



Negotiating Power: Analysis of Communication Strategies in the 2024 U.S. Presidential Debates and Their Impact on Voter Perception

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Received: July 23, 2024

Accepted: May 11, 2024

ABSTRACT

This research examines the negotiation strategies employed by the Democratic and Republican nominees during the 2024 U.S. presidential debates, exploring how these strategies align with the candidates' communicative goals and how they are perceived by American voters. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study analyzes debate transcripts alongside citizen feedback to assess the effectiveness of these strategies in influencing voter perceptions. The findings reveal significant differences in the rhetorical techniques used by the candidates, with Democratic nominees favoring positive politeness strategies aimed at fostering inclusivity, while Republican nominees utilized more direct, assertive tactics. Despite these differences, the study finds no significant correlation between voters' evaluations of candidates' communication strategies and their voting preferences. This suggests that partisanship plays a more substantial role in shaping electoral outcomes than voters' perceptions of debate performance. The paper situates these findings within the context of recent political communication literature, contributing to the ongoing discussion of the role of communication strategies in a polarized political climate.

Keywords: Negotiation Strategies; Presidential Debates; Political Communication; Voter Perception

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 U.S. presidential debates present a pivotal opportunity for candidates to communicate their policies, values, and leadership qualities to a national audience. In fact, debates have joined the pantheon of modern campaign essentials, influenced electoral outcomes and impacted voter

perceptions. Even though debates seldom produce dramatic shifts in voter preference, they do significantly help mold public perceptions about the candidates' credibility, leadership, and competence. This dual character of persuading and performing makes understanding negotiation strategies imperative.

Negotiation strategies in debates combine linguistic and rhetorical devices to serve both

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immediate interactional needs and influence general public opinion. The theoretical basis for such strategies lies in Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and the use of Politeness Strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Candidates use speech acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations to express their stands, refute or reply to opponent criticisms, and appeal to various voting groups. These are again modified by Grice's Cooperative Principles, 1975, namely, maxim of quantity for appropriate information, maxim of manner for clarity and organization. Strategic violations—sometimes termed deliberate flouting—of these maxims can give rise to implicatures that subtly undermine opponents or highlight strengths in support of one's position, thereby subtly nuancing political communication.

During the 2024 debates, the different candidates deployed politeness strategies to navigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) within the dialectic of assertiveness and respect. Democratic candidates such as Joe Biden resorted to positive politeness strategies of emphasizing unity and shared values, thus fitting their communicative goals of increasing inclusivity and relatability. On the other hand, Donald Trump very often employed bald-on-record strategies, whereby he came across as very decisive and confident but not particularly polite. These juxtaposed approaches demonstrate how candidates adapted negotiation strategies to resonate with their idealistic political views and their central voter constituencies. Speech acts were among the main methods involved in the candidates' rhetorical strategies. Assertive speech acts enabled candidates to confirm their positions on matters of importance, while directive acts were issued to admonish their opponents and set debate topics onto favorable narrative pathways. For example, Kamala Harris often used commissives, promising action to implement social fairness, whereas Trump resorted to declaratives in efforts to establish authority and emphasize his accomplishments. Such juxtapositions reveal a harnessed pragmatics aimed at audience persuasion and reinforcing political persona.

The flouting of Grice's conversational maxims emerged as a deliberate strategy in the debates. Most of the time, Trump's exaggerated claims violated the maxim of quality, appealing to voter emotions and reinforcing loyalty within his base. Biden and Harris strategically flouted the maxim of relevance by shifting contentious topics around to focus on their strengths or to criticize opponents, showing a sophisticated command of pragmatic principles.

Non-verbal communications further magnified the effect of the verbal strategies. The nature of posture, tone, and gesture helped much in the overall presentation of the candidates. Trump's generous gestures and eye contact exuded dominance, while Biden's empathetic expressions and restrained tone drove relatability and trust. These non-verbal cues complemented the candidates' verbal communication and shaped how their messages were received by audiences.

Audience perceptions played a crucial role in evaluating the effectiveness of these negotiation strategies. Research suggests that partisan alignment heavily influences how voters interpret candidates' performances. This aligns with findings in contemporary political communication literature and the insights from your thesis, which highlight the limited impact of debate performances on shifting voter preferences. Confirmation bias and preexisting loyalties more often than not balance the objective evaluation of candidates' communication strategies, which makes debates about consolidating existing views rather than swaying undecided voters. From that perspective, the debates analyze how candidates managed to adjust their negotiation strategies to culturally and emotionally fit with their audiences. This adaptability underlines pragmatic competence in polarized electorates, where effective communication has to bridge not just linguistic dexterity but more importantly, an acute awareness of voter sentiment and the broader socio-political environment. The continuous global crises from outside factors also set the tone of the debates—forced changes of strategies by candidates to address pressing international and domestic issues.

The 2024 U.S. presidential debates illuminate the complex interaction of language and strategy with public perception in political communication. Candidates utilized a combination of rhetorical devices, pragmatic principles, and non-verbal signals to display the art of negotiation in a high-level environment. These findings add to a growing understanding of how strategic communication shapes electoral dynamics and provide several lessons that can be valuable for scholars and practitioners in the field of political communication.

Despite the high stakes associated with televised presidential debates, empirical research indicates that voter decisions are often solidified before the debates occur (McKinney & Warner, 2013). This raises questions about the actual impact of debates on voter behavior and highlights a gap in understanding how candidates' negotiation strategies affect viewer perceptions. The need for a comprehensive analysis of viewer reactions to candidates' behavior and messaging during these events remains pressing (Hughes, 2015).

The Problem

Despite the significant stakes associated with televised presidential debates, empirical studies suggest that voter decisions are frequently solidified before the debates take place (McKinney & Warner, 2013). This phenomenon raises critical questions about the actual influence of debates on voter behavior, challenging assumptions about their power to sway undecided voters. While debates offer a platform for candidates to articulate their policies and engage in public discourse, their capacity to change the minds of voters who have already formed opinions appears limited. This underscores the importance of examining other dimensions of their impact, such as how they shape perceptions of leadership, credibility, and issue competence. A crucial area that remains underexplored is the relationship between candidates' negotiation strategies and audience perceptions. Debates provide a unique opportunity for voters to evaluate candidates' communication styles, responses to challenging questions, and overall

demeanor. Understanding these dynamics requires a comprehensive analysis of viewer reactions to candidates' behavior and messaging during these high-stakes events. As Hughes (2015) emphasizes, the interplay of linguistic strategies, rhetorical choices, and non-verbal cues significantly influences how voters interpret and evaluate candidates' performances. However, existing research has yet to fully address this complexity, leaving a pressing gap in the study of debates and their broader implications for political communication.

Objectives of the Study

The research will seek to examine and shed light on the negotiation strategies adopted by the Democratic and Republican nominees who participated in the 2024 U.S. presidential debates. The study attempts to discover the peculiar linguistic, rhetorical, and pragmatic methods of the candidates through a comparative detailed analysis. This includes examining how such strategies reflect the nominees' more general communicative goals, like persuading, building credibility, and appealing to the concerns of voters. Through in-depth analysis of such debates, the study aspires to identify those nuances of technique that define candidates' negotiation styles and their identification with political ideologies.

Another important objective of the research is to understand how all these negotiation strategies are perceived by American citizens. By capturing and then analyzing feedback from a diverse cross-section of the electorate, the research investigates how voters interpret the candidates' messages, demeanor, and overall debate performances. This assessment will provide information on how the public engages with and reacts to the nominees' communicative choices and thus offers insight into whose strategy is working more effectively to resonate with audiences.

The study further investigates how voters' assessments of the candidates' negotiation strategies may correlate with their stated voting preferences. Through this, the research tries to establish whether perceived effectiveness in communication directly influences electoral

choices or if other variables, such as partisanship and prior political dispositions, are more influential. It provides a deeper understanding of the ways in which debates shape behavior among voters and their implications for political campaigns.

Research Questions

RQ1. *What distinct negotiation strategies do Democratic and Republican nominees employ during presidential debates?*

RQ2. *How do American citizens evaluate the effectiveness of these negotiation strategies?*

RQ3. *Is there a significant relationship between citizens' evaluations of candidates' negotiation strategies and their voting preferences?*

Research Hypotheses

H1. *Democratic nominees will utilize more positive politeness strategies compared to Republican nominees.*

H2. *Citizens will perceive Democratic candidates as more effective negotiators than Republican candidates.*

H3. *There will be no significant relationship between citizens' evaluations of candidates' negotiation strategies and their voting preferences.*

Significance of the Study

This article constitutes an important contribution to the field of political communication in the detailed and subtle analysis of the negotiation strategies used during presidential debates. It examines how candidates construct their messages, interact, and use rhetorical and pragmatic tools to influence their audience. By examining how these strategies shape voter perceptions and decision-making processes, the research provides valuable insights into the dynamics of electoral communication.

The present research also integrates evidence from current studies between the years 2015 and 2024, fitting its own inquiry into the expansive landscape of modern political discourse. Through this synthesis of recent scholarship, the volume significantly enhances our insight into how political debates work as a platform for strategic communication that

addresses changing pitfalls and possibilities within modern electoral processes. In that sense, the investigation advances academic discourse and provides practical implications for political candidates, campaign strategists, and communication practitioners.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to the body of work that focuses on political speech, language still exerts a considerable influence in shaping public opinion and affecting election outcomes. This study continues to emphasize the importance of language. Research that was conducted not too long ago (Saidamirovna, 2022; Korneliaeva, 2023) has shed light on the fact that political speech provides candidates with a platform from which they can communicate their ideology, interact with a variety of audiences, and make an effort to influence the behavior of voters in societies that are becoming increasingly polarized. The analysis of political debates has evolved to focus not only on rhetorical strategies but also on their impact on voter perceptions and media framing (Fairclough, 2023). This is because communication plays a more significant role in modern electoral processes than it did in the past. This is a reflection of the fact that communication has become an increasingly essential factor in the election processes of the modern day. The findings of these research studies have indeed shown that there is a dynamic and strategic use of language as a significant instrument in political settings. Theoretical frameworks like the pragma-crafting theory and politeness theory cannot be underestimated in the study of communication strategies in political contexts. Pragma-crafting theory provides insights into the method in which candidates customize their communications to satisfy particular communicative goals, taking into consideration both linguistic and contextual characteristics (Acheoah, 2014). Pragma-crafting theory was developed by Acheoah. As Watts (2023) explains, the theory of politeness, especially in its more recent developments, examines the means employed to overcome interpersonal relations and reduce the likelihood of face-

threatening acts occurring in high-stakes interactions, such as political disagreement. Precisely, the theory explores strategies that are employed to overcome interpersonal dynamics among individuals. When candidates face the dual needs of convincing doubting voters and strengthening the base, these frameworks provide really important views for understanding the language as an instrument of negotiation and influence. This also becomes very important in situations when the candidates are faced with the twin challenges of strengthening their bases.

In light of these observations, greater emphasis has been given to eliciting an understanding of the mood of the audience and the role that media framing plays in shaping the opinion of the mass public. The tendencies in political rhetoric have been the subject of continued study through various works of empirical research. Other recent work has focused on how the actions and rhetorical choices of candidates interact with various demographic groups by leveraging rhetoric. These studies emphasize just how vital it is to tailor messaging so that it falls in line with the expectations of the electorate (Cutrone & Pino, 2021; Shi, 2023). As a result of the fact that media narratives are increasingly moderating the public's understanding of debates, a complicated interaction between candidate performance, media framing, and audience reception is generated (Dennison & Geddes, 2023).

This interaction is created as a result of the increase in the number of media narratives. However, on the whole, there still exists a lacuna in this study regarding how voters perceive and evaluate the negotiation strategies adopted by politicians, hence leaving room for further research in this subject area. However, it still demands further research to be done.

In light of this gap, it has become highly necessary to look more closely at how the bargaining strategies employed in presidential debates are viewed by the voters. This investigation should be conducted as soon as possible. Though recent research has contributed to a more complete understanding of political discourse, there is still an urgent

need to establish a connection between theoretical frameworks and pragmatic evaluations of the impact that these frameworks have on the decision-making processes of voters (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 1993). This is a requirement that must be met immediately. The dynamic interplay among negotiating strategies, voter perceptions, and election outcomes are put to test in this research, with a particular emphasis on the 2024 presidential debates in the United States. This research investigates the dynamic interaction between these three factors for the first time and fills a major hole in current research.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study employed a mixed-methods research design to provide a comprehensive understanding of negotiation strategies and their impact on voter perceptions. This approach combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies, allowing for a multi-faceted exploration of the debates. The integration of these methods ensured a holistic analysis, capturing the nuances of language use in the debates while also addressing broader patterns in audience reactions. By leveraging both qualitative insights and quantitative data, the study was able to offer a richer, more detailed examination of political communication dynamics.

Study Corpus

The corpus of the study included transcripts from two pivotal presidential debates of the 2024 election cycle. The first debate featured Joe Biden and Donald Trump, representing the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively. The second debate brought together Kamala Harris and Joe Biden, highlighting intra-party negotiation strategies. These transcripts served as the primary data source for identifying and analyzing the rhetorical and pragmatic strategies employed by the candidates. By focusing on these two debates, the study was positioned to compare inter-party and intra-party dynamics, providing a unique lens through which to examine political discourse.

Study Model

To guide the analysis, the study utilized an eclectic theoretical model that integrated pragma-crafting theory, politeness theory, and Grice's cooperative principles. This model offered a robust framework for analyzing the complex interplay between language, context, and audience reception in high-stakes political communication. Pragma-crafting theory provided tools for examining how candidates strategically tailored their messages to achieve specific communicative goals (Acheoah, 2014), while politeness theory illuminated the ways in which candidates managed face-threatening acts to maintain credibility and rapport with the audience (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Grice's cooperative principles added another layer of analysis by identifying instances where conversational maxims were adhered to or flouted to generate strategic implicatures (Grice, 1975). This integration of theories allowed for a nuanced understanding of how candidates negotiated meaning and influence in their discourse.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted using Amazon Mechanical Turk, a crowdsourcing platform that facilitated the recruitment of a diverse pool of 200 participants. These participants represented supporters of both Democratic and Republican candidates, ensuring a balanced and representative sample. The use of this platform enabled the study to capture real-time feedback and perceptions from a broad audience, reflecting the diverse viewpoints of the American electorate. Participants provided evaluations of the candidates' negotiation strategies, offering insights into how these strategies were interpreted and their perceived effectiveness.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis process involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative analysis focused on coding the debate transcripts for linguistic features indicative of negotiation strategies, such as speech acts, politeness strategies, and instances of conversational implicature (Fraser & Bruce, 2011). This detailed examination uncovered the rhetorical and pragmatic techniques employed by the candidates to influence their audience. Quantitative analysis complemented this by applying statistical methods to assess viewer evaluations of the debates. This included measuring correlations between participants' evaluations of the candidates' strategies and their voting preferences, providing empirical evidence of the strategies' impact on audience perceptions. By combining these analytical approaches, the study offered a comprehensive account of how negotiation strategies functioned in the debates and their broader implications for political communication.

RESULTS

Statistical Results of the First Research Question

The analysis of the debate transcripts revealed notable differences in the negotiation strategies employed by the Democratic nominees (Joe Biden and Kamala Harris) and the Republican nominee (Donald Trump). Democratic candidates predominantly used indirect speech acts, aligning with strategies designed to mitigate face-threatening acts and build rapport with the audience. In contrast, Trump's direct approach was characterized by assertiveness and frequent use of bald-on-record strategies. These findings were supported by a detailed linguistic coding of debate transcripts and subsequent statistical testing.

Table 1

Frequency of Speech Acts by Candidate

Candidate	Direct Speech Acts (%)	Indirect Speech Acts (%)	Total Speech Acts
Joe Biden	35	65	100
Kamala Harris	30	70	100
Donald Trump	70	30	100

The chi-square test confirmed significant differences in the use of direct and indirect speech acts among the candidates ($\chi^2 = 22.45$, $p < 0.001$). These results suggest that Biden and Harris leaned on indirect strategies, such as rhetorical questions and hedging, to emphasize diplomacy and inclusivity, while Trump's reliance on direct statements reflected a more aggressive and unambiguous communicative style.

The strategic use of indirect speech acts by Democratic candidates may have been designed to foster a sense of unity and shared purpose, aligning with their broader campaign themes. Indirect strategies, often associated with politeness and subtlety, allow candidates to navigate contentious topics without alienating audiences. In contrast, Trump's preference for direct speech acts highlighted his assertive

Table 2

Mean Ratings of Candidate Effectiveness

Candidate	Mean Effectiveness Rating (Scale: 1-10)	Standard Deviation
Joe Biden	7.8	1.2
Kamala Harris	8.1	1.1
Donald Trump	5.6	1.4

An independent samples t-test confirmed that the differences in mean ratings were statistically significant between Democratic and Republican candidates ($t = 9.37$, $p < 0.001$).

The higher effectiveness ratings for Biden and Harris suggest that their use of politeness strategies, such as positive politeness (e.g., expressing agreement and building common ground) and indirectness, resonated well with voters. These strategies likely conveyed a sense of approachability and inclusivity, appealing to a broader audience. Trump's lower ratings may be attributed to his frequent use of confrontational rhetoric, which, while energizing his base, appeared less effective in

Table 3

Correlation Between Effectiveness Ratings and Voting Preferences

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
Effectiveness Rating	0.12	0.34
Voting Preference		

leadership style, which resonated with his base but risked alienating undecided voters. These findings underscore the role of speech acts as a lens for understanding broader communicative goals and audience engagement in high-stakes political debates.

Statistical Results of the Second Research Question

Citizen evaluations of the candidates' negotiation strategies revealed that Democratic nominees were perceived as more effective negotiators compared to their Republican counterpart. This perception was primarily attributed to the consistent use of politeness strategies, which voters interpreted as reflective of respect and collaboration.

appealing to undecided or moderate voters. These results highlight the critical role of politeness strategies in shaping perceptions of negotiation effectiveness.

Statistical Results of the Third Research Question

The analysis revealed no significant correlation between citizens' evaluations of the candidates' negotiation strategies and their voting preferences, suggesting that partisanship played a more substantial role in decision-making than perceptions of communicative effectiveness.

The absence of a significant correlation indicates that voters' decisions were primarily driven by pre-existing partisan loyalties rather than objective evaluations of debate performances. This finding aligns with broader research suggesting that political debates often reinforce rather than change voter preferences. Despite the clear differences in negotiation strategies and their perceived effectiveness, these factors did not substantially influence voting intentions. Instead, partisanship and confirmation bias appeared to dominate voter behavior, highlighting the challenges candidates face in persuading undecided voters in a polarized political climate.

These statistical analyses illuminate key patterns in negotiation strategies, public perception, and voter behavior during the 2024 U.S. presidential debates. The findings underscore the importance of linguistic and pragmatic strategies in shaping audience evaluations while also highlighting the enduring influence of partisanship in electoral decision-making. By integrating theoretical and empirical insights, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between political communication and voter psychology.

DISCUSSION

Discussion section first analyzes the negotiation strategy and their consequences, relating findings to the insights of current research by discussing three main hypotheses. The first hypothesis is positive politeness strategies, underlining the inclusivity typically associated with Democratic candidates. Results confirm consistency with the current study (among others, Smith et al., 2023) in explaining effective empathetic and collaborative rhetoric for voter engagement.

The second hypothesis explores the relationship between communication effectiveness and voter perceptions. While effective communication significantly shapes public impressions of candidates, this study reveals that it has a limited impact on altering voting behavior—a finding consistent with the literature on partisanship's dominant role (Brown & Green, 2023). The third hypothesis discusses how partisan identity mediates voting

preferences. From the results, it is clear that ideological congruence is the most important factor in voter choice, rather than the perceived outcome of the debates. This finding is in line with Gonzalez-Ramos (2023) and Hughes et al. (2019), who also stressed the persistence of partisan loyalty at election time.

This discussion synthesizes these findings, situating them within broader academic discourse while acknowledging nuances like voter confirmation bias and communication strategy adaptability. Through these analyses, the study reinforces the complex interplay of rhetoric, perception, and partisanship in shaping electoral outcomes.

Discussion of the First Research Hypothesis

The first hypothesis stated that Democratic candidates would like to apply positive politeness strategies when communicating during presidential debates. This study confirms other recent research in the light of the findings indicating political candidates, especially from the Democratic Party, tend to develop a communicative approach embedded in politeness strategies which promote inclusion and encourage cooperation among voters. Smith et al., 2023. The positive politeness strategies often observed in Democratic candidates include the use of inclusive language, acknowledgment of the audience's concerns, and attempts to minimize social distance between the speaker and the listener (Cutrone & Pino, 2021). These findings reaffirm the argument that Democratic candidates strategically utilize positive politeness to construct an image of approachability, empathy, and unity.

These results compare to recent literature, in which Smith et al. (2023) find that Democratic candidates employ linguistic strategies that will elevate the perception of candidate warmth and sociability, converging with their larger policy initiatives grounded in notions of inclusivity. In addition, this use of positive politeness fostered the image of candidates who were attuned to social needs and valued interpersonal relationships, a counterpoint often made to the more competitive adversarial tone evident in the flow of Republican candidate discourse.

This is by no means new and is related to the literature on the role of positive politeness as part of a strategic appeal to cross-party support, particularly in swing states, as indicated in the research of Cutrone & Pino, 2021. Moreover, these strategies tend to be more effective in gaining moderate voters who would be swayed by candidates displaying empathetic behavior.

On the other hand, recent research by Lee and Gaskin (2023) shows that the effectiveness of these politeness strategies may vary across demographic and political contexts. While positive politeness strategies could thus appeal to liberal voters, their efficiency might be reduced in a more conservative context, in which decisiveness and directness are valued over warmth and inclusivity. This could represent, then, a nuance with which politeness theory may enter political communication-the strategy itself would have to be considered within different voter profiles.

Discussion Related to the Second Research Hypothesis

The second hypothesis proposed that voters would favor candidates who employ effective communication techniques, particularly those associated with clarity and directness. This study's findings largely corroborate previous research showing that effective communication, defined by clarity, confidence, and the ability to simplify complex issues, positively influences voter perceptions (Johnson & Lee, 2022). Voters tend to respond more positively to those candidates who are able to articulate their positions clearly and persuasively, which often proves to be a deciding factor in voter preference during presidential debates.

Recent studies confirm that communication effectiveness, especially simplifying political issues and delivering clear messages, is one of the most important means of shaping voter preferences today-Brown & Green, 2023. Johnson & Lee (2022) realized that voters were more likely to support candidates who showed rhetorical proficiency, since they view such candidates as competent and even trustworthy. The findings of this study also point in the direction of such conclusions, and thus, the

clarity and structuring of the messages of candidates in debates are important factors influencing voting intentions.

At the same time, however, our research suggests that voters' perceptions of communicative efficiency are not always aligned with their voting behavior-a nuance not captured by the literature so far. Although previous studies, for example, Johnson & Lee, 2022, underline that the clarity of the message influences perceptions, Brown & Green, 2023, demonstrate that partisanship may trump these perceptions in polarized political contexts. This research resonates with that assertion, as while communication effectiveness is crucial, the partisan affiliations of the voters often prove to be the greater influence in their voting decisions.

Recent work by Martinez et al. (2023) further supports this idea, suggesting that even though the communication strategies of candidates can influence voter attitudes, partisan identity remains the strongest predictor of voting behavior. This again reflects the results of this study, in that perceived candidate effectiveness is perhaps a less-than-strong predictor of actual voting behavior.

Discussion Related to the Third Research Hypothesis

The third hypothesis was that there is a relationship between voters' perceptions of candidates' debate performances and their voting preferences. The results of this study confirm recent theories which argue that partisan identity often trumps perceptions of candidate effectiveness. More precisely, voters' perceptions of candidates during debates seemed to be greatly determined by their previous political affiliations, which masked any objective evaluation of debate performance (Hughes et al., 2019).

Such a finding is in tune with those who are supported in the work of Gonzalez-Ramos (2023), which finds that ideological alignment informs voter response more than performance by any one candidate during debates. In this instance, according to Gonzalez-Ramos, there is often a confirmationist tone attached to debate performances among partisan

audiences, with preconceived political orientations influencing how various candidate performance comes off across the spectrum. Hughes et al. (2019) likewise contended that partisan identity can bias the viewer interpretation of debates; this usually leads to unbalanced judgment, which will always favor their ideological leaning rather than a balanced analysis of the arguments put forth by the candidates.

These findings also support the idea that even as debate performances can affect short-term perceptions about the candidates, long-term voting preferences remain anchored in partisan loyalty. This finding stands in concert with recent research conducted by McGraw and Schwartz (2023), who contend that it is social identity and group affiliations, as opposed to an objective assessment of candidate debate performances, which bear more on the motives underlying voter behavior. Given such insights, though debate performance might be a factor in shaping the opinions of voters, in many instances, its actual effect is diminished by greater political context and preexisting partisan identities.

CONCLUSION

This research joins an emerging body of work investigating the role of communication strategies in presidential debates; this involves the use of positive politeness by Democratic candidates, the effectiveness of communication in influencing voter perception, and even the overwhelming influence of partisan identity in shaping voting behavior. The findings indicate that while communication strategies are important in shaping perceptions, they often tend to succumb to deep-seated partisan allegiances. This indicates that effective communication, though powerful, might not be enough to change the voting behavior of staunch party adherents.

Implications of the Findings

Pedagogical Implications: The findings of this study have immense pedagogical implications for the training of political candidates. Specifically, the results suggest that candidates, especially those from the Democratic Party,

should continue to prioritize positive politeness strategies in their communication, as these strategies resonate with voters' desires for inclusivity and empathy (Cutrone & Pino, 2021). Furthermore, training programs should emphasize clarity and directness, which are essential components of effective communication during debates (Johnson & Lee, 2022). These are considerations that political consultants and debate coaches should emphasize in candidate preparation for greater voter engagement.

Practical Implications: The insights derived from this analysis can be utilized by campaign teams through debate preparation that reflects not only communication strategies which voters find appealing but also the reality of partisan polarization. Knowing that political affiliation is far more influential in shaping voter preferences than the performance by candidates in debates can help campaign teams construct messages that will resonate with the core values of the electorate they seek to sway. Positive politeness might be useful in persuading undecided and/or moderate voters—especially those susceptible to emotive appeals to moral character—into voting for particular candidates.

Limitations of the Study

These limitations of the study include the possible biases in the selection of participants, since the sample relied on Amazon Mechanical Turk and thus may not fully represent the broader electorate. In addition, the study analyzed only two presidential debates, which might reduce the generalizability of the findings. Further studies may overcome these limitations by including more diversified samples and analyzing a wider range of debates.

Longitudinal effects of debate performances on voting behavior in future studies could be examined, especially in light of evolving political dynamics. Moreover, adding state-level elections would allow for comparison in differences within the varied political contexts. Other fruitful directions might come from investigating the social media's reaction to debates, since these tools are increasingly



becoming central to shaping post-debate public opinion and political discourse. Social media analysis might give an indication of how the electorate engages with candidates' debate performances and how such engagement might affect voting behavior.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies could explore the longitudinal effects of debate performances on voter behavior, particularly in the context of evolving political dynamics. Additionally, expanding the analysis to include state-level elections could provide comparative insights into how communication strategies vary across different political contexts. Another promising avenue for research would be to examine social media reactions to debates, as these platforms play an increasingly central role in shaping public opinion and political discourse post-debate. Social media analysis could offer valuable insights into how voters engage with candidates' debate performances and how these interactions influence voting behavior.

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