodliffe, Herrnson, and Patterson (2003) Finally, Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen (2003/2004; see also Petrocik, 1996) report that there is a strong relationship "between the vote and the issue ownership bias of the problems of concern to the electorate" (p. 617; see also Benoit, 2007c). Issue Ownership, therefore, has been found to influence voters and voting behavior.

Sample of Debates

The data examined here are taken from eighty-six presidential primary debates 1948–2008 (Benoit et al., 2002; Benoit, Henson, and Sudbrock, 2011), twenty Presidential general debates 1960 and 1976–2000 (Benoit et al., 2003; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996), and twelve gubernatorial, twelve senate 2000–2004 (Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2007).

Results

Data show that political campaign debates in the United States follow the predictions of Issue Ownership Theory. Although there is a tendency for candidates from both political parties to discuss Republican issues more than Democratic issues (see Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen, 2003–2004), Democratic candidates in general election debates discussed Democratic issues more (39 percent to 33 percent) and Republican-owned issues less (49 percent to 67 percent) than Republicans. Statistical analysis confirms that these differences are significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 28.25, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .06$).

Data from presidential primary debates tell the same story. Democrats stress issues owned by their political party more than Republicans (52 percent to 35 percent), who in turn emphasize Republican issues more than Democratic candidates (65 percent to 48 percent). A *chi-square* test shows that these differences are significant (χ^2 [df = 1] = 827.85, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .17$).

Finally, data from gubernatorial and senate debates again show the same pattern: Democrats talk about Democratic issues more (54 percent to 48 percent), and Republican issues less (46 percent to 52 percent), than Republicans. These differences are significant as well (χ^2 [df = 1] = 20.43, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .06$).

So, computer content analysis of three samples of debates—general election debates, primary debates, and non-presidential debates—confirm the prediction of Issue Ownership Theory. Candidates for office show a marked proclivity for stressing the issues owned by their own political party. As noted earlier, these results are consistent with studies of presidential nomination acceptance addresses, television spots, and direct mail advertising (Benoit, 2007) and non-presidential TV spots (Benoit and Airne, 2005; Brazeal and Benoit, 2008).

Notice that these data provide support for both issue convergence and issue ownership. In general debates, candidates from both political parties discussed Democratic issues and Republican issues (convergence); however, Democrats treated Democratic issues more often, and Republican issues less often, than Republicans (issue ownership). The same pattern of discussing issues owned by both political parties but emphasizing the issues owned by their parties also occurred in presidential primary debates and in non-presidential debates.

FUNCTIONAL FEDERALISM

America practices a federalist system that distributes different responsibilities to elected officials at different levels of government. Peterson (1995) explained that "each level of government had its own independently elected political leaders and its own separate taxing and spending capacity" (p. 10). He then distinguished between two groups of issues, developmental (state) and redistributive (national). "Developmental programs provide the physical and social infrastructure necessary to facilitate a country's economic development" (p. 17). Developmental policies concern transportation, sanitation, and public utilities (physical infrastructure), as well as police,

fire, public health, and education (social infrastructure). In contrast, he explained that "Redistributive programs reallocate societal resources from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots'" (p. 17). These include welfare programs for the elderly, the poor, the unemployed, single-parent families, and those who are ill. Peterson argued that the national government has primary responsibility for redistributive policies whereas state and local government mostly implement developmental policies. He reported that state and local government spends about twice as much as the federal government on developmental policies; the federal government, in contrast, spends about three times as much as state and local government on redistributive policies.

Atkeson and Partin (2001) explained the implications of Functional Federalism for political campaign messages:

> National-level politicians should emphasize in their work and communications with citizens . . . a more heavily redistributive and international agenda. In contrast, state leaders and state elected officials should emphasize in their work and communications with citizens . . . a more localized, state agenda oriented around developmental policies such as education, taxes, infrastructure, and crime. (p. 796)

Similarly, Stein (1990) argued that citizens are aware of these governmental functions:

> Voters are aware of the differences in functional responsibilities assigned to local, state, and federal governments. Specifically, they understand that responsibility for state economic conditions depends significantly on the actions of the national government and market factors. Unemployment, interest rates, [and] economic growth . . . are largely, if not exclusively, the domain and responsibility of the national government. (p. 34)

Stein presented opinion poll data which shows that economic issues are thought by voters to be important reasons for senatorial, but not gubernatorial, vote choice. He also indicated that in the 1982 elections that "Senatorial voting exhibits clear and unambiguous economic voting" (p. 50) but the evidence for economic voting in gubernatorial elections is less strong.

Atkeson and Partin (2001) analyzed Senate and gubernatorial television advertisements broadcast in 1986, reporting that developmental issues, such as education, were more likely to be found in political spots for gubernatorial than senatorial candidates. On the other hand, redistributive issues such as the elderly and foreign policy were more likely to be employed in senatorial than gubernatorial ads. They also reported that newspaper coverage tended to follow the predictions of functional federalism (stories on governor's races stressed state issues; stories on senate races emphasized national issues). Tidmarch, Hyman, and Sorkin (1984) examined newspaper coverage in 1982, concluding that "the national policy agenda, while visible, is a demonstrably smaller presence in gubernatorial campaign coverage than in House and Senate coverage" (p. 1239). So, Functional Federalism predicts that:

> H1. Candidates for Senate will use discuss national issues more, and local issues less, than candidates in gubernatorial races.

However, this theory can also be extended to address presidential campaign messages along with senate and gubernatorial messages. The president serves the entire United States; the constituency for a senator is a single state. This suggests that presidents will tend to stress national issues even more than senators. Accordingly, I predict that:

H2. Candidates for president will discuss national issues even more than candidates for Senate.

Sample of Debates

The data here are based on twelve senate and twelve gubernatorial debates from 2000–2004 (Henson and Benoit, 2009) and twenty-three presidential general election debates from 1960 and 1976–2004 (Benoit et al., 2003, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996).

Results

The data on Functional Federalism in political campaign debates are reported in Table 8.1.[1] Debates for governor, as predicted, stressed state issues more than the other two samples of debates. Senate debates discussed state issues less, and national issues more, than gubernatorial debates. Presidential debates addressed national issues even more than Senate debates and state issues less than Senate debates (or than gubernatorial debates). Statistical analysis confirms that these difference are significant (χ^2 [df = 2] = 1382.88, $p < .0001$, $V = .32$). These findings are consistent with research on Functional Federalism and television spots (Benoit, Brazeal, and Airne, 2011).

RETROSPECTIVE VERSUS PROSPECTIVE VOTING

A number of studies investigate two different bases for voting on issues: retrospective and prospective voting. Retrospective voting looks back—to the past—to see how the country has fared under the leadership of the candidate (or party) in power. It focuses on record in office (past deeds). Prospective voting, in contrast, is oriented

Table 8.1. Functional Federalism in American Campaign Debates

	State/Local	*National*
Gubernatorial	**1806 (75%)**	607 (25%)
Senate	1127 (47%)	1293 (53%)
Presidential	2802 (33%)	**5766 (57%)**

χ^2 (df = 2) = 1382.88, $p < .0001$, $V = .32$

toward the future, and involves speculation about how the country is likely to do under the leadership of one candidate or the other (future plans, general goals, and ideals).

Lanoue (1994) discusses the nature of the research on retrospective and prospective voting behavior:

> Typically students of voting behavior have assumed that citizens use retrospective assessments of economic performance in a fairly straight-forward fashion: If conditions have improved over the previous period, voters support the incumbent party; if conditions have deteriorated, support goes instead to the challenger (Tufte, 1975; Fiorina, 1981; Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979; and Abramowitz et al., 1988). More recently, a number of scholars have begun to argue in favor of prospective explanation of voting behavior (Kuklinski and West, 1981; and Lockerbie, 1991). These researchers contend that voters should logically base their vote for the current elections on how they expect conditions to be in the future. (p. 193)

Up to this point, the work on retrospective versus prospective voting has ignored candidate messages. Clearly, voters must learn about economic (or other) conditions before those conditions can inform their vote choice. Messages from presidential candidates in campaign debates discuss both past and future, allowing a test of these theories of voting behavior.

Sample of Debates

The debates analyzed here include American presidential primary debates from 1948, 1960, 1968, 1972, and 1980–2004 (Benoit et al., 2002, 2007). American general election debates from 1960 and 1976–2004 comprise the data examined here (Benoit et al., 2003, 2007; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, 1998; Benoit and Brazeal, 2002; Benoit and Harthcock, 1999; Benoit and Wells, 1996).

Results

The data from presidential primary debates do not support retrospective voting (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 0.6, *p* = .44, *ns*; the review of the literature does not indicate that political science research has contrasted retrospective and prospective voting in primary campaigns). Notice that these data do not support either retrospective or prospective voting. However, analysis of presidential debates from the general election does confirm retrospective voting. Both groups of candidates were more likely to emphasize the future than the past, but candidates who won American general election presidential campaigns discussed the past more (45 percent to 38 percent), and the future less (55 percent to 62 percent), than losers in election debates. A *chi-square* analysis confirms that these differences are significant (χ^2 [*df* = 1] = 19.94, $p < .0001$, $\varphi = .07$). Notice that these results suggest another difference between primary and general election campaign messages (chapter 6).

CONCLUSION

This chapter examines three theories developed in Political Science using data from political campaign debates. The predictions of Issue Ownership Theory (Petrocik, 1986) were confirmed in presidential primary debates, general election debates, and non-presidential debates (governor and senate). The predictions related to Functional Federalism—that gubernatorial debates stress state issues most and national issues least, presidential debates discuss national issues most and state issues least, with senate debates in the middle—were confirmed with these data. Finally, data from presidential general election debates (but not primary debates) are consistent with retrospective voting.

NOTE

1. Source: Henson, J. R. and Benoit, 2009.

9

Conclusion

This book discusses political campaign debates. It begins by advancing several arguments for the claim that political election debates are important components of the modern campaign. It does not attempt to investigate every aspect of these election events but instead focuses on certain aspects of campaign debates.

The sample of election debates analyzed here is extraordinary. Presidential primary debates from 1948–2012, general election debates from 1960 and 1976–2012, and vice presidential debates from 1976 and 1984–2012 are included here. Debates for other levels of offices—senate, house, governor, and mayor—are part of the sample. Debates from the two main phases of political campaigns, primary and general, are included. Political leaders' debates (president, prime minister, chancellor) from ten countries around the world (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, the Ukraine, and the United Kingdom) are another component of the sample. This sample of political campaign debates is wide and varied and allows strong tests of predictions about this message form.

This book focuses primarily on Functional Theory, although one chapter discusses Issue Ownership Theory, Functional Federalism Theory, and retrospective versus prospective voting. Chapters discuss American presidential debates, non-presidential debates, debates from around the world; incumbency and campaign phase; and news coverage of political debates (this chapter includes previously unpublished data).

Predictions derived from Functional Theory are consistently confirmed in the data presented here. Political campaign debates use acclaims more than attacks and, least frequently, defenses. Debates discuss policy more often than character. Both general goals and ideals are used more frequently as the basis of acclaims than attacks. More attacks (and fewer acclaims) concern future plans than general goals. Candidates in debates discuss morality more often than other character traits. Incumbents acclaim more and attack less than challengers. This is especially true

when the candidates discuss their record in office (past deeds). Debates in the primary campaign use more acclaims and fewer attacks than in the general campaign. Primary debates also discuss character more, and policy less, than general election debates. News coverage of debates reports acclaims less than candidates use them and attacks more than candidates make them. News coverage also addresses character less and policy more than debates themselves. News coverage is an important part of the modern campaign environment but we must never assume they report on debates without introducing biases.

The fact that the same results occur over and over, with many candidates, across decades, in primary and general campaigns, at different levels of office, and in different countries is remarkable and provides evidence that some elements of the fundamental situation faced in election debates transcend these many kinds of debates. Functional Theory argues that candidates running for political office must persuade voters that they are preferable to opponents and that only three kinds of utterances have the potential to do so: acclaims, attacks, defenses. Candidates have only two potential topics: who they are (character) and what they have done or will do in office (policy). The nature of general goals and ideals is such that they are easier to acclaim than attack; future plans are easier to attack than general goals. Differences between incumbents and challengers between primary and general campaign phases explain consistent differences in the statements candidates make in election debates. News coverage is consistently more negative than candidate messages and discusses character more and policy less than candidates. Of course, Functional Theory makes no attempt to explain everything about campaign debates, but it does have a strong track record in explaining some aspects of these important events.

Issue Ownership Theory predictions and those related to Functional Federalism are confirmed in the data from debates presented here. Candidates discuss the issues their party owns more than they discuss issues owned by the opposing party. Gubernatorial debates discuss local issues more (and national issues less) than Senate debates and presidential debates address local issues even less (and national issues more) than Senate debates. Evidence from presidential primary debates does not support either retrospective or prospective voting, but general election debates in the United States are consistent with retrospective voting.

Of course, much work on political campaign debates remains to be done. More work can be done on Functional Theory. For example, the presidency is so important—the president is arguably the most powerful elected official in the world—that each new campaign merits scholarly attention. Additionally, more work on non-presidential debates (particularly debates in campaigns for the U.S. House) would be very helpful. Data on campaign debates from ten countries are included here, but more work on election debates in other countries would be helpful.

Furthermore, Functional Theory focuses only on certain aspects of content (functions, topics). Other elements, such as the use of evidence or metaphor in debates, are well worth studying (and indeed Levasseur and Dean, 1996, have published study of evidence in debates; Rhea, 2012, has investigated the use of

humor in debates). It would be interesting to apply psychological theories of persuasion, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) or the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), to help understand political campaign debates. Other research on the effects of watching debates, particularly non-presidential debates and debates around the world, would be very useful. Furthermore, additional studies of news coverage of election debates would supplement the sample examined here.

Political campaign debates are now an accepted part of the modern political campaign, particularly in races for higher office. They are useful to, and have effects on, those who watch them. This book is one step advancing our understanding of this medium but work on this message form should continue.

Appendix I

List of American Primary and General Debates

Date	*Location*	*Party*	*Participating Candidates*
1948[1]			
5/17	Portland, OR	R	Dewey, Stassen
1956			
5/21	Miami, FL	D	Kefauver, Stevenson
1960			
5/3	Charleston, WV	D	Humphrey, J. Kennedy
7/12	Los Angeles, CA	D	Johnson, J. Kennedy
1968			
6/1	San Francisco, CA	D	R. Kennedy, McCarthy
1972			
5/28	Burbank, CA	D	Humphrey, McGovern
5/30	Los Angeles, CA	D	Humphrey, McGovern
6/4	Los Angeles, CA	D	Chisholm, Hardin (for Wallace), Humphrey, McGovern, Yorty
1976			
2/23	Boston, MA	D	Bayh, Carter, Harris, H. Jackson, Shapp, Shriver, Udall
3/29	New York, NY	D	Carter, Church, Harris, H. Jackson, Udall
5/3	Chicago, IL	D	Church, Udall
1980			
1/5	Des Moines, IA	R	Anderson, Baker, Bush, Connally, Crane, Dole

Date	*Location*	*Party*	*Participating Candidates*
2/20	Manchester, NH	R	Anderson, Baker, Bush, Connally, Crane, Dole, Reagan
2/23	Nashua, NH	R	Bush, Reagan
2/28	Columbia, SC	R	Baker, Bush, Connally, Reagan
3/13	Chicago, IL	R	Anderson, Bush, Crane, Reagan
4/23	Grapevine, TX	R	Bush, Reagan
1984			
1/15	Hanover, NH	D	Askew, Cranston, Glenn, Hart, Hollings, J. Jackson, McGovern, Mondale
1/31	Cambridge, MA	D	Cranston, Glenn, Hart, Hollings, J. Jackson, McGovern, Mondale
2/3	Boston, MA	D	Glenn, Hart, Hollings, J. Jackson, McGovern, Mondale
2/11	Des Moines, IA	D	Askew, Cranston, Glenn, Hart, Hollings, J. Jackson, McGovern, Mondale
2/23	Goffstown, NH	D	Askew, Cranston, Glenn, Hart, Hollings, J. Jackson, McGovern, Mondale
3/11	Atlanta, GA	D	Glenn, Hart, J. Jackson, McGovern, Mondale
3/18	Chicago, IL	D	Hart, J. Jackson, Mondale
3/28	New York, NY	D	Hart, J. Jackson, Mondale
4/5	Pittsburgh, PA	D	Hart, J. Jackson, Mondale
5/2	Grapevine, TX	D	Hart, J. Jackson, Mondale
6/3	Los Angeles, CA	D	Hart, J. Jackson, Mondale
1988			
7/1	Houston, TX	D	Biden, Babbitt, Dukakis, Gephardt, Gore, J. Jackson, Simon
8/23	Des Moines, IA	D	Biden, Babbitt, Dukakis, Gephardt, Gore, J. Jackson, Simon
1/15	Des Moines, IA	D	Babbitt, Dukakis, Gephardt, Gore, Hart, J. Jackson, Simon
1/24	Durham, NH	D	Babbitt, Dukakis, Gephardt, Gore, Hart, J. Jackson, Simon
2/13	Goffstown, NH	D	Babbitt, Dukakis, Gephart, Gore, Hart, J. Jackson, Simon
2/18	Dallas, TX	D	Dukakis, Gephardt, Gore, Hart, J. Jackson
2/19	St. Paul, MN	D	Dukakis, Gephardt, J. Jackson, Simon
2/27	Atlanta, GA	D	Dukakis, Gephardt, Gore, Hart, J. Jackson, Simon
2/29	Williamsburg, VA	D	Dukakis, Gephardt, Gore, Hart, J. Jackson
4/12	New York, NY	D	Dukakis, Gore, J. Jackson

Date	*Location*	*Party*	*Participating Candidates*
4/17	New York, NY	D	Dukakis, Gore, J. Jackson
4/22	Philadelphia, PA	D	Dukakis, J. Jackson
4/23	Munhall, PA	D	Dukakis, J. Jackson
5/25	San Francisco, CA	D	Dukakis, J. Jackson
12/1	Washington, DC	D+R	Babbitt, Dukakis, Gephardt, Gore, J. Jackson, Simon, Bush, Dole, DuPont, Haig, Kemp, Robertson
10/28	Houston, TX	R	Bush, Dole, DuPont, Haig, Kemp, Robertson
1/8	Des Moines, IA	R	Bush, Dole, DuPont, Haig, Kemp, Robertson
1/16	Hanover, NH	R	Bush, Dole, DuPont, Haig, Kemp, Robertson
2/14	Concord, NH	R	Bush, Dole, Kemp, Robertson, DuPont
2/19	Dallas, TX	R	Bush, Kemp
2/28	Atlanta, GA	R	Bush, Dole, Kemp, Robertson
1992			
12/15	Washington, DC	D	Brown, Clinton, Harkin, Kerrey, Tsongas, Wilder
1/19	Manchester, NH	D	Brown, Clinton, Harkin, Kerrey, Tsongas
1/31	Washington, DC	D	Brown, Clinton, Harkin, Kerrey, Tsongas
2/16	Goffstown, NH	D	Brown, Clinton, Harkin, Kerrey, Tsongas
2/23	Sioux Falls, SD	D	Agran, Brown, Clinton, Harkin, Kerrey, Tsongas
2/29	Denver, CO	D	Brown, Clinton, Harkin, Kerrey, Tsongas
3/1	Atlanta, GA	D	Brown, Clinton, Kerrey, Tsongas
3/1	College Park, MD	D	Brown, Clinton, Harkin, Tsongas
3/5	Dallas, TX	D	Brown, Clinton, Harkin, Tsongas
3/15	Chicago, IL	D	Brown, Clinton, Tsongas
3/27	St. Paul, MN	D	Brown, Clinton
3/30	New York, NY	D	Brown, Clinton
4/5	New York, NY	D	Brown, Clinton
4/6	New York, NY	D	Brown, Clinton
1996			
10/11	Manchester, NH	R	Alexander, Buchanan, Dole, Dornan, Forbes, Gramm, Keyes, Lugar, Specter, Taylor
1/6	Columbia, SC	R	Alexander, Buchanan, Gramm, Keyes, Lugar, Taylor
1/13	Johnston, IA	R	Alexander, Buchanan, Dole, Dornan, Forbes, Gramm, Keyes, Lugar, Taylor

Date	*Location*	*Party*	*Participating Candidates*
2/15	Manchester, NH	R	Alexander, Buchanan, Dole, Dornan, Forbes, Keyes, Lugar, Taylor
2/22	Tempe, AZ	R	Alexander, Buchanan, Dornan, Forbes
2/29	Columbia, SC	R	Alexander, Buchanan, Dole, Forbes
3/3	Atlanta, GA	R	Alexander, Buchanan, Forbes
2000			
10/27	Hanover, NH	D	Bradley, Gore
12/17	Nashua, NH	D	Bradley, Gore
12/19	Washington, DC	D	Bradley, Gore
1/5	Durham, NH	D	Bradley, Gore
1/8	Johnston, IA	D	Bradley, Gore
1/17	Des Moines, IA	D	Bradley, Gore
1/26	Manchester, NH	D	Bradley, Gore
2/21	New York, NY	D	Bradley, Gore
3/1	Los Angeles, CA	D	Bradley, Gore
10/22	Durham, NH	R	Bauer, Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain
10/28	Hanover, NH	R	Bauer, Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain
11/21	Tempe, AZ	R	Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain
12/2	Manchester, NH	R	Bauer, Bush, Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain
12/6	Phoenix, AZ	R	Bauer, Bush, Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain
12/13	Des Moines, IA	R	Bauer, Bush, Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain
1/6	Durham, NH	R	Bauer, Bush, Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain
1/7	Lexington, SC	R	Bauer, Bush, Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain
1/10	Grand Rapids, MI	R	Bauer, Bush, Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain
1/15	Johnston, IA	R	Bauer, Bush, Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain
1/26	Manchester, NH	R	Bauer, Bush, Forbes, Keyes, McCain
2/15	Columbia, SC	R	Bush, Keyes, McCain
3/2	Los Angeles, CA	R	Bush, Keyes, McCain
2004			
4/9	Washington, DC	D	Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Graham, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
5/3	SC	D	Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Graham, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton

Date	*Location*	*Party*	*Participating Candidates*
5/17	IA	D	Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Graham, Kucinich, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
8/5	IL	D	Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Graham, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
9/4	NM	D	Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Graham, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun
9/9	MD	D	Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Graham, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
9/25	NY	D	Clark, Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Graham, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
10/9	AZ	D	Clark, Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
10/15	IA	D	Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Kerry, Kucinich, Mosley-Braun
10/26	MI	D	Clark, Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
11/4	MA	D	Clark, Dean, Edwards, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
11/24	IA	D	Clark, Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Kerry, Kucinich, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
12/9	NH	D	Clark, Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
1/4	IA	D	Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun
1/6	radio	D	Dean, Gephardt, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun
1/11	IA	D	Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Sharpton
1/ 22	NH	D	Clark, Dean, Edwards, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Sharpton
1/ 29	SC	D	Clark, Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
2/15	WI	D	Dean, Edwards, Kerry, Kucinich, Sharpton
2/26	CA	D	Edwards, Kerry, Kucinich, Sharpton
2/29	NY	D	Edwards, Kerry, Kucinich, Sharpton

Date	*Location*	*Party*	*Participating Candidates*
2008			
4/26	SC	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
6/3	NH	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
6/28	DC	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
7/23	SC	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
8/7	IL	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
8/19	IA	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
9/9	FL	D	Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
9/26	NH	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
10/30	PA	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
11/15	NV	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
12/1	IA	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Obama, Richardson
12/4	IA	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Obama
12/13	IA	D	Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Obama, Richardson
1/5	NH	D	Clinton, Edwards, Obama, Richardson
1/15	NV	D	Clinton, Edwards, Obama
1/ 21	SC	D	Clinton, Edwards, Obama
1/31	CA	D	Clinton, Obama
2/21	TX	D	Clinton, Obama
2/26	OH	D	Clinton, Obama
4/16	PA	D	Clinton, Obama
5/3	CA	R	Brownback, Gilmore, Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Paul, Romney, Tandredo, T. Thompson
5/15	SC	R	Brownback, Gilmore, Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Paul, Romney, Tandredo, T. Thompson

Date	*Location*	*Party*	*Participating Candidates*
6/5	NH	R	Brownback, Gilmore, Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Paul, Romney, Tandredo, T. Thompson
8/5	IA	R	Brownback, Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Paul, Romney, Tandredo, T. Thompson
9/5	NH	R	Brownback, Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Paul, Romney, Tandredo
9/27	MD	R	Brownback, Huckabee, Hunter, Keyes, Paul, Tandredo
10/9	MI	R	Brownback, Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Paul, Romney, Tandredo, F. Thompson
10/22	FL	R	Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Paul, Romney, Tandredo, F. Thompson
11/28	FL	R	Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Paul, Romney, Tandredo, F. Thompson
12/9	FL	R	Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, McCain, Paul, Romney, F. Thompson
12/12	IA	R	Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, Keyes, McCain, Paul, Romney, Tandredo, F. Thompson
1/5	NH	R	Giuliani, Huckabee, McCain, Paul, Romney, F. Thompson
1/6	NH	R	Giuliani, Huckabee, McCain, Romney, F. Thompson
1/10	SC	R	Giuliani, Huckabee, McCain, Paul, Romney, F. Thompson
1 /24	FL	R	Giuliani, Huckabee, McCain, Paul, Romney
1/ 30	CA	R	Huckabee, McCain, Paul, Romney
2012[2]			
5/5	Greenville, SC	R	Cain, Johnson, Paul, Pawlenty, Santorum
6/13	Manchester, NH	R	Bachmann, Cain, Gingrich, Paul, Pawlenty, Romney, Santorum
8/11	Ames, Iowa	R	Bachmann, Cain, Gingrich, Huntsman, Pawlenty, Paul, Romney, Santorum
9/5	Columbia, SC	R	Bachmann, Cain, Gingrich, Paul, Romney
9/7	Simi Valley, CA	R	Bachman, Cain, Gingrich, Huntsman, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum

Date	*Location*	*Party*	*Participating Candidates*
9/12	Tampa, FL	R	Bachmann, Cain, Gingrich, Huntsman, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
9/22	Orlando, FL	R	Bachman, Cain, Gingrich, Huntsman, Johnson, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
9/11	Hanover, NH	R	Bachmann, Cain, Gingrich, Huntsman, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
10/18	Las Vegas, NV	R	Bachmann, Cain, Gingrich, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
11/5	Houston, Texas	R	Cain, Gingrich
11/9	Rochester, MI	R	Bachmann, Cain, Gingrich, Huntsman, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
11/12	Spartanburg, SC	R	Bachmann, Cain, Gingrich, Huntsman, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
11/19	Des Moines, IA	R	Bachmann, Cain, Gingrich, Paul, Perry, Santorum
11/22	Washington, DC	R	Bachmann, Cain, Gingrich, Huntsman, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
12/3	New York City	R	Bachman, Gingrich, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
12/10	Des Moines, IA	R	Bachman, Gingrich, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
12/12	Manchester, NH	R	Gingrich, Huntsman
12/15	Sioux City, IA	R	Bachmann, Gingrich, Huntsman, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
1/7	Manchester, NH	R	Gingrich, Huntsman, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
1/8	Concord, NH	R	Gingrich, Huntsman, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
1/14	Charleston, SC	R	Gingrich, Huntsman, Perry, Romney, Santorum
1/16	Myrtle Beach, SC	R	Gingrich, Paul, Perry, Romney, Santorum
1/19	Charleston, SC	R	Gingrich, Paul, Romney, Santorum
1/23	Tampa, FL	R	Gingrich, Paul, Romney, Santorum
1/26	Jacksonville, FL	R	Gingrich, Paul, Romney, Santorum
2/22	Mesa, AZ	R	Gingrich, Paul, Romney, Santorum

American General Election Debates

1960	John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon	9/26, 10/7, 10/13, 10/21
1976	Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford	9/23, 10/6, 10/22
1980	Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan	10/28

1984	Walter Mondale and Ronald Reagan	10/8, 10/22
1988	George W. Bush and Michael Dukakis	9/25, 10/13
1992	George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and H. Ross Perot	10/11, 10/15, 10/19
1996	Bill Clinton and Bob Dole	10/6, 10/16
2000	George H. W. Bush and Al Gore	10/3, 10/11, 10/17
2004	George H. W. Bush and John Kerry	9/30, 10/8, 10/13
2008	John McCain and Barack Obama	9/26, 10/7, 10/15
2012	Barack Obama and Mitt Romney	10/3, 10/16, 10/22

List of American Vice Presidential Debates

1976	Walter Mondale and Bob Dole	10/15
1984	Geraldine Ferraro and George Bush	10/11
1988	Lloyd Bentson and Dan Quayle	10/5
1992	Al Gore, Jack Kemp, and James Stockdale	10/13
1996	Al Gore and Jack Kemp	10/9
2000	Joe Lieberman and Dick Cheney	10/5
2004	John Edwards and Dick Cheney	10/13
2008	Joe Biden and Sarah Palin	10/2
2012	Joe Biden and Paul Ryan	10/11

NOTES

1. Records of primary debates in earlier campaigns are probably less complete than in recent campaigns.

2. 2012 from: www.2012presidentialelectionnews.com/2012-debate-schedule/2011-2012-primary-debate-schedule/ accessed January 24, 2012.

Appendix II

Viewers for American General Election Debates

Year	*Dates*	*Candidates*	*Viewers*
Presidential			
1960		John Kennedy, Richard Nixon	
	9/26		66.4
	10/7		61.9
	10/13		63.7
	10/21		60.4
1976		Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford	
	9/23		69.7
	10/6		63.9
	10/22		62.7
1980		Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan	
	10/28		80.6
1984		Walter Mondale, Ronald Reagan	
	10/8		65.1
	10/22		67.3
1988		Michael Dukakis, George Bush	
	9/25		65.1
	10/13		67.3
1992		Bill Clinton, George Bush, Ross Perot	
	10/11		64.2
	10/15		69.6
	10/19		66.9
1996		Bill Clinton, Bob Dole	
	10/6		46.1
	10/16		36.3

Year	*Dates*	*Candidates*	*Viewers*
2000		Al Gore, George Bush	
	10/3		46.6
	10/11		37.5
	10/17		37.7
2004		John Kerry, George Bush	
	9/30		62.5
	10/8		46.7
	10/13		51.2
2008		Barack Obama, John McCain	
	9/26		52.4
	10/7		63.2
	10/15		56.5
2012		Barack Obama, Mitt Romney	
	10/3		57.2
	10/16		65.6
	10/22		59.2
Total	29		1713.5
Vice Presidential			
1976	10/15	Walter Mondale, Bob Dole	43.2
1984	10/11	Geraldine Ferraro, George Bush	56.7
1988	10/5	Lloyd Bentson, Dan Quayle	46.9
1992	10/13	Al Gore, Dan Quayle	51.2
1996	10/9	Al Gore, Jack Kemp	26.6
2000	10/5	Joe Lieberman, Dick Cheney	28.5
2004	10/13	John Edwards, Dick Cheney	43.5
2008	10/2	Joe Biden, Sarah Palin	69.6
2012	10/11	Joe Biden, Paul Ryan	51.4
Total	9		417.6
GrandTotal	38		2131.1

NOTE

Audience debate data from Commission on Presidential Debates: www.debates.org/pages/history.html

Appendix III

Examples of the Forms of Policy and Character

POLICY

Past Deeds

Acclaim: "We cut taxes several years ago across the board, not just for businesses big and small but also for consumers" (Harper)
Attack: "You have the highest spending government in the history of the country" (Ignatieff)

Future Plans

Acclaim: "We are prepared to support the Lower Churchill project, this is a project that has the capacity of dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions and [Duceppe interrupting] climate change" (Harper)
Attack: "Canadians don't understand why you're prepared to spend $30 billion fighter jets, $13 billion on prisons, and $6 billion in corporate tax breaks when we're in the middle of a serious deficit" (Ignatieff)

General Goals

Acclaim: "We want to keep [tax] rates where they are so that we continue to create jobs and grow the Canadian economy" (Harper)
Attack: "What is proposed by Mr. Ignatieff and the other parties is to raise taxes on, on, on hundred of thousands of Canadian businesses" (Harper)

CHARACTER

Personal Qualities

Acclaim: "Let's tell the truth" (Harper)
Attack: "How can people trust what you are saying today, when your actions are so contrary to what you are offering Canadians" (Layton)

Leadership Ability

Acclaim: "We have balanced policies to move us all forward together" (Harper)
Attack: "This money [spent on gazebos and fake lakes] was supposed to spent on the border, you spent it 300 KM away that kind of deception undermines confidence in your leadership." (Ignatieff)

Ideals

Acclaim: "Canada needs to stand for great values abroad the same values it stands for at home in particular democracy, defending and promoting democracy around the world" (Ignatieff)
Attack: "Mr. Harper has betrayed our democracy at home and I don't think he can stand up for democracy and freedom abroad" (Ignatieff)

NOTE

Examples from Canadian Prime Minister Debate 4/13/11: www.globalnews.ca/decision canada/debate/index.html.

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About the Author

William L. Benoit is a professor of communication studies at Ohio University. He was born in New Castle, IN, where he attended Chrysler High School. He earned a BS at Ball State University, an MA at Central Michigan University, and a PhD at Wayne State University. He taught at Miami University (Ohio), Bowling Green State University, and University of Missouri before moving to Ohio University. He developed the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse and has applied this theory to debates, TV spots, nomination announcement speeches, nomination acceptance addresses, direct mail advertising, candidate press releases, candidate webpages, and news coverage of elections. He has studied debates for various levels of office (president, vice president, senate, governor, mayor), primary and general election debates, and debates in other countries (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, the Ukraine, and the United Kingdom). He is currently working on projects applying this theory to the 2012-candidates' Facebook Posts (with Ivy Shen) and to the 2010 Nigerian debate (with King Akan Nnaemeka Eyo). He has been fortunate to work with many other scholars in this work, including his daughter, Jennifer M. Benoit-Bryan, and his wife, Pamela J. Benoit.