

Political Communication: Political Debates
POLS 418
MWF 10:00-10:50

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February 23, 2011

Quiz

- 1) According to McKinney and Carlin, which of the following are the dominant theoretical perspectives are used to guide research about campaign debates? Please list all correct responses.
- (a) Democratic theory
 - (b) Agenda-setting theory
 - (c) Uses and gratification theory
 - (d) Heuristic theory
 - (e) Argumentation theory
 - (f) Realist theory
 - (g) ELM

Quiz

- 2) According to McKinney and Carlin, what are the conditions under which voters are likely to find debates useful?
- 3) Aside from theoretical perspectives and when voters find debates useful, briefly discuss two things you read.

Before we get started...

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- ▶ Make sure you have read the syllabus closely, especially those of you who were not here the first day of class.
- ▶ Remainder of week will be spend on the Simon book.

Goals

- ▶ Theory and debates
- ▶ Effects of the debates
- ▶ Content of the Debates
- ▶ The media
- ▶ Non-presidential and not general election

Exploring the Theories

- ▶ Democratic theory is often used as a justification for exploring political campaign debates, rather than hypothesis testing. Why is democratic theory used as a justification for research and do you agree with the arguments that scholars make?

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Exploring the Theories

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- ▶ Does the research reported later on in the chapter by McKinney and Carlin support democratic theory's claims about campaign debates?
- ▶ The agenda-setting literature is mixed. Some of the research finds that debates help to set the agenda while other research finds no relationship. Do you think there is a relationship? What might explain the mixed results in the literature?

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Exploring the Theories

- ▶ What insights does research of uses and gratification offer and how can we relate these insights to democratic theory?
- ▶ One of the most concerning findings in the argumentation literature is that arguments that provide little evidence to support one's claims are generally judged more favorably. Is this really concerning? Why the favorable judgment? Do you think this happens in other areas outside of debates?
- ▶ Prior to the debates, there seems to be a lot of talk about expectations. Do you think that expectations play a role in how people evaluate candidates following a debate. What does the literature say?

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Debate Effects

- ▶ Thinking about ELM and debates, how can we explain who views and is affected by debates of debates?
- ▶ McKinney and Carlin note that following debates there is very little change in people's voting intentions. Why is this the case, and why do we care about debates? Is there something deeper going on here?
- ▶ Debates seem to bring a lot of hope for democratic theorists. What reasons are there that debates might not be as helpful as much of the research claims?

The Media and Debates

- ▶ Most of the content of debates is issues, yet this is not the focus of the media. What do the media focus on and is the media's focus more important than the debates themselves?

Content and Format

- ▶ A repeated notion in the reading is that debates are nothing more than a joint press conference. Do you agree with Lanoue and Schrott or is there something more to debates?
- ▶ What are some of the major short-comings in the format of campaign debates and have there been any improvements in the format of campaign debates? Of the three typical debate formats (a panel of journalists, a single moderator, and town hall), which one is best and why?

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- ▶ Most of the research about campaign debates focuses on the president leading up to the general election. What other areas are ripe for research?
- ▶ Do you think that debates that are either non-presidential or not general election focused will produce similar research results?