This 44-item bibliography, limited to the television era of American politics, is intended to assist teachers of debate, argumentation, and political communication; researchers of campaign debates; and debate sponsors and participants. Scholarly books and monographs; public affairs books, monographs and papers; academic articles and chapters from textbooks; and sources for debate transcripts and video-tapes are listed. (RAE)
Political Campaign Debating

A Selected, Annotated Bibliography Prepared by
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seek office. This bibliography, limited to the TV era of American politics, is
intended to assist teachers of debate, argumentation, and political communication;
researchers of campaign debates; and debate sponsors and participants.

Scholarly Books and Monographs

Bishop, George, Robert G. Meadow, and Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, eds. The Presidential
Primarily concerned with the 1976 debates, with some attention on the 1960 debates.
Includes 10 scholarly essays, most measuring the effects of the 1976 debates.

Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1980. A textual analysis of argumentation, with an
extensive critique of the debate format, and suggestions for improving the format.

Jamieson, Kathleen H. and David Birdsell. Presidential Debates: The Challenge of
Creating an Informed Electorate. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, forthcoming (Fall
1988). Surveys the function of debate in American society from the nation's founding
to contemporary presidential debates. Suggests changes in structure and content.

Kraus, Sidney, ed. The Great Debates: Background-Perspective-Effects. Bloomington:
Indiana Univ. Press, 1982. Includes 14 academic studies and 5 reports from politicians
and media representatives involved in the 1960 debates. Focuses on debate effects.

Univ. Press, 1979. Includes 20 academic studies and 7 reports from journalists,
politicians, and individuals in public affairs groups concerned with the debate
effects and policy.

Kraus, Sidney. Televised Presidential Debates and Public Policy. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence
Erlbaum Associates, forthcoming (Summer 1988). Covers debates from 1960 to
1984, with emphasis on public policy as it relates to TV in politics, debate format
negotiations, media coverage, and voter effects.

York: Longman, 1983. Most comprehensive analysis of political debate strategy
available. Covers all electoral levels. The author, a former speech communication
professor, served as a debate advisor to Reagan in 1980.

(special issue of Speaker & Gavel, vol 16, no. 2). Available from the Allen Press,
P.O. Box 368, Lawrence, KS 65044. The only compilation of studies exclusively on
the 1980 debates. Presents eight academic essays, including an "insider's" report from
Ronald Reagan's debate advisor. Most attention given to debate content and format.

Public Affairs Books, Monographs, and Papers

Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979. Focuses on the value
of presidential debates in public affairs. The most scholarly of the public affairs
publications on campaign debates.

Swerdlow, Joel L. Beyond Debate: A Paper on Televised Presidential Debates. New York:
The Twentieth Century Fund, 1984. An excellent survey (96 pages) of key issues in
debate policy: formats, participation, and sponsorship.

Quarterly Press, 1988. Sponsored by the League of Women Voters Education Fund,
these essays focus on sponsorship of televised campaign debates. Contributors are
political scientists and strategists, media representatives-and-critics, communication
scholars, and legal specialists. Includes data on radio and TV debates since
Academic Articles and Chapters


Chaffee, Steven H. "Approaches of U.S. Scholars to the Study of Televised Political Debates," Political Communication Review, 4 (1979) 19-33. Reviews political debate research (1960-76) on research questions pursued and generic approaches employed, particularly the traditional persuasive paradigm vs. the journalistic approach.

Desmond, Roger Jon and Thomas R. Donahue. "The Role of the 1976 Televised Presidential Debates in the Political Socialization of Adolescents," Communication Quarterly, 29 (1981), 302-308. The social class of parents was the best predictor of how adolescents viewed the importance of the first 1976 debate. Interpersonal communication prior and immediately after the debate was the factor which best predicted the adolescents' perceptions of who won the debate.

Ellsworth, John H. "Rationality and Campaigning: A Content Analysis of the 1960 Presidential Campaign Debates," Western Political Science Quarterly, 18 (1965), 794-802. Compares the discourse in the 1960 debates with other campaign discourse in the 1950 election. Finds that in the debates the candidates devoted more time to making position statements, offering evidence for their positions, and giving reasoned arguments in support of their positions than they did in non-debate discourse.


Kennamer, J. David. "Debate Viewing and Debate Discussion as Predictors of Campaign Cognition," Journalism Quarterly, 64 (1987), 114-118. Based on data from over 300 Richmond, Va. residents who were interviewed shortly after the 1984 presidential and vice-presidential debates, this study concludes that interpersonal discussions of debates strengthen the 'impact' of viewing debates: those who had conversations about them were able to name more campaign issues and express more political attitudes.


Pfau, Michael. "A Comparative Assessment of Intra-party Political Debate Formats," Political Communication Review, 9 (1984), 1-23. Based on three televised presidential primary debates in 1984, this study found that when both debate procedure and format were altered, a significant difference was produced in the behaviors of debate moderators and candidates. Changes in debate format alone affected the quality of candidate answers as reflected in their directness and completeness.

Pfau, Michael. "The Influence of Intra-party Political Debates on Candidate Preference," Communication Research, 14 (1987), 687-697. Using the 1984 presidential campaign for analysis, this study demonstrated that (1) intra-party debates significantly influence viewer attitudes about the candidates and viewer interest in the campaign and (2) violations of viewer expectations about candidates offer an explanation for shifts in viewer attitudes and preferences.


Rouner, Donna and Richard M. Perloff. "Selective Perception of Outcome of First 1984 Presidential Debate," Journalism Quarterly, 65 (1988), 141-47, 240. Using data from over 130 individuals in the Cleveland area, this study reinforces previous research by demonstrating that partisan voters believe that their favorite candidate won the debate. It also suggests that undecided voters are influenced by the TV debate.
Rowland, Robert. "The Substance of the 1980 Carter-Reagan Debate," Southern Speech Communication Journal, 51 (1986), 142-165. This careful textual and argumentative analysis reveals that the journalistic commentators were inaccurate in reporting that Carter was superior on the "substance" or "issues" in the 1980 debate, while Reagan won the TV audience due to his "style." Rowland's analysis makes it clear that Reagan was the superior debater in terms of substantive arguments.

Sigelman, Lee and Carol K. Sigelman. "Judgments of the Carter-Reagan Debate: The Eyes of the Beholders," Public Opinion Quarterly, 48 (1984), 624-628. Using data on over 800 registered voters from a CBS News/New York Times survey conducted shortly after the 1980 Reagan-Carter debate, this study lends support to the "minimum effects" position on TV debates. It reports that citizens who stated that they favored a particular candidate (and who stated that they intended to vote) tended to believe that their candidate had won the debate.

Tiemens, Robert K. "Television's Portrayal of the 1976 Presidential Debates: An Analysis of Visual Content," Communication Monographs, 45 (1978), 362-370. Provides a visual content analysis of the three 1976 debates, showing that Carter benefited more than Ford from the visual dimension of TV.


Vancil, David L. and Sue D. Pendell. "The Myth of Viewer-Listener Disagreement in the First Kennedy-Nixon Debate," Central States Speech Journal, 38 (1987), 16-27. This thorough review of public opinion polls refutes the conventional wisdom from journalistic accounts of the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates that the TV audience viewed Nixon as the losing debater because of his TV image, while the radio audience, lacking negative visual clues, viewed Nixon as the winner.

Debate Transcripts and Video-Tapes


Video-Tapes of Televised Political Debates: The four 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates are available from the Audio-Visual Dept., John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, Columbia Point, Boston, MA 02125. The Vanderbilt University Television News Archive has the most extensive collection of political campaign debates available to scholars and teachers. Its holdings include: the three McGovern-Humphrey debates of the 1972 California Democratic primary campaign, all of the 1976 presidential and vice presidential debates, three TV debates from the 1980 presidential campaign (including the two major debates), eight debates from the 1984 Democratic presidential primary campaign, the two Reagan-Mondale debates in 1984, the 1984 vice presidential debate, and six debates from the 1988 presidential primary campaigns. For information on fees and holdings, see Television News Index and Abstracts (published-monthly); or write to Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Vanderbilt Univ. Library, Vanderbilt Univ., Nashville, TN 37240.