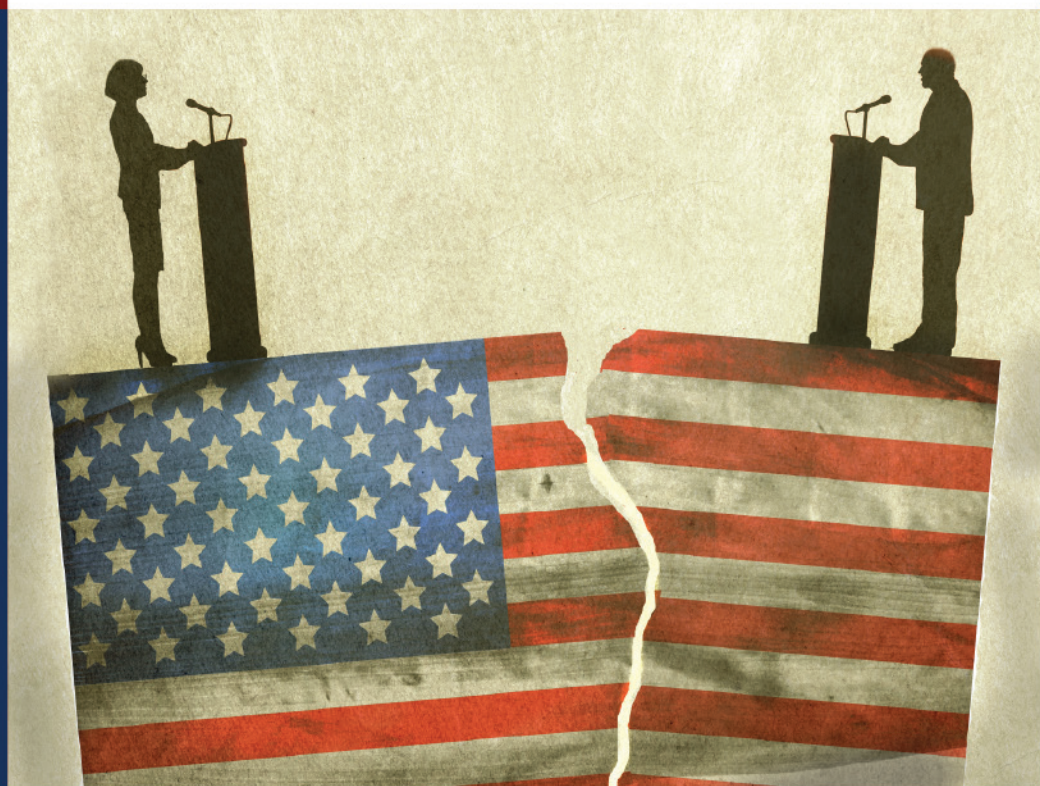# The Audience Decides

Applause-Cheering, Laughter, and Booing during Debates in the Trump Era

Patrick A. Stewart

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This is dedicated to my "tight five + fur"
Rae Rae, Jae Jae, and Mae Mae
Launa, Jeannie, and Jack

Contents

Preface

In many ways, recent American presidential debates have stopped serving the cause of representative democracy and have come to impede thoughtful deliberation: instead of being informative, recent debates have become performative; instead of inspiring thoughtful discourse, recent debates have incited chaotic discord; instead of fortifying the nation, recent debates have come to erode our civic foundation.

This book argues that the political parties, aided and abetted by mass media, have abdicated one of their most important responsibilities: that of providing and vetting the best leadership options available. Instead, the search for followers, ratings, and attention has led to the structure of presidential debates, especially during the primary season, being driven by goals of entertaining the public at the expense of enlightening the citizenry. To understand the role of the audience, and how this function has been subverted, *The Audience Decides* considers behavior during the 2016 and 2020 general election debates (chapter 1) before turning to the primary debates that "set the stage" for the final debates during those electoral campaigns. From there trends in primary debate viewership are considered (chapter 2), allowing for a more exhaustive exploration of the role played by the audience and the social influence their observable audience response (OAR) has on the viewing audience (chapter 3). The next two chapters carry out a microanalysis of candidate speaking time and turns as well as audience OAR of laughter, applause-cheering, and booing during the initial primary debates in 2016 (chapter 4) and 2020 (chapter 5). Exploring the roots of those defining moments during debates that in turn structure the narrative that characterizes a presidential campaign is the focus of chapter 6. Chapter 7 considers the influence debate performance, OAR, and media coverage have on online search behavior. The concluding chapter (chapter 8) reprises the findings in light of a framework that allows for evaluation and reconsideration of how debates, or whatever replaces them, might not only entertain, but also enlighten the most important part of representative democracy, ultimately letting the audience decide who their leader should be.

Acknowledgments

Every large project is built upon the work of others; this book is no different. There have been people who inspired me to write this book through their research and practical insights, people who have assisted me with collecting the data this book is built upon, and people who have galvanized me over the years through their mentoring, kindness, and support.

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Chapter 1

A Prologue to Impolite Politics

Are Debates Obsolete?

Since he burst onto the political scene as a Republican Party presidential candidate in June 2015, journalists, pundits, and scholars have attempted to unearth the root causes of Donald Trump's political popularity. This popularity not only saw him supplant traditional Republican Party presidential candidates and engage in what may be unironically referred to as a hostile takeover of the Grand Old Party, but also drove some select few followers to treasonous insurrection during the January 6, 2021, Capitol attack. The reasons for this are numerous and complex, with insightful work being done from many different perspectives and using multiple approaches including journalistic endeavors (Alberta 2019) and psychological profiles of Trump and his followers (Post 2019), as well as extensive work in political science and communication.

The work carried out here does not preclude, diminish, or preempt any of the above; instead, it provides an auxiliary argument regarding how Trump successfully subverted a structural process that had long filtered out less-serious politicians. Instead of leaving carefully vetted establishment-accepted candidates to choose from, Trump crashed the Republican Party at its most visible and vulnerable point: the presidential debates. This project uses an evolutionarily informed perspective that suggests changing technologies and their application throughout society provided the occasion for opportunistic public figures, such as Donald Trump, to "hack" evolved predispositions regarding leaders and their choice. In short, modern media market realities have changed with the now-altered electoral process, revealing cracks to be taken advantage of by celebrities. This book argues that Donald Trump, through his aggressive, hyperbolic, and self-aggrandizing persona, was able to command his audiences as allies from the debate stage, enlisting them to his side at key moments through his masterful nonverbal and verbal rhetoric. Whether it was alongside nine other Republican Party presidential candidates and in front of

tens of thousands of party loyalists during the first 2016 presidential primary debate, or across the stage from Hillary Clinton before hundreds of audience members, Trump's norm-breaking performances (Hinck et al. 2021; Stewart et al. 2018) invited the in-person audience to laugh, applaud, cheer, and even boo him. The intensity of the in-person audience, in turn was heard, seen, and felt by those millions of viewers watching at home—in turn likely affecting their votes. Thus, while Donald Trump was the focus and catalyst, ultimately it was the audience that decided.

The US presidency may be seen as an increasingly media-centered position, with millions paying close attention thanks to the twenty-four-hour news cycle and the emergence of social media as a continuous conduit of information. Arguably, the media-presidency starts with the presidential debates as these viewers have the opportunity to assess for themselves, in a relatively unmediated and uncontrolled environment, the viability of candidates for the most powerful—and visible—position in the world. As can be seen in figure 1.1, general election presidential debate viewership increased steadily from 2000, with an average of 40.6 million viewers, to the 2012 election with an average of 64 million viewers watching the debates. This linear trend took a sudden leap in viewership for the 2016 and 2020 presidential debates as Donald Trump waged his entertaining insurgency campaign. The novelty of his appearance and performances drew millions more viewers to the debates than had been the case in the past.
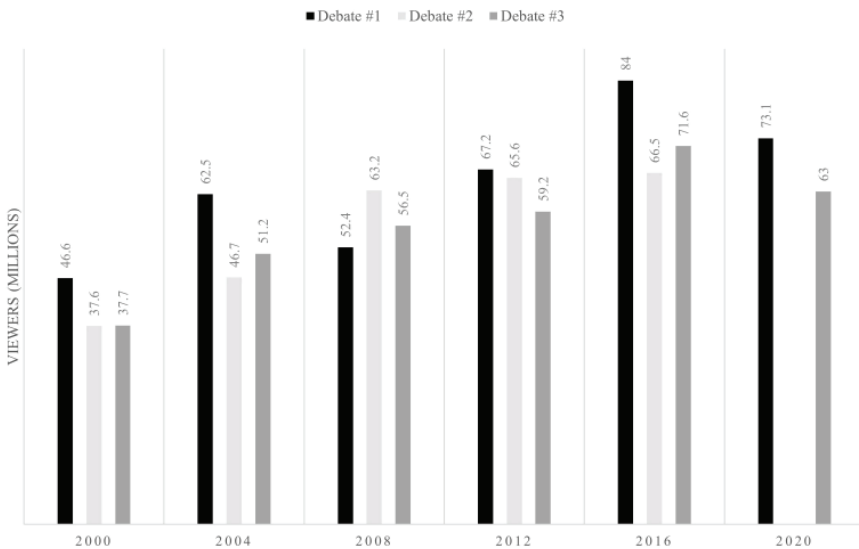

Figure 1.1. Viewership for US Presidential General Election Debates 2000–2020 (millions). *Source:* **Figure created by the author using data from: Nielsen https://www .nielsen.com/insights/2020/2020-election-hub/; Ariens, C. (2012).**

The sustainability of the size of these audiences can be called into question, however, due to Trump's final 2020 debate drawing only 63 million viewers. This number can be seen as roughly on par with patterns of viewership during the George W. Bush and Barack Obama presidential election cycles. Whether due to the lack of in-person audiences thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, viewer fatigue with Trump's dominance of the media cycle, or some combination of these and other factors, what can be said is the 2016 and 2020 presidential debates presented a sharp departure from the norm. How much of a departure and what may be learned from these elections, especially regarding these showpiece events, is what this book ultimately explores.

This first chapter focuses on the 2016 and 2020 general election debates between Donald Trump and his respective Democratic Party opponents, Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden. These debates were unprecedented, albeit for different reasons. The 2016 debates broke new ground not just by the historic candidacies of the first major party female candidate and the least politically experienced presidential candidate, it also broke the barrier of incivility (McKinney 2021). Not only did the candidates, mainly Trump, transgress boundaries of what were previously collegial, if not sedate events, so too did the audiences (Stewart et al. 2018). The result of this was a fast moving "incivility spiral" (Scott et al. 2021) that saw a cascading effect in which the audiences were provoked by the candidates and then themselves sanctioned greater attacks. For their part, the 2020 debates were unique and historic thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, but not just in the larger context of the overarching existential threat posed by the coronavirus, but also by removing the audience from the equation. The deafening silence from the empty seats, especially in comparison with the raucous in-person audiences four years previous, seemed to underscore and accentuate the onstage rancor and aggression of the two candidates striving for verbal and nonverbal dominance.

From the very start of the 2016 presidential campaign until three weeks before Election Day, the presidential debates provided insight into not only the candidates themselves but also their connection with in-person audiences. Although candidates possessing a wide range of intellect and charisma have long attracted public attention due to the importance of the office, the 2016 presidential debates were undoubtedly unique. Whereas Hillary Clinton was a historical first woman major party nominee, the general public also was exposed to the first reality-TV star to run for major elective office in Donald Trump.

Low expectations regarding Trump's debate performance were not only the result of him holding a position normally achieved by only the most judiciously vetted and campaign-tested political party selections, but also due to a route to the nomination that rarely saw him being challenged on policy specifics due to an overcrowded primary. These low expectations for Donald

Trump were accentuated by high hopes for Hillary Clinton. As veteran of over twenty-two head-to-head debates during the 2008 presidential primary season, another nine during the 2016 primaries, and multiple senatorial debates, as well as being an intimate observer of husband Bill Clinton's many presidential debates (Benoit 2013; Seiter & Weger 2020; Stewart 2010), it was common knowledge that Hillary Clinton held a distinct edge. However, despite Clinton's experience and well-known work ethic, remarks in advance of the debate noted that Trump had the "ability to read a room, to sense when he is losing an audience, and to try the theme or tone that will win them back" (Fallows 2016). In essence, while Hillary Clinton was foreseen as undoubtedly winning on the basis of preparation and substance, Trump's reactive style was foretold as being key for his success.

While the script had been written for the pundits and media experts, what remained was for the studio audience and those watching at home to judge the candidates based upon their mostly unmediated performance (Stewart et al. 2017; Wicks 2007; Wicks et al. 2017). For the millions of viewers watching or streaming, the ability of the candidates to evoke response from those at the event had the potential to play a key role in how the contenders were evaluated. The role of audience response in providing useful information can be seen as accentuated especially in light of the often arcane and complex policy arguments made by traditional political figures that are not necessarily fully understood and appreciated by the typical viewer. Just as laugh tracks indicate a successful punch line in scripted television, audience laughter signals not only a successful humorous comment, but also a connection between audience members and the candidate. In turn, these coordinated group vocalizations likely indicate the electoral viability of the candidates eliciting and receiving the laughter (West 1984).

As has been the case since the 1992 presidential election, a three-debate approach with two podium-based events bookending a town-hall meeting took place during the 2016 general election. The three ninety-minute general election debates between Democratic Party presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and Republican Party nominee Donald Trump occurred over the course of one month with the first debate held at Hofstra University in New York on Monday, September 26, and moderated by NBC News's Lester Holt. The second debate, hosted by St. Louis, Missouri's Washington University, occurred on Sunday, October 9, and was moderated by CNN's Anderson Cooper and ABC's Martha Raddatz. This debate varied in format by featuring a "town-hall" style, with half of the questions posed by audience members who were uncommitted voters. The third and final debate, hosted by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, took place on Wednesday, October 19, and was moderated by Fox News's Chris Wallace.

Viewership across all three debates was historically high. An estimated 84 million voters watched the first debate on television, making it the most watched debate in US history. Despite viewership being less than the first debate, the second debate saw an impressive 66.5 million viewers. The third and final debate had an increase in viewership from the second debate with 71.6 million viewers watching the broadcast.

In past presidential campaigns, general election debates were noted for being more respectful and polite, especially when compared to primary election debates. At the same time, there still remains the temptation for the nominees to play to the studio audience, while performing for the larger audience viewing at home. With the 2016 presidential debate, norms of respectfulness and politeness, while being nodded at in the introductory statements by both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, soon were cast by the wayside through interruptions by the two contenders and ultimately by the audience itself.

Candidate Interruptions, Interjections, and Utterances

Visual dominance of attention has long been considered synonymous with leadership across species and cultures (Chance 1967; Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1989; Salter 2007) with modern politicians' ability to dominate camera time being a key indicator of their leadership potential (Bucy 2016; Gerpott et al. 2018; Grabe & Bucy 2009; Stewart et al. 2017; Stewart et al. 2021; Stewart et al. 2019; Wicks 2007; Wicks et al. 2017). Being capable of pilfering attention through interrupting the other candidate as they speak was likely a key strategy at play during the 2016 debates. Although there is disagreement on the exact number of interruptions engaged in by both candidates during the three 2016 presidential debates, there was no question regarding the aggressive verbal and nonverbal behavior engaged in by Donald Trump (Grebelsky-Lichtman & Katz 2019; Rohmah & Suwandi 2021). With popular press estimates of the times Trump interrupted Clinton during the first debate ranging from three to fifty-one (Koerth 2016), there is no doubt that Trump engaged in highly disruptive and antagonistic behavior (Bull 2018). Even in competitive politics, an arena that emphasizes asserting dominance through control of speaking turns and time (Kimmel et al. 2012; Schubert 1988; Schubert et al. 1992), Trump's behavior was widely perceived as excessive.

Thus, consideration of both candidate speaking time—how much attention they received—and their speaking turns—attempts made to capture the audiences' attention—is revealing because it indicates patterns not only of dominance of attention (Kimmel et al. 2012; Schubert 1988; Schubert et al. 1983; Schubert et al. 1992; Schubert et al. 1987) but also abiding (or not) by behavioral norms of politeness (Dailey et al. 2005). During the first debate,

according to rigorous content analyses by Stewart and colleagues that coded on a millisecond basis (Eubanks et al. 2018), results indicated nearly five minutes more speaking time for Trump at forty-seven minutes when compared to Clinton's forty-two minutes. This was most likely due to Trump's many interruptions. Here, Trump's attempts to dominate speaking time through interruptions led him to have nearly twice as many speaking turns (80) as Clinton (43). While the second debate found each candidate speaking for approximately forty minutes, Trump's propensity for interruptions led to him having nearly twice as many speaking turns (52) as Clinton (28). Finally, while during the third debate, Clinton spoke for nearly seven minutes more than Trump did, Trump again took far more speaking turns (82) than did Clinton (49).

Perhaps more illuminating is consideration of the overall patterns of speaking time and turns across all three debates. While Trump and Clinton received nearly equal speaking time, with only six seconds separating them in sum, Trump neared one hundred more speaking turns (214) than did Clinton (120). As a result, Trump's speaking turns were just half as long as Clinton's, suggesting less emphasis on enhancing prestige through content and more on increasing dominance through interruption.

Audience Interactions through Observable Audience Response (OAR)

This lack of candidate politeness appeared contagious to audience members through their audible responses. This can be seen in two forms: first, the total number of observable audience response (OAR) incidents that occurred during each debate and the amount of time spent in the different types of response, whether laughter, applause-cheering, booing, or the combinations of laughter followed by applause-cheering and mixture of laughter and booing. A second means by which the in-person audience's response can be considered is the level of judged OAR intensity during the course of each debate; in this case an additive scale measuring audience reaction intensity combines duration in seconds and judged strength on a 1-to-5 point scale ranging from "barely audible" to "extremely audible" provides a metric by which the audience watching at home experience the event.

During the first 2016 general election presidential debate, the audience engaged in thirty-one OAR incidents in reaction to the candidates' statements or retorts. Of the over minute and a half (94.1 seconds) of OAR occurring during the debate, Trump elicited nearly twice as much OAR (eighteen events, 58.8 seconds) as did Clinton (thirteen events, 35.3 seconds).

While expected from proceedings that have historically been marked by norms of politeness, a great majority of these group utterances were the difficult-to-control and highly contagious laughter, with roughly two-thirds
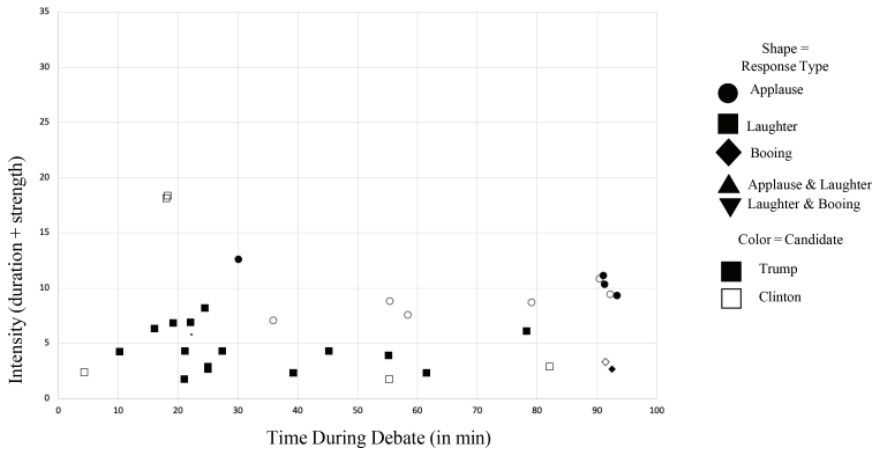
Figure 1.2. Audience Response to Candidates, Presidential Debate, September 26, 2016. *Source:* **Figure 1.2, published as figure 1 in Stewart et al., "Candidate performance and observable audience response: Laughter and applause–cheering during the first 2016 Clinton–Trump presidential debate," Frontiers in Psychology (9)1182, 2018.**

involving laughter alone (19 events). The largest difference between Clinton and Trump pertained to laughter, with Trump inducing it five times more often, either alone or in combination with booing in one instance (thirteen times for 31.3 seconds) than Clinton, who for her part elicited applause-cheering immediately following laughter only once (eight times for 11.2 seconds).

The initial breakdown of audience norms of politeness can be seen in the laughter that occurred in combination with applause-cheering in one case and booing in another. With booing occurring twice and applause-cheering occurring eight times and audible for nearly three-quarters of a minute (45.6 seconds), the breakdown of typical standards of audience behavior during general election debates can be seen as realized in 2016.

The patterns of response by the audience attending the first 2016 general election debate can be seen as escalating in amount and reaction intensity of observable audience response during the first third of the debate, with nearly half of all OAR—mainly laughter—occurring during the first twenty-five minutes. At this point, the audience's reactions reached an apex of intensity when Donald Trump attacked Hillary Clinton by stating, "I will release my tax returns—against my lawyer's wishes—when she releases her 33,000 e-mails that have been deleted. As soon as she releases them, I will release" to applause and cheering. From there, the pattern of OAR was relatively scattered with mainly laughter, and some applause, occurring until the final minutes of the debate. Here, we see both candidates being booed, and both candidates eliciting intense applause and cheering from the audience in the waning minutes of the debate.

Consideration of the different patterns of the studio audience response to the candidates suggest potentially different strategies. Trump, for his part, largely evoked laughter early in the debate through interruptions and interjections that attacked Clinton during her speaking turns. Trump's ten laughter-eliciting comments that occurred during the first half hour of the debate evoked escalating intensity in response—including a comment that was responded to with both laughter and booing—and reached its peak with the aforementioned attack on Clinton's email server issue. From there, however, Trump's ability to elicit laughter was much diminished both in numbers and intensity. For her part, Clinton saw increasing intensity and numbers of responses by audience members.

The second 2016 general election presidential debate, in the town-hall format, proved to have a much more tranquil audience than the first with only nine OAR. Whether due to the more intimate town-hall setting with candidates in closer proximity than the other debates or thanks to the respective October surprises faced by Trump (his *Access Hollywood* sexual harassment tapes) and Clinton (the WikiLeaks hacking and release of her campaign manager's online account), the audience reaction to both candidates was subdued. Besides Clinton's receiving audience applause-cheering twice for twelve seconds, all other audience responses were incited by Trump. While Trump did prompt one incident of extended audience booing (4.9 seconds) and caused audience applause-cheering once (6.2 seconds), his major strength was eliciting audience laughter five times for over twenty-one seconds, with two of these being combinations of laughter followed by applause. This composite response of applause-cheering and laughter presumably allowed the audience more time to savor the moment, as well as give them a physical break from the effort of laughing (Eubanks et al. 2018; Stewart 2012; Stewart et al. 2016).

With this debate, Trump used a similar approach to the one he applied during the first debate with largely interruptions, insults, and attacks eliciting audience response during the first twenty-five minutes, then diminishing thereafter. However, in comparison with the first debate, there were fewer incidents of OAR, and the intensity of the audience response was much lower. The one comment that elicited the most intense audience response was Trump's refrain regarding Clinton going to jail at the twenty-first minute mark (see figure 1.3). What was different in this debate from the first was that Trump made an apparently pre-scripted humorous attacks referencing Abraham Lincoln twice in succession; this was the first and only time during the three debates that Trump referenced the Republican Party and its values, even if obliquely.

Though the third debate had more incidents of OAR than the second (eleven vs. nine), there was marginally less audience enthusiasm as marked
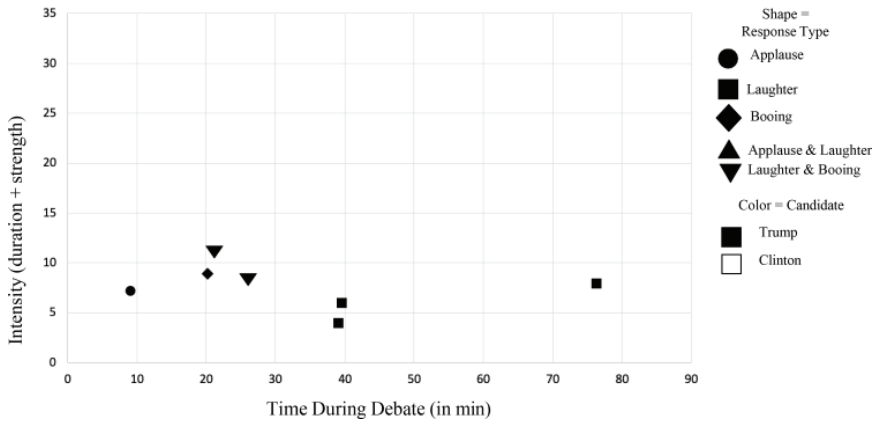
Figure 1.3.   Audience Response to Candidates, Presidential Debate, October 9, 2016.
Source: **Created by the author.**

by time spent in response (41.8 vs. 44.5 seconds). Clinton and Trump each received applause-cheering from the audience once; however, a stark contrast between the two occurred with Trump receiving audience laughter six times (22.5 seconds) compared with Clinton's only attaining audience laughter twice (7.0 seconds) and combined laughter and booing once (3.0 seconds).

With this third debate, audience response was even more muted than the second—and especially the first—debate, with slightly fewer responses at less intensity. Interestingly, these incidents of OAR occurred later in the debate in a U-shaped pattern with a strong initial series of responses to Trump as the debate reached the twenty-five-minute mark, diminishing thereafter and then increasing again as the debate passed the hour mark. While Clinton used humor to a much greater extent with well-crafted attacks, as was the case when she said "And I would be happy to compare what we do with the Trump Foundation which took money from other people and bought a six-foot portrait of Donald. I mean, who does that?" However, her delivery did not elicit the response that Trump was able to—either intentionally or unintentionally—as was the case when he said "Nobody has more respect for women than I do. Nobody." As can be seen in figure 1.4, support for Trump from the audience was more intense and happened more often that it did for Clinton.

Conclusions about the 2016 Presidential General Election Debates

By comparison, the three 2008 presidential general election debates between Barack Obama and John McCain averaged ten laughter events; with
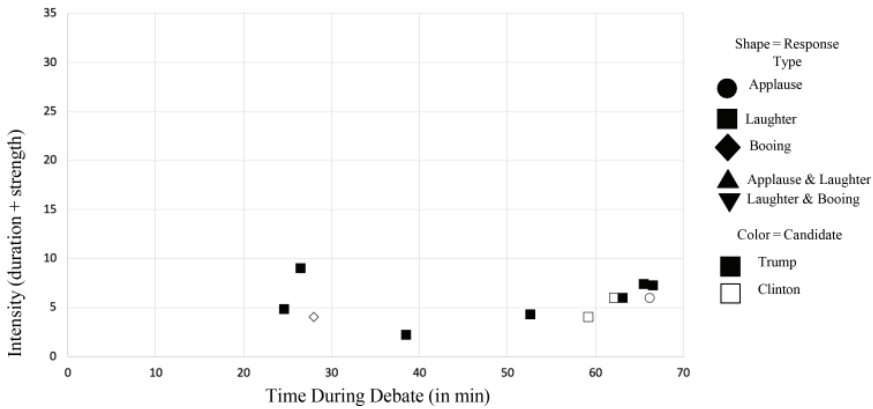
Figure 1.4.   Audience Response to Candidates, Presidential Debate, October 19, 2016.
Source: **Created by the author.**

thirty-five events involving laughter, there apparently was not that much difference between those more genteel events and the 2016 general election debates. What was different was the presence of booing—which has largely been absent throughout the history of general election and primary debates— and the presence of applause-cheering by the audience during the debates themselves. Whether this is due to Clinton's supporters being more polite and rule-abiding when compared to Trump's, or to Trump's much-vaunted ability to perform and connect with an audience cannot be said. What is apparent is that those watching at home saw—and heard—debates in which the studio audience reacted enthusiastically to Donald Trump.

OVERVIEW OF THE 2020 DEBATES

The first 2020 presidential debate between President Donald J. Trump and Vice President Joe Biden was much like the first 2016 presidential debate: unprecedented in its rancor. This time, instead of the in-person audience largely breaking with the unspoken, yet long-held values of politeness in debates, Donald Trump interrupted, insulted, and attacked Joe Biden for an hour and a half (McKinney 2021); Biden for the most part responded in kind. While little could be learned about either of the candidates' policies in the cacophony of provocation, with the noise turned down and the focus on the candidates' nonverbal behavior, much can be learned about each of their respective leadership styles by just watching.

The first debate occurred on September 29, 2020, in Cleveland, Ohio, and was hosted by Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Clinic,

with the latter serving as health security adviser for all the presidential debates. Moderated by FOX News' Chris Wallace, the debate took place in front of a greatly limited in-person audience, while an estimated 73.1 million watched the broadcast. The planned October 15 town-hall debate was canceled outright—the first televised presidential general election debate to be canceled—due to Donald Trump refusing to take part in a virtual format. Instead, Trump scheduled a counterprogrammed town-hall forum on NBC (network home to his reality show *The Apprentice*) to compete with Joe Biden's town-hall forum on ABC that was to replace the town-hall debate (McKinney 2021). The third debate was held at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, on October 22, and was hosted by Kristen Welker of NBC News. A total of 63 million watched the nationally televised event. While the drop of 10 million viewers from the first debate can be seen as typical for debates in the twentieth century, part of the drop-off was ascribed to FOX Sports broadcasting the NFL Thursday night football game between the Philadelphia Eagles and the New York Giants.

Candidate Interruptions, Interjections, and Utterances

In performances that both mirrored and amplified his 2016 debates with Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump relied upon interruptions as his main competitive technique to counter his challenger, Joe Biden. In his initial debate, Trump either interrupted Biden 128 times (Demsas 2020) or 71 times (Blake 2020) while speaking for just over forty minutes in the ninety-minute debate (Wu et al. 2020). Although Biden did engage in conversational aggression during the forty-six minutes he spoke, his interruptions and interjections were substantially fewer with estimates of one-quarter of that of Trump (twenty-two times). The form of aggression Biden relied upon was mainly nonverbal displays of exasperation and incredulity. The nature of this first debate was perhaps best described by Park and colleagues (Park et al. 2021):

> Trump's initial debate with Biden may well be the most unusual—and disturbing—performance in the history of presidential debating. Trump completely ignored the debate rules for candidate response times and continuously sparred with both his opponent and the debate moderator. Trump delivered a 90-minute diatribe of constant interruptions, insults, and harangues. (p. 5)

While the final debate saw a more "sedate" Trump performance, he still interrupted extensively. *Vox* counted ninety-six interruptions and interjections by both candidates, with Trump responsible for thirty-four interruptions compared to Biden's seventeen (Demsas 2020). Of the forty-five

interjections identified, Biden provided double that of Trump's fourteen with thirty total. NBC News perceived a similar equality in acrimonious exchange between the two candidates, albeit with Biden edging Trump's interruptions by one with twenty-five total during his thirty-three minutes of speaking time compared to twenty-four Trump interruptions during his thirty-seven minutes speaking (Chiwaya 2020).

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL ELECTION DEBATES

Donald Trump has been exceedingly successful in defining his public persona due in large part to his ability to choose the venue and the medium of his interactions in a manner that highlights his charismatic, larger-than-life style while minimizing or even hiding his weaknesses. The 2020 presidential debates provided an opportune venue for Donald Trump to put the spotlight on his ability to dominate other candidates, again using the strategy he had so effectively used in 2016: breaking norms of politeness. This time, however, was different. In the absence of vocal allies in the building, President Trump's consistent aggression through his interruptions and attacks was not met with acclaim from followers and their observable audience response. If anything, more attention was paid by the media and the viewing public to his nonverbal behavior, which was overwhelmingly aggressive (see textbox 1.1).

For his part, Joe Biden presented a prototypical example of an emotionally expressive politician who, even when directly dealing with aggression from competitors, tended to base his response in affiliative behavior. Unlike Trump, Biden laughed off attacks rather than responding with overt anger. Instead of amusement, Biden's behavior signaled bemusement; his core behavior during this debate was smiling and laughter indicating his deriding Trump's attack. Thus, throughout the debate, despite being continuously interrupted and personally attacked, Biden's response tended to be one of smiling and laughter (see textbox 1.1).

CONCLUSIONS: ALL NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR MATTERS

Although the communication of policy content by the candidates during presidential debates matters, it might not have mattered as much during the five 2016 and 2020 general election debates. This may be definitely seen as the case due to the nature of a nontraditional candidate such as Donald Trump

TEXTBOX 1.1. NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR DURING THE FIRST 2020 PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL ELECTION DEBATE

Donald Trump

When content analyzed at the microanalytic level, there were both well-established patterns of behavior by Donald Trump and unique deviations from his typical behavior. Perhaps the most revealing of his nonverbal behavior derived from his facial displays. Of twenty-eight smiles engaged in by Trump, twenty-two were contemptuous. This prototypical "contempt display," involves the one-sided tightening and pulling up of a lip corner and is associated with perceived values being violated by in-group members. Trump's displays of contempt can often be seen in conjunction with his tongue thrust out in distaste, frequently just prior to his making combative statements.

Perhaps Trump's signature facial display is his protruding funneled lips. This lip funneler was observed twenty-seven times during the debate while Trump was listening and preparing to interject or interrupt Biden. The research that exists about this behavior in humans suggests it is a primal display often occurring during intense emotional situations, as would be the case during competitive debates.

Finally, while less noticeable due to their rapid onset and offset, Trump exhibited three micro-expressions: one of fear and two signaling anger. Micro-expressions are subtle, largely involuntary and preconscious facial behaviors lasting for a fraction of a second and are interpreted as "leakage" of otherwise hidden emotions and attitudes. When discordant with a political figure's goals, they can decrease a speech's persuasive impact. During the debate Trump's first micro-expression was one of fear involving his lip corners being pulled back and occurred in response to Joe Biden attacking his signature competence by saying, "Donald Trump talks a lot about the art of the deal. But under his watch, China has perfected the art of the steal." In his response immediately afterward, Trump attacked Biden's son, Hunter Biden, and his business dealings, escalating the acrimony.

Joe Biden

Joe Biden adopted a similar debate strategy to the one he used against Paul Ryan in their 2012 vice presidential debate—that of smiling and

laughing off attacks. The smiling and laughter can be seen as perform-ing multiple functions. It diminishes negative feelings and associated physiological states while at the same time signaling to individuals nearby an "all clear" from threat. At the same time, laughter may serve as a subtle signal for transitioning to another discussion topic—espe-cially as research suggests that people informally discussing topics often change topics within thirty seconds of laughter occurring. This, in turn may be why people "laugh off" attacks and insults. Specifically, laughter signals that the person feels positive enough to be playful and laugh about a comment, while at the same time ever-so-subtly prompt-ing a change in the conversation.

Throughout his initial presidential debate with Trump, Biden smiled twenty-two times; fourteen of these smiles were accompanied by laughter. Even when he displayed a contempt smile, which occurred ten times, he laughed four of these times, attenuating their effect. In total, when considering both on- and off-camera laughter by himself, Biden laughed twenty-five times. As a result, we can observe a distinct behav-ioral strategy to not be affected by Trump's contentious and aggressive style by taking a "happy warrior" approach in this competitive arena.

who was willing to disregard long-standing norms of polite discourse, thanks in part to supporters in the audience giving dispensation through their observable responses of first, laughter, and then applause-cheering and booing. Having an appreciation for a person's baseline nonverbal behavior is highly important to help identify when someone starts feeling strong emotions. Noticing deviations are important whether considering powerful political figures or friends and family. These distinctive nonverbal behaviors, whether they are body move-ments, posture, facial displays, and vocalizations—can be seen as "signatures" by which individuals may be evaluated (8), whether the stakes are relatively ordinary, or as in this case with choosing a president, quite high.

Dominate Attention and Win Supporters

Evolutionary leadership theorists largely agree that three major forms of leadership niches exist (Smith et al. 2018; Spisak et al. 2011; Spisak et al. 2015). These niches exist because groups faced recurrent problems that threatened group stability and well-being; responding to external and internal threats, building the size and connectedness of a group, and comforting group members in time of loss have long been major concerns for group success.

While in the past, when groups had face-to-face personal relationships, these leadership roles might have been held by multiple individuals. In our modern world where mass visual media gives us the illusion of personal connection with leaders, we expect individuals to play all roles equally effectively.

This is not necessarily the case. Some leaders portray themselves as having abilities they do not possess. We are most familiar with leaders playing the role of focal point for rallying against both internal and external threats to a group. Here, followers want someone who can focus their anger against a threat. As a result, they look to individuals who have the physical capacity and signaling style that indicates they can do the job of protecting the larger group.

More typical of leaders in Western representative democracies are leadership styles premised upon affiliative behavior. While contenders who are trailing in political races rely on more aggressive behavior, both verbal and nonverbal, successful politicians try to broaden their reach to more supporters and build closer connections with them. Even when responding to threats, attempts might be made to mitigate aggression to allow for the governance that must occur after elections are over. In other words, in keeping with his reputation for reaching across the aisle to compromise on political issues, based upon their affiliative behavior Biden and Clinton apparently favored a broaden-and-build leadership strategy. This is the case even when they were aggressed against by Trump's many interruptions and interjections.

Finally, while we rarely look to our leaders in times of loss, when large-scale loss occurs—whether economic, inexplicable violence, or pandemics—we expect our leaders will be able to show empathy with loss. Being able to "tend-and-befriend" others is an assumed part of the human experience, but one that we want to see in our leaders if we are to trust them. Although the structure of traditional debates pits the candidates against each other in a battle of wits, the town-hall approach, even socially distanced, will by necessity require the presidential candidates to connect with and empathize with the undecided voters on which this election hinges.

Laughter can be an incredibly useful social tool. Not only is it one of life's most pleasant feelings, in conflictual interactions it can pacify, and even bond people together (Fein et al. 2007). Further, most laughter isn't directly tied to jokes or obviously humorous comments. In social settings, studies have found less than 20 percent of laughter to be prefaced by comments that are even remotely humorous (Provine 2001). A similar dynamic occurs in politics. During the presidential primary debates in 2008, of three hundred humorous comments uttered over ten debates, comparatively few were witty or joke-like—despite the theatrical nature of primary debates that rewards humorous candidates (Stewart 2012).

While the observable audience response of laughter, as well as applause-cheering, booing, chanting, and so on, can be reliable indicators of connection between speakers and the in-person audience, they do not necessarily indicate competence so much as charisma. With this in mind, if the political parties abdicate their traditional role by not acting to filter out inexperienced, incompetent, and unscrupulous candidates from populating their primary debate stages, and instead delegate this duty to the broadcast media, how the televised debates are structured may matter more in who is chosen than actual political leadership ability. If this dereliction of political party responsibility is the case, and political leadership ability is indeed valued—as one would hope in democratic societies—one may very well raise the question "are debates obsolete?" We explore this question throughout the remainder of this book by focusing on the first highly public step taken in leader selection: the presidential primary debates.

Chapter 2

Presidential Primary Debates
from Beginning to End

The 2016 and 2020 presidential elections were game-changing, not just in the hyperbolic sense, but by the manner in which both political parties saw outsider candidates make sustained, and in the case of Donald Trump with the Republican Party, successful bids for power. That Trump, a media figure with no experience as an elected official, and Bernie Sanders, a senator who was not even an official member of the Democratic Party, were contenders in the respective political parties' primaries suggests that the traditional "game" of politics has been upended. The most immediate question concerns how this came about in the first place.

A major factor influencing winners and losers in politics, especially in electoral races, are the rules of the game; namely, the decisions regarding who can take part and what can be done influences who obtains political power. One of the few identifiable and predictable rules in political science is "Duverger's rule" where first-past-the-post electoral systems tend to lead to political systems dominated by two parties (Taagepera & Shugart 1993). As a result, political systems such as in the United States have two political parties that constrain the choice made not just with formal rules, but also informally through what is deemed as acceptable actions.

Elinor Ostrom in her 2009 Nobel Prize–winning work concerning institutional economics established that cross-culturally humans create rules, and institutions to enforce these rules, organically (Ostrom 1998, 2011). These rules can be informal "rules-in-use" that are understood and followed by the participants or can be formal "rules-in-form" that are defined explicitly. In turn, environmental factors influence outcomes, types of rules, and their application. Because informal rules-in-use are changeable and based upon shared understandings, they are most likely to alter, often incrementally. Conversely, it takes greater time and effort for rules-in-form to be

changed—often in response to more obvious threats to the public order—and when these changes occur, they are often substantial.

This chapter argues that, in the attempt to appeal to a national audience, the political parties have largely lost their ability to referee their presidential primaries as they have apparently ceded substantial control of their primary debates to the networks. In short, the political game of electing the president has changed as primary debates have become "must- see live TV" with substantial viewership and with this the resultant ratings and moneymaking potential. The function played by both the political parties and the networks by informally structuring attention during the presidential election process has become ever more apparent on the primary debate stage. Namely, during the 2016 and 2020 electoral cycles the celebrity of contesting candidates overshadowed the ideas and experience offered by alternative lower-tier contenders.

While political parties still play a role in structuring electoral decisions at the presidential level, their power can be seen as diminishing over time. Their loosening grip over which candidates stood for election can be seen as coming about first due to structural changes in the late 1960s (Cohen et al. 2009; Steger et al. 2002). More recently the political parties' hold was further weakened due to greater public access to and interest in media coverage of presidential primary races. As concluded by Cohen and colleagues, "The campaign is no longer a collection of separate organizations, but a big national debate with multiple candidates and an audience of national news junkies who seem never to sleep" (336).

To explore the diminishing influence of political parties with the concurrent media populism that characterizes modern life, this chapter first considers the influence of structure on primary elections by the three faces of the political parties—the elected officials, party leaders and functionaries, and party membership. From there, the influence of visibility on electoral status is explored; while all humans are prone to using heuristics and biases in their decision-making, those less involved in the electoral process are more likely to use quick-and-easy decision tools—with potentially ruinous results. Here, the effect of visibility on voting is explored, providing a psychologically based rationale for studying the most important of all political party events—the presidential primary debate. The next section thus considers the effect of primary debates on visibility, and hence electoral status, and how these events have become increasingly important in the modern media era. From there, understanding how the audience—not just political party members, but also the interested public—has increasingly influenced the options onstage, and how they are presented, is considered.

THE INFLUENCE OF STRUCTURE ON
AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES

The United States' political system is largely based upon the Westminster "first-past-the-post" model for electing representatives in legislative and executive branches. In Westminster electoral systems, where the candidate receiving 50 percent plus one vote is the winner in electoral races, political parties play the major role in structuring who gets on the ballot, who gets heard, and as a result, who has the potential to be elected and make public policy (Taagepera & Shugart 1993). Different ideological voices may thus be heard (or not) based upon decisions made by the political parties, especially during the early stages of electoral races, but also well before potential candidates decide to enter the fray. Parties do so by structuring the number and types of contests faced by presumed candidates. In the case of presidential primary races, the structuring of whose voices are heard and whose faces are seen on the debate stage is of utmost importance for identifying electoral status.

Each of the two major US political parties, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, have subtly different ways of translating votes from caucus- and primary-holding states into delegates (Cohen et al. 2009; Steger et al. 2002); this in turn influences the process, pace, and outcomes of presidential primaries (Deltas & Polborn 2019; Ryan 2018). As pointed out by Ryan, "Republican primary campaigns generally use a winner-take-more system, which over-rewards their candidates for winning, while Democrats award delegates almost exactly in proportion to their vote share" (839). What this means is that over the course of a primary season, Republican presidential candidates benefit significantly more from winning a state, consolidating their vote share over time, which in turn leads to the earlier exit of competitors when compared to their Democratic Party counterparts (Ryan 2018).

Thus, the electoral status of political candidates is affected by the structure and context of the race being run; discrete aspects of political parties play varying roles that have different levels of influence throughout the electoral process by structuring choice. This is the case regardless of whether elections are proportional or first-past-the-post Westminster style elections, although in the latter case political parties exert more power due to these systems tending to be two-party systems (Taagepera & Shugart 1993). By specifying how many choices there are and eligibility to be one of those choices, parties can strategically alter who is considered, and with the candidates their preferred policies and underlying ideologies. In other words, the political parties' structure who attention is paid to, playing the role of ballot gatekeeper for their own members and ultimately the general public, who for their part often vote

based upon party identity (Campbell et al. 1960; Hillygus & Shields 2009; Lodge & Taber 2013; Miller et al. 1996).

The Ever-Evolving Three Faces of the Political Parties

The three faces of political parties, the party in public office, the party in central office, and the party in the electorate, are key components in representative democracies by determining the rules of the electoral game and who is chosen to represent what oftentimes is one of two realistic choices. According to Katz and Mair, these three faces all play distinct and important roles when it comes to the selection of candidates (Katz & Mair 1993). This has been the case in the US political system with presidential candidates in the preprimary and, then if the candidate is fortunate and capable enough to survive to that point, in the primary season.

The first face is the visible, active, and highly important party in public office. This group of elected officials not only carry out policies favorable to the political party winning and maintaining office, they are often the most clearly identified and visibly active in their pursuit of objectives. While an elite few follow their aspirations and run for the highest office in the land, many more are able to help the party win elections, and thus may consolidate political power while enhancing future opportunities.

The second face is the party in central office, which refers to the formal party that does not hold elective office. This aspect of the party serves two prominent goals, with the first helping organize campaigns to win elections, and the second the realization of party policy goals. While the realization of party goals through public policy is a key aspect, the initial element of organizing winning electoral campaigns depends upon the essential mobilization of support and excitement of the third face of the party, the party in the electorate. In the words of Katz and Mair the "members, activists, and so on" (1993, 593) are the lifeblood of the political parties (Katz & Mair 1993).

The first two faces of political parties do much to structure the competitiveness of races, and with it the electoral status of presidential primary candidates. Steger and colleagues' analysis of presidential primary campaigns from 1912 to 2000 found that the structuring of resource requirements and, concomitantly, their scarcity, affected presidential primary candidate viability before and during primary elections and caucuses (Steger et al. 2002). Importantly, the McGovern-Fraser Committee reforms that affected the elections from 1968 to present led to a "significantly higher number of candidates competing for the nominations of the two major parties. On average, postreform primary voters of both parties select from a larger pool of effective candidates than did proreform primary voters" (542). This has led to an increase in the pool of presidential contenders to where from one and a half

to three times as many candidates have run in the post-reform era (Steger 2000), suggesting structural changes by the formal entities of both parties can influence electoral status.

Combined with the elite signaling to the mass media, increased opportunities for "dark horse" candidates have come about in the recent past (Iyengar & McGrady 2007; Steger 2000). However, this elite signaling may be seen as contingent upon the strength and coherence of the initial signals by the first and second faces of the political parties. In other words, the elites and media rely on whether the important political players generally agree. With this comes the development and perception of momentum. Steger (Steger 2013) notes "when one candidate gains a substantial lead in polls and endorsements during the invisible primary" (385) the caucuses and primaries play a confirmatory role for the elites, activists, donors and other groups as they unify early. On the other hand, campaign momentum may play a role in the absence of coalesced support, in which case the voters—and the media informing voters—play a more important role (Steger 2013). It is here that the third face of the political parties comes into play as the perceptions of this relatively amorphous party in the electorate effectively signals support or lack thereof for presidential candidates through a range of activities in advance of primary voting (Dowdle et al. 2013).

Thus, the third face, the party in the electorate, has been further differentiated into components beyond including those partisans just tallying their primary election vote to include individuals that are active in a political campaign in other more involved ways. Most notably, according to Dowdle and colleagues, a key component includes donating financially to presidential campaigns (Dowdle et al. 2013). Thus, while the first two faces can have direct impact on the electoral status of candidates through structuring rules and providing support through preexisting professional networks, the third face can indicate and build enthusiasm that can be seen through donation patterns during the invisible primary. While Dowdle and colleagues' network analysis of work does more to identify connections within a party than anything else, it does provide an indicator of electoral status through the level of enthusiasm for a candidate—as measured through the costly signal of campaign giving—as well as the likelihood of connections being contagious among political figures. In other words, donations of money more accurately index whether support is intensely felt as individuals "put their money where their mouth is"; additionally, because network analysis shows connections between candidate giving, it indicates the level of both financial, and by proxy, emotional investment among individuals in an election.

This enthusiasm is likewise an important indicator for the media, especially as horse-race coverage leads to more attention to pertinent candidates. However, existing research suggesting that media coverage is driven by

donations alone is lacking, except potentially as an indicator of viability in the context of a horse race. When independent funding plays a role, it may allow long shots to persist longer than anticipated (Christenson & Smidt 2014). This coverage is imperative for candidates during the early stages of a campaign when name recognition is most important for opinion polling. Known candidates are seen as more viable, often regardless of how well their policy positions match those of the partisan voting base. Beyond that, as shown masterfully in Grabe and Bucy's book *Image Bite Politics*, the visual priming and framing of presidential general election candidates follows a distinct pattern that can serve to benefit a candidate at the expense of others (Grabe & Bucy 2009). Candidates with extremely large "war chests" may thus find themselves elevated in public consciousness due largely to their financial resources in a manner that exceeds their leadership capabilities. This visibility, whether driven by financial resources or driving their accrual, is a key factor in electoral success.

Visibility Matters for Electoral Status

Due to the post-1990 media explosion, campaign momentum may matter less once the primary elections have started, thanks in part to a compressed electoral calendar (Christenson & Smidt 2014; Mayer & Busch 2003). As noted by Clinton and colleagues in their analysis of the 2016 presidential primary election public opinion, momentum during caucuses and primaries may not matter as much as initial electoral status when considering final results (Clinton et al. 2019). This finding was underscored by Dowdle and colleagues' forecasting of the 2016 race, where polling response to candidates prior to the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary predicted successful nominees (Dowdle et al. 2016). Thus, visibility may play the most important role in modern campaigns.

The visibility of a political figure may be the key factor for winning elective office as voters rely upon the recognition heuristic when making candidate choices with little other information. This shorthand decision rule occurs even when merely recognizing a name leads to more positive evaluation of a person, object, or organization (Gigerenzer & Todd 1999). Recognition in turn may be driven by mere exposure to verbal or visual representations (Zajonc 2001), in which case preconscious or conscious perceptions may lead to preferences that do not need further information (Zajonc 1980). In the political arena, Kam and Zechmeister experimentally provide evidence that, in the absence of other relevant information, recognizing the name of a political candidate plays a significant and salient role in attaining votes (Kam & Zechmeister 2013). Here, not only providing a candidate's name

preconsciously in the laboratory, but also putting up yard signs enhanced perceived viability and likelihood of receiving an individual's vote.

It is not surprising that voters in low-information elections would use such simple decision rules as the recognition heuristic, especially in the absence of the traditionally relied upon voting cue of party identification. As seen with exit poll studies by Bawm and colleagues, nearly half of voters could not identify the candidate they voted for in their congressional primary; when asked about the reasons behind their voting, group membership identifiers (20.2 percent) and personal attributes (51.6 percent) made up nearly three-quarters of rationale for voting (Bawn et al. 2019). In other words, when a quick decision must be made in the absence of more extensive information, just being familiar—and hence comfortable—with an individual based upon swift associations with other information may be enough to sway a vote (Lodge & Taber 2013).

Candidate visibility does not necessarily have to be positive to have an impact, especially in primary elections where partisan cues are largely irrelevant. Both Bill Clinton in 1992 and Donald Trump in 2016 may have benefited from negative media coverage. Clinton's run against a then relatively large field of five largely unknown candidates found that prior to the presidential caucuses and elections media coverage of his sexual and "patriotic" (in which he avoided the Vietnam draft) scandals led to greater name recognition than the other candidates and as can be inferred (Lenart 1997), greater than expected electoral performance.

For his part, Donald Trump was able to set himself apart from the extremely large field of Republican Party presidential candidates by breaking with traditional norms on the campaign. This was in addition to the high level of "brand awareness" he brought to the campaign due to his reality television persona and lifelong attention-seeking persona (Krasner 2018). Given that the top two candidates for the GOP were both recognized names, with Jeb Bush, the brother of the forty-third US president George W. Bush and son of the forty-first US president George H. W. Bush, Trump and Bush receiving disproportionate amounts of camera (Stewart et al. 2019) and speaking time (Stewart et al. 2016) during the initial Republican Party primary debates is not surprising.

THE EFFECT OF PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATES ON ELECTORAL STATUS

The importance of building name recognition may thus be seen as a major rationale for taking part in modern-day presidential primary debates. With it, public interest in the personalities in a live and unmediated political scenario

may be seen in the increasingly large number of presidential primary debates since 2000 (Birdsell 2017). Specifically, in the wake of the mass media expansion with competition for both viewers and live content, presidential primary debates have become more important for electoral and media purposes.

Consideration of table 2.1 makes it apparent that the numbers of primary debates and serious contenders for either the Republican or Democratic Party nomination have grown substantially since 1948. However, a more nuanced perspective may be derived by considering patterns in each. Numbers of presidential primary debates started increasing in an almost linear pattern after the McGovern-Fraser Committee reforms in the late 1960s opened the electoral system. However, debates in the year prior to the primaries and caucuses experienced an explosion of activity at the turn of the millennium. This suggests there has been a slow, but inexorable, demise of the "invisible primary" where decisions regarding who potential candidates would be were narrowed substantially prior to the primaries and caucuses. Instead of decisions being largely made by the first and second faces of the party, the party in public office and party in central office, the third face of the party, the party in the electorate, has become increasingly conspicuous and obvious.

The number of presidential candidates making it on the primary debate stage likewise suggests the McGovern-Fraser Committee reforms affected participation. Here, the numbers of contenders increased substantially after the reforms were put in place (see table 2.1). Although the numbers of presidential primary candidates from 1972 to 2012 ranged from a low of two for the Democratic Party after President Bill Clinton's second term to a high of eleven after President George W. Bush's second term, the numbers of primary candidates varied at their peak from mostly six to nine candidates.

In 2016 this all changed. Although the 2016 Democratic Party presidential primary debates featured at most five candidates, this likely reflected Hillary Clinton's status as heir apparent to the nomination as the party in public office and party in central office arguably coalesced behind her. Clinton's front-runner position was due to her ascendance within the Democratic Party from major back-room player during President Bill Clinton's two-term presidency, to her run as domestic powerhouse New York Senator, and then to her stint as President Barack Obama's Secretary of State. As a result of her increasing public relevance, she became a polarizing lightening rod being seen as alternately an embattled political figure and a loathed Washington D.C. insider.

However, the seventeen Republican Party candidates jockeying for media coverage and viewer attention during the 2016 electoral cycle, as well as the twenty 2020 Democratic Party candidates, may reflect a new normal for presidential primaries and the debates. As mass media broadcasting has not only become commonplace, but the major means by which campaign decisions

Table 2.1 . Primary Debates and Candidates Onstage 1948–2020

Year	Political Party	Debates (YR prior)	Candidates (#)
1948	Republican	1	(2) Dewey, Stassen
1956	Democratic	1	(2) Stevenson, Kefauver
1960	Democratic	2	(3) J. Kennedy, Humphrey, Johnson
1968	Democratic	1	(2) R. Kennedy, McCarthy
1972	Democratic	3	(5) Humphrey, Chisholm, Hardin (for Wallace), McGovern, Yorty
1976	Democratic	3	(9) Carter, Bayh, Church, Harris, H. Jackson, Shapp, Shriver, Udall-Church, Udall
1980	Republican	6	(7) Reagan, Anderson, Baker, Bush, Connally, Crane, Dole
1984	Democratic	11	(8) Mondale, Askew, Cranston, Glenn, Hart, Hollings, J. Jackson, McGovern
1988	Democratic	15* (2)	(7) Dukakis, Biden, Babbit, Gore, Gephardt, J. Jackson, Simon
1988	Republican	6(1)	(6) Bush, Dole, DuPont, Haig, Kemp, Robertson
1992	Democratic	14(1)	(7) Clinton, Agran, Brown, Harkin, Kerrey, Tsongas, Wilder
1996	Republican	7(1)	(10) Dole, Alexander, Buchanan, Dornan, Forbes, Gramm, Keyes, Lugar, Specter, Taylor
2000	Democratic	9(1)	(2) Gore, Bradley
2000	Republican	13(6)	(6) Bush, Bauer, Forbes, Hatch, Keyes, McCain,
2004	Democratic	21(13)	(10) Kerry, Clark, Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Graham, Kucinich, Lieberman, Mosley-Braun, Sharpton
2008	Democratic	20(13)	(8) Obama, Biden, Clinton, Dodd, Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, Richardson
2008	Republican	16(11)	(11) McCain, Brownback, Gilmore, Giuliani, Huckabee, Hunter, Paul, Romney, Tancredo, F. Thompson, T. Thompson
2012	Republican	26(18)	(9) Romney, Bachman, Cain, Gingrich, Huntsman, Johnson, Paul, Perry, Santorum
2016	Democratic	9(3)	(5) Clinton, Chafee, O'Malley, Sanders, Webb
2016	Republican	12/14(5)	(17) Trump, Bush, Carson, Christie, Cruz, Fiorina, Gilmore, Graham, Huckabee, Jindal, Kasich, Pataki, Paul, Perry, Rubio, Santorum, Walker
2020	Democratic	11(8)	(20) Biden, Bennet, Booker, Buttigieg, Castro, De Blasio, Delaney, Gabbard, Gillibrand, Harris, Hickenlooper, Inslee, Klobuchar, O'Rourke, Ryan, Sanders, Swalwell, Warren, Williamson, Yang

Source: Information from 1948–2012 comes from Benoit's Appendix 1 (Benoit 2013).

are informed, there is no reason to expect any different. In other words, there may not be so much a partisan realignment (Carmines & Stimson 1986; Schreckhise & Shields 2003) as a technological transformation in how leaders are chosen and on what basis (Cohen et al. 2009; Grabe & Bucy 2009; Iyengar 2023).

Because presidential primary debates remove the partisan cue, viewers are more likely to be informed and persuaded by the contending candidates onstage (Benoit & Hansen 2004; Benoit et al. 2001; Benoit et al. 2002; Lanoue & Schrott 1989; McKinney & Warner 2013; Yawn et al. 1998). Viewers also have a greater likelihood of changing their minds, especially during the earlier debates (Holbrook 1999; Warner et al. 2018). The use of simple decision rules such as recognition or likability is perhaps accentuated during the early debates. The greater number of candidates onstage, before the contenders have been winnowed, means that policy debate is limited by the speaking time available. In turn, the sheer number of choices means less reliable and valid differentiation between candidates on the basis of their policy positions. Warner and colleagues found greater vote-shifting by their participants in the most crowded of the four 2016 presidential primary debates they considered (Warner et al. 2018) suggesting both the multitude of options and the content depth acquired leads to tenuous connections with the candidates.

At the same time, however, viewing a primary debate in which there are numerous and strong attacks on the opposition might lead to polarization, as was the case when Warner and colleagues analyzed the 2020 Democratic Party presidential primary debates. Even if these attacks do not affect perceptions of the candidates themselves, as was the case in the 2020 Democratic Party primary debates with both independent and Democratic Party identifiers viewing the participating candidates more warmly, they do have negative effects on perceptions of the electoral system (Warner et al. 2021). This lack of immediate and personal blowback in turn might be why presidential candidates are more likely to go on the attack during primary and general election debates, especially if they are political party outsiders such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders (Montez & Brubaker 2019). In essence, candidates—especially party outsiders—are incentivized to enact their own tragedy of the commons, with the commons in this case being public trust in the electoral system (Paletz 1990; Stewart 2012).

THE PRIMARY DEBATE AUDIENCE FINDS ITS VOICE

To better understand the changing balance of power since the turn of the twenty-first century from the more insider-driven "invisible primary," where the first two faces, whether elected or professionals, of the political parties

predominated, to the new and more visible primaries where both the partisan third face and the general public play a larger role, it makes sense to consider viewership of an electoral cycle's presidential primary debates. The impact of presidential primary debates has grown immensely over the past twenty years, as reflected by a headline summarizing the 2000 presidential primary debate season "Candidates engaged in many debates but relatively few people watched" (Appleman 2000). But, as can be seen in table 2.1, while most presidential primary debates prior to the turn of the century were held during the primary election season, often in conjunction with each of the state's primaries and caucuses, in the years since (and including) the 2000 presidential election there has been a growth in not just the numbers of primary debates, but also those during the preprimary season.

The Changing Nature of Presidential Primary Debates

The increasing numbers of preprimary debates reflect the changing reality of the presidential primaries. Although presidential primary debates had largely been subsumed into the invisible primaries, mostly unseen by the general public and attended to solely by hardcore partisans that made up the third face of the parties, that does not mean that they have not been historically unimpactful. Indeed, one can trace the rise of Ronald Reagan from more than just a conservative Hollywood celebrity to a viable presidential candidate for the Republican Party to his first debate performance prior to the 1980 New Hampshire primary. Here, Reagan upstaged a field of seven Republican Party contenders, including front-runner George H. W. Bush, while squelching criticism of his bypassing the first primary debate in Iowa in what came to be known as the "Ambush at Nashua." Angrily exclaiming "I am paying for this microphone" to raucous cheers from his supporters in the audience, he insisted that all GOP presidential candidates be able to take part in what had been planned as a one-to-one debate between Bush and himself. By doing this, Reagan dominated the national news cycle and catapulted himself into the front-running position that he never relinquished.

While this sound bite has reverberated through political history as an example of Ronald Reagan's desire for fairness for fellow candidates and his spontaneous willingness to take the media on, closer inspection reveals a carefully constructed defining moment (see chapter 6). Although Reagan and his campaign had agreed to pay for this event, it was organized to be a head-to-head front-runners' debate between Bush, who had just won the Iowa Caucus, and Reagan. The New Hampshire newspaper, the *Nashua Telegraph*, which would have sponsored the debate for all seven candidates according to the Federal Election Commission (FEC) ruling, found itself preparing for a Reagan vs. Bush debate as contracted by Reagan. However, the Reagan

campaign had not only invited and brought four other Republican Party presidential candidates onstage (Bob Dole, Howard Baker, John Anderson, and Phil Crane), they had also put extra chairs and tables at the ready for the additional participants (Shirley 2014). With this move, Reagan was not only able to benefit from a calculated and masterfully executed defining moment during this primary thanks to favorable audience reaction and flattering media coverage, he likely also avoided the intense scrutiny of his positions a one-to-one debate would have presented by adding candidates. Perhaps as pertinent, he consequently caught George H. W. Bush unawares and rendered the front-runner's preparations largely inconsequential in the multicandidate melee that followed.

Presidential Primary Debates from Reagan to Trump

Although Reagan was nominally an outsider in the Republican Party, reflecting the conservative wing of what was then a more moderate political party, by virtue of his terms as California governor he was explicitly a party member. In other words, he represented the first face of the Republican Party, the party in political office, and had substantial support from the second face, the party in central office, albeit an extremist branch of the GOP. From the 1980s to three-plus decades later, one can see there has been substantial change in participants in the presidential primary debates. Whereas those presidential contenders onstage have been overwhelmingly members of the first face of the political party, in 2016 and again in 2020 Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders (among others) were "tolerated invaders"; at the same time, apparently the second face of both political parties were more intent upon winning elections by creating electoral excitement for the party and its candidates (and outrage focused on the opposition) than the realization of policy goals. Put another way, both political parties tolerated outsiders on the debate stage presumably in hopes that the resultant on-screen conflict would mobilize donors and voters while at the same time enlarging their base; indeed, during his first 2016 presidential primary debate Donald Trump was afforded special deference by FOX News not just through the speaking time given and with it the screen time and type provided, but also how he was framed on camera as a front-runner with status and prestige equal to or greater than his opposition (Stewart et al. 2021; Stewart et al. 2019).

This change in the rules-in-use for the political parties during their presidential debates, and their toleration of deviation from norms of politeness from the candidates, can be seen as deriving from changes to how the third face of the party is approached. The party in the electorate is now, more than ever, no longer driven by electoral results in state presidential primaries and caucuses in a constantly updating tally of results (Deltas & Polborn 2019),

but by what they see on-screen—whether video or social media. Because the vote during the presidential election matters most for the political party as an entity, it makes sense to use live political events to expand the scope of conflict by bringing in more potential voters and their engaging them through emotional and ultimately behavioral contagion.

The Ratings Game of Presidential Primary Debates 2000–2020

Taking the broader view to understand how presidential primaries moved from being "invisible" to not only being highly visible, but an intrinsic part of the popular culture landscape, means not only taking a longer view of viewership, but also considering comparable live events. To better understand how political viewership has changed, we consider the field of contenders for each of the party's nomination that made their way onstage and the resultant Nielsen ratings of the primary debates from 2008 to 2020. This time-period saw two open presidential seats, with no incumbent president or vice president in 2008 and 2016, during the four electoral cycles.

2008 Debates

In 2008, both the Democratic and Republican Parties held presidential primary debates with the second term of President George W. Bush ending and his vacating the White House. This presidential race could be seen as wide open due to this being the first presidential election since 1928 in which neither the Democratic Party nor the Republican Party would have the option of nominating the sitting president nor vice president. Indeed, neither party fielded a candidate with substantial Oval Office experience. With primary debates starting in late April and early May 2007 for the Democratic and Republican Parties, respectively, there was plenty of lead-up to the January 3 Iowa caucuses and the January 8 New Hampshire primary that officially started the 2008 presidential election.

While the Republican primary debates had twelve candidates take to the podium, there were at most ten candidates onstage at one time; this occurred only during the initial three debates in the May and June 2007. The candidates onstage for the early debates provided a broad range of elective service, with senators (Sam Brownback, John McCain), governors (Jim Gilmore, Mike Huckabee, Mitt Romney, and Tommy Thompson), and US representatives (Duncan Hunter, Ron Paul, and Tom Tancredo), as well as—thanks to the events of September 11, 2001—the high-profile mayor of New York City (Rudy Giuliani).

The late entries were the most curious of debate participants. Their onstage presence perhaps led the way for others to enter the presidential race from media positions: Alan Keyes and Fred Thompson. Keyes was a longtime conservative activist who served as a US diplomat and as a political appointee for the Reagan administration before becoming a media commentator and talk show personality with a predilection for running for political office, including senate seats in Maryland (1988 & 1992) and Illinois (2004) and the US presidency (1996, 2000 & 2008), albeit unsuccessfully.

Likewise, there was the much heralded but ultimately disappointing candidacy of Fred Thompson. Thompson entered the race when the competition had been whittled to seven candidates and made his debate debut to much anticipation (Cohen et al. 2009; Stewart 2012). While Thompson had been a two-term senator representing Tennessee, his national reputation rested upon his acting, specifically his role as district attorney on the syndicated television show *Law & Order* from 2002 to 2007. This highly successful drama series served as a high-profile bridge between his senate service and his run for the presidency.

Ultimately, this race was closely contested through the primary season with five candidates making it through the entire debate cycle. Eventually, John McCain won the Republican Party candidacy, although arguably the real winner of the debates was Mike Huckabee, who on the strength of his debate performances went on to become a national talk show host and media star.

The Republican Party held a total of thirteen primary debates that were broadcast by the major networks, of which eight occurred prior to the primary elections. The debates averaged 2.85 million viewers with the highest rated debate, held just prior to the New Hampshire primary, reached 7.35 million viewers. Overall, while there was relatively stable interest in the debates over the entire primary process, on average the five debates occurring during the primary elections had nearly 1.4 million more viewers than the eight preprimary debates (2.65 million viewers). As can be seen with figure 2.1, the number of viewers increased as the debate cycle progressed, presumably as the viewers used information derived from these national debates to select their preferred candidate in their state caucuses and primaries.

For their part, during the 2008 presidential primaries the Democratic Party had eight candidates enter onto the debate stage to contend for the nomination. All eight were experienced politicians serving as either senators (Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, Chris Dodd, John Edwards, Mike Gravel, and Barack Obama), a US congressperson (Dennis Kucinich), or a governor (Bill Richardson). With the official start of the presidential primary season, four candidates remained, with ultimately only Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton making it through the entire debate cycle. Most of the candidates dropped out of the race during the preprimary debate cycle when polls and funding rendered their candidacy unlikely to survive.
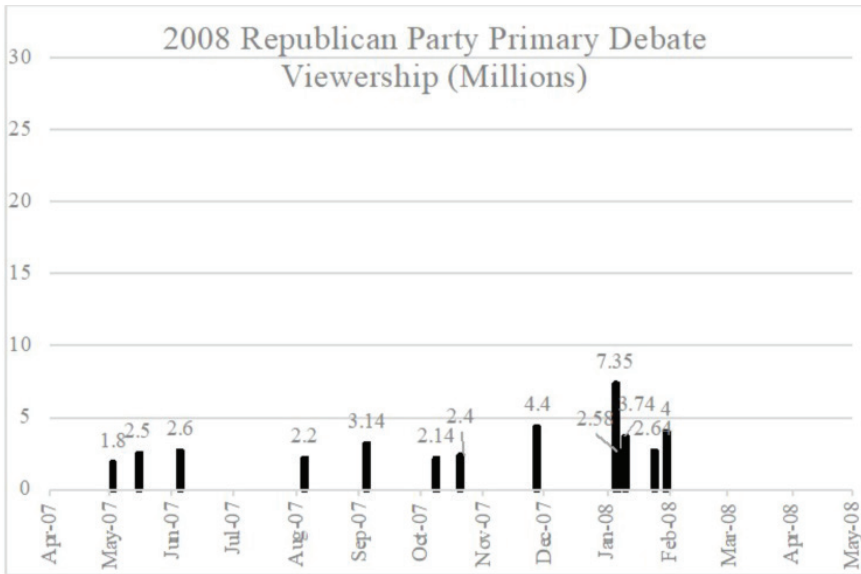
Figure 2.1. 2008 Republican Party Primary Debate Viewership in Millions. *Source: Figure created by the author using data from: Murphy, C. (2016). Report: Presidential Primary Debate Audiences. NDN.*

The Democratic Party primaries had fifteen of their debates, eight of which occurred before the primary elections, broadcast by major networks. The debates averaged 4.7 million viewers, with the highest-rated debate, which aired just prior to the Iowa caucuses opened the official primary election season, reaching 9.4 million viewers (see figure 2.2). The contested primary elections appeared to draw substantial interest in debate watching, as the seven primary debates averaged over twice as many viewers on average (6.45 million) than did the eight preprimary debates (2.43 million viewers).

Both the 2008 primary debates for the Republican and Democratic Parties had very similar viewership numbers at the beginning of the debate cycle, with the preprimary debates occurring in the calendar year prior to the 2008 election drawing roughly two-and-a-half million viewers on average for each party. However, the Democratic Party primary season debates saw significant increases in viewership during the contested primaries, with nearly two-and-a-half million more viewers watching their candidates onstage in comparison with the Republican Party contenders.

2012 Debates

In 2012, the Democratic Party had incumbent President Barack Obama running for reelection. The Republican Party held nineteen presidential primary
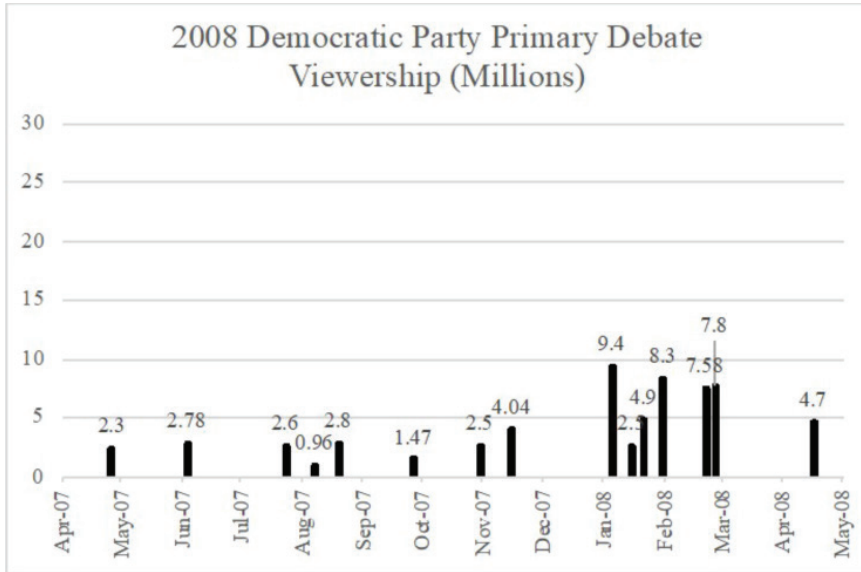
Figure 2.2. 2008 Democratic Party Primary Debate Viewership in Millions. *Source: Figure created by the author using data from: Murphy, C. (2016). Report: Presidential Primary Debate Audiences. NDN.*

debates, with preprimary debates starting in early May of 2011. During this preprimary process anywhere from six to nine candidates, representing a range of experience—from serving as governors (Gary Johnson, John Huntsman, Jr., Rick Perry, and Mitt Romney), representatives in the U.S. Senate (Rick Santorum), in the U.S. Congress (Newt Gingrich and Ron Paul), or as businessmen outside the political system (Herman Cain)—were on the debate stage. With the Iowa caucuses held on January 3 and the New Hampshire primaries one week later on January 10, 2008, six candidates started the primary election process; however, by mid-January only four GOP candidates remained to contest during the final four debates, with Mitt Romney receiving the candidacy.

Despite it being an election in which the incumbent held one party's nomination, the 2012 Republican Party primary debates can be seen as drawing increased public viewing interest and averaged 5.1 million viewers over eighteen total debates, with the highest debate drawing in 7.6 million viewers (see figure 2.3). With twelve preprimary debates broadcast by the major networks having double the viewership of the average 2008 preprimary debates with 4.89 million viewers, there was substantially elevated interest in the year prior to the primary elections. Although, viewership remained relatively consistent throughout the debate cycle, with only an additional 750,000 viewers watching

Figure 2.3. 2012 Republican Party Primary Debate Viewership in Millions. *Source:* **Figure created by the author using data from: Murphy, C. (2016). Report: Presidential Primary Debate Audiences. NDN.**

the primary debates, the trends in viewership suggest the invisible primary of the preprimary season was becoming more visible to the general public.

2016 Debates

The 2016 primary season saw, yet again, an open presidential seat without an incumbent president or vice president running for office. As a result, both Democratic and Republican Parties held presidential primary debates both in the lead-up to the February 1, 2016, Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary just over a week later on February 9. While the Democratic Party's debates can be seen as largely a continuation of previous elections, the Republican Party can be seen as taking a substantially different approach with their debates.

The 2016 Republican Party primaries, as we will discuss in chapter 4, had a surplus of candidates—so much so, that the Republican National Committee, in cooperation with FOX News, hosted their initial debates with ten prime-time candidates and eight drive-time candidates back-to-back. While that first debate night provided the opportunity for the public to see more candidates than could possibly be seen at one time, the drive-time debate was not afforded much attention, nor were its candidates, in comparison with the prime-time event.

The Republican Party presidential primary debates were watched by substantially greater numbers of viewers with the first two debates on FOX News (24 million) and CNN (23.1 million) reaching nearly five times as many viewers as their average debates in 2008 and 2012. While viewership dwindled somewhat from these high points as the race progressed, the average viewership for the six preprimary (17.3 million) and the six primary election season debates (13.8 million) were still substantially greater than any of the previous primary debates. Perhaps more importantly, the much greater viewership during the preprimary season (see figure 2.4) signaled general public interest that went well beyond the first, second, and third faces of the political parties.

While interest in the 2016 Democratic Party debates did not reach the level seen with the Republican Party primary debates during the same electoral cycle, there was still substantially greater public interest based upon viewership. This interest was largely driven by the four preprimary debates, which averaged over ten million viewers (10.5 million). Indeed, the first debate on CNN—with over fifteen million viewers—nearly tripled the average viewership of the debates held during the primary election season itself (5.38 million viewers). While viewership can be seen as waning as the season progressed (see figure 2.5), when compared with the average viewership for 2008 (figures 2.1 & 2.2) and 2012 (figure 2.3) primary election season debates for both parties, the viewership remained relatively stable.
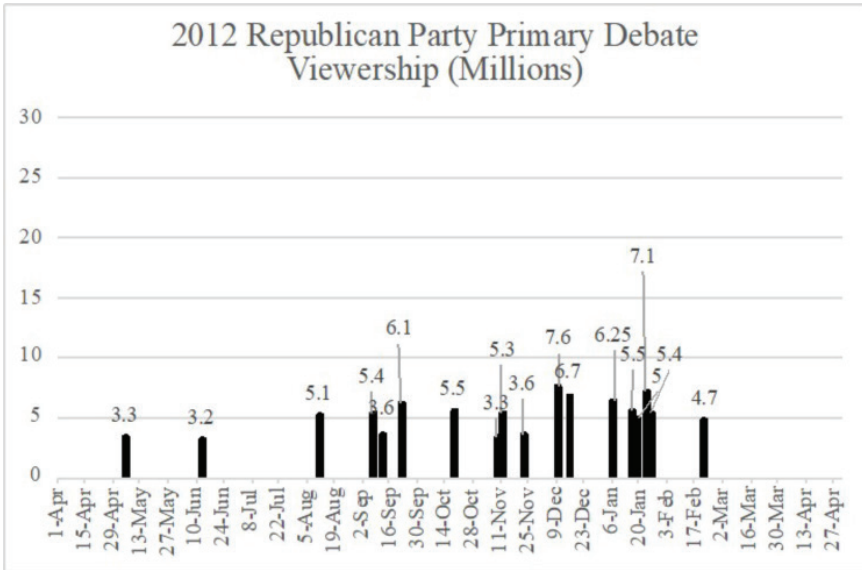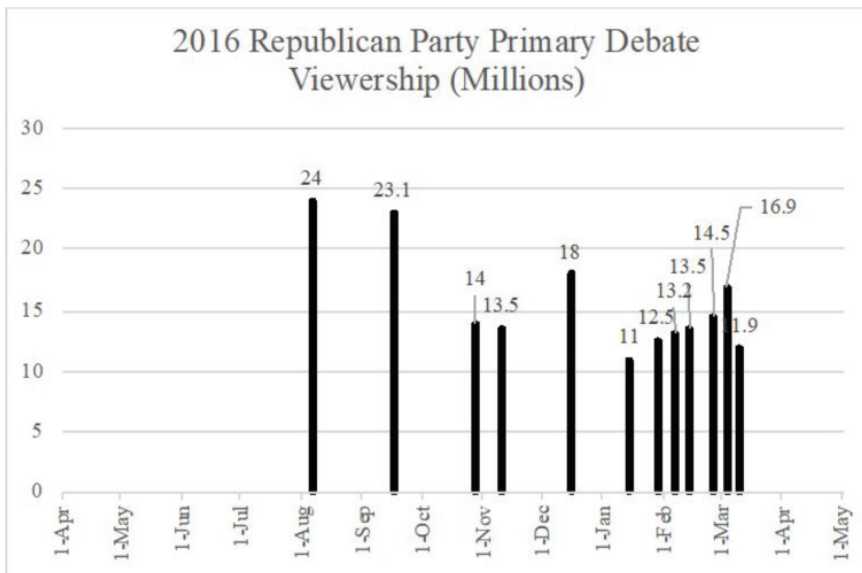

Figure 2.4. 2016 Republican Party Primary Debate Viewership in Millions. *Source:* Figure created by the author using data from: Murphy, C. (2016). Report: Presidential Primary Debate Audiences. NDN.
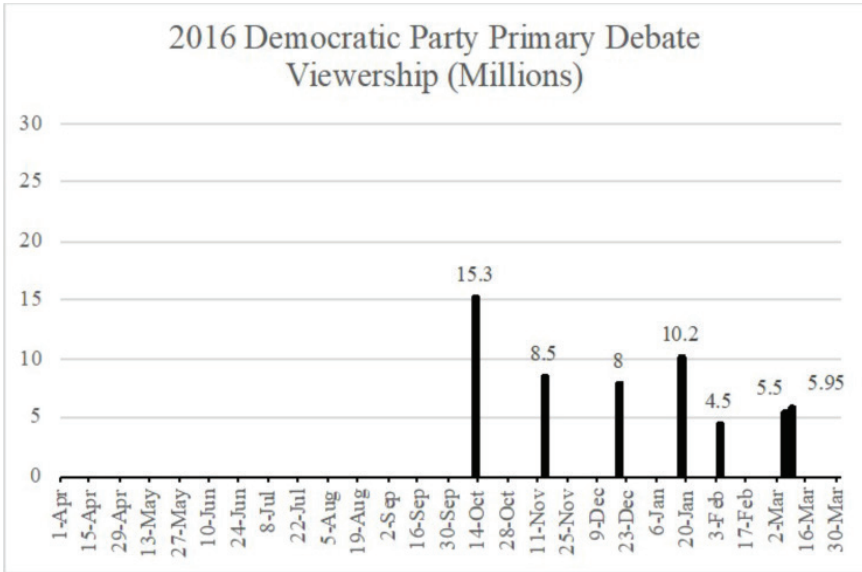
Figure 2.5.   2016 Democratic Party Primary Debate Viewership in Millions. *Source:* **Figure created by the author using data from: Murphy, C. (2016). Report: Presidential Primary Debate Audiences. NDN.**

2020 Debates

In 2020 the Republican Party had an incumbent running, resulting in only the Democratic Party holding primary debates during that electoral cycle. In the lead-up to the first caucus in Iowa and primary election in New Hampshire, separated by a week on February 3 and 11, 2020 respectively, the Democratic Party held thirteen debates. Like the 2016 Republican Party primary debates, there was a surplus of contenders wishing to get onstage, so much so that the first debate—discussed in chapter 5—had two nights hosting ten candidates onstage at one time, randomly assigning the twenty viable candidates to back-to-back nights.

   The 2020 Democratic Party presidential primary debates attracted substantial interest from the viewing public with the arguably overfull field necessitating back-to-back debates during the June 2019 NBC-hosted and July 2019 CNN-hosted events. The preprimary debates were watched by audiences larger (11.7 million) than was the case during either the 2008 or 2016 Democratic Party preprimary or primary election season debates. While there was a dip in viewership in the months prior to the primary elections, as can be seen in figure 2.6, the increased viewership during the early months of 2020 suggests substantial interest in the candidates as they vied for the Democratic Party nomination throughout the United States (13.3 million viewers).
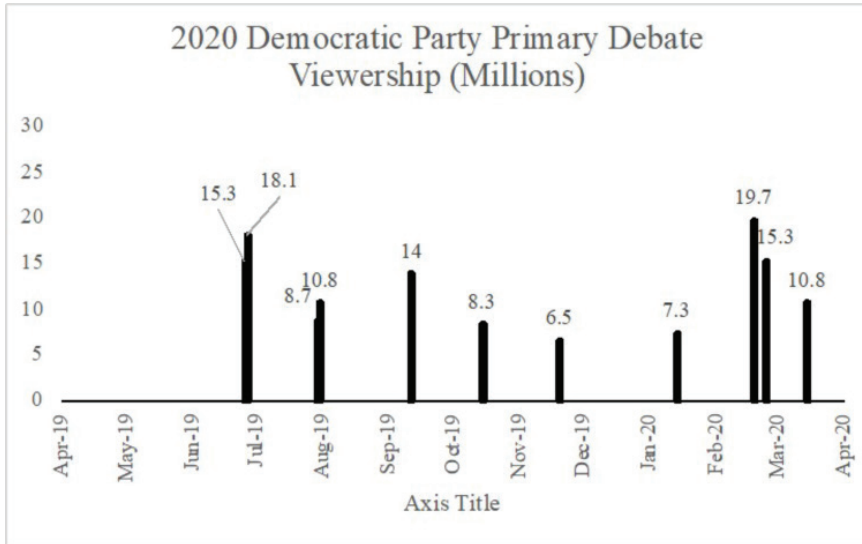
Figure 2.6. 2020 Democratic Party Primary Debate Viewership in Millions. *Source:* Figure created by the author using data from: Murphy, C. (2016). Report: Presidential Primary Debate Audiences. NDN.

Patterns in Primary Debates 2008–2020

While it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from four presidential primary electoral cycles and six races, two major lessons stand out. First, the numbers of candidates onstage and viewers of presidential primary debates have increased substantially. Although viewership comparisons may be made with the general election debates, especially as these events largely reflect mass public interest in the presidential election itself, because the three presidential debates and one vice presidential debate are covered by all the major networks, this is not necessarily an apt comparison. Indeed, if parallels are to be drawn, it would be in the changing patterns of viewership; not only have the preprimary debates been viewed by more individuals over the past two electoral cycles, the initial debates—whether primary or general election debates—are much more likely to be viewed by a greater number of individuals than the later debates in the campaigns.

Second, the preprimary season debates, especially the early ones in which the candidates are forming initial impressions, have become media events, at times dwarfing the debates held just before the statewide primary elections themselves. As these debates are broadcast predominantly by individual legacy news networks throughout the United States, the conclusion that may be drawn is that the state-by-state primary- and caucus-based electoral system has become more national than has been the case historically.

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE CHANGING ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATES

One can conclude that the locus of control for determining electoral status of a political party's presidential candidate has shifted substantially since presidential primary debates were first recorded (Benoit 2013). Specifically, the ability to structure electoral status can be seen as having moved from the first and second faces of the political parties—those officially involved with running and implementing the day-to-day activities of the political party—to the third face of the political party (Katz & Mair 1993). In other words, those who are remunerated for their professional services have been, to an extent, supplanted by those involved for other more psychologically relevant rationales.

Because this third face, the activists, donors, and primary voters, of the party is fueled by enthusiasm and anger (Marcus et al. 2000; Mason 2018), it makes perfect sense that the medium most likely to engender emotional response—audiovisual representations on television and through the internet—is relied upon and has become increasingly more important for assessing and developing electoral status. By putting a face and personality to the name, presidential primary debates are the principal means by which candidates achieve visibility. And as established here, visibility and the recognition that follows may mean more for electoral success than a multitude of other factors. In terms of in individual assessment of electoral viability, early exposure may be seen as more salient than the much vaunted "momentum" a campaign aims to develop.

However, in the attempt to capture eyes and enlarge an enthusiastic third face of the political parties, both the Republican and Democratic Parties may have gone too far. By pushing the debate stage to the extent of and even beyond its carrying capacity over the last two electoral cycles, both parties arguably may have pushed primary voters from a more reasoned approach to voting to one relying on decision heuristics relied upon by low information voters (Lodge & Taber 2013; Redlawsk et al. 2007). Instead of introducing the public to the candidates in a relatively unmediated fashion, allowing them to thrive, survive, or be shunt aside based upon their policy positions and verbal and nonverbal style, boundaries have been pushed literally and figuratively. By overloading the debate stage, the parties may have inadvertently structured the event to enforce the use of visibility and recognition as determining perceived electoral viability. While leveling the playing field by providing more competitors on the debate stage may be seen as making electoral status as more equal, it just might have reinforced the position of those front-runners who came in with elevated name recognition. In turn, the

electoral status of presidential primary candidates in the initial debates may be reinforced by how the in-person audiences react; the question is: how does this play out on-screen for those watching at home?

Although Ronald Reagan's grandstanding during his first presidential primary debate catapulted him to the forefront of national awareness and the front of that race, it was not an isolated event and may have set the stage for similar approaches. Political figures have long used such grandstanding to stand out and apart from other capable opponents. Indeed, Donald Trump's performance in his first FOX News presidential debate can be seen as following the template Reagan set by his establishing of himself as distinctly different from his fellow candidates and as willing to attack the same media outlet that was providing the opportunity to obtain national exposure.

While the same political playbook can be seen as being used, the difference in the Reagan and Trump cases was the audience. While both presidential candidates had their retinue of followers present and willing to vociferously support their candidate in person at the event, the difference is that Trump's performance instantaneously reached an audience that was massively larger than Reagan could ever have hoped.

To better understand the changing nature of primary debates, the following chapters ask questions concerning what role the audience plays in selecting leaders and informing attitudes by first considering existing research and what the evolutionary roots of this behavior are in connecting individuals into groups. From there, we focus more closely on the 2016 and 2020 presidential primary debates by first considering which candidates get attention through speaking time and support from the audience. The next step is considering the basis on which the observable audience response (OAR) communicates intent to others, whether in-person or watching on-screen.

Chapter 3

Evolutionary Bases for Observable Audience Response

There can be no doubt that the audience matters; whether in person at a political event or watching on television or other visual media, public figures attempt to win followers through their rhetoric and nonverbal behavior. The question remains: how do electoral contenders accomplish this in competitive settings such as debates? Likewise, how (and why) do the audiences communicate their agreement, support, antagonism, and even joy to not only the speakers, but also their fellow audience members—whether attending the event or virtually present? In short, this chapter grapples with the nature and influence of laughter, applause-cheering, booing, and the myriad combinations that might occur during political events such as presidential debates.

A great deal of research to date has concentrated on the powerful role debates play in influencing viewer response to candidates (Bucy & Stewart 2018; McKinney 2021; McKinney & Warner 2013; Seiter & Weger 2020); however, the disentangling of particulars regarding how candidates and the media influence voters is arguably in its infancy. This is largely due to existing research tending to consider debates as a single and discrete event: debates are either the unit of analysis or the treatment. While these approaches to inquiry provide useful insights concerning the larger electoral process, they do not fully take into consideration the uncontrolled and unpredictable aspects over the course of debates during which candidate rhetorical approach (Benoit 2013), nonverbal behavior (Seiter & Harry Jr 2020; Seiter et al. 2010), and media visual presentation style (Grabe & Bucy 2009; Stewart et al. 2021; Stewart et al. 2019) choices all play a role in viewer perceptions. This is even before considering their influence on campaign pitch-and-spin and media coverage bias/slant (Clayman 1995; Schroeder 2016) that occurs prior to and immediately after these events.

Although strides have been made in research concerning the processing of information by viewers, the greatest research emphasis is on general

election presidential debates, due in great part to their salience and visibility. For instance, Shah and colleagues have carried out extensive cross-cultural research considering how verbal utterances, nonverbal behaviors, and critical moments during the debates influence Twitter messaging (Shah et al. 2015; Wells et al. 2016), whereas in the lab setting Bucy and colleagues have considered continuous response measurement (Hughes & Bucy 2016; Stewart et al. 2018). Less intrusive measures by Gong and Bucy have included eye tracking (Gong & Bucy 2015 2016), while Fridkin and colleagues have carried out research using automatic facial expression analysis (Fridkin & Gershon 2021; Fridkin et al. 2021).

Although such approaches effectively consider what participants respond to, there are two issues to address when considering presidential debates. The first is that by this research focusing on general election debates, the element of partisan identity has an arguably overwhelming influence on response; this can be seen as especially the case in the increasingly polarized political climate (Iyengar et al. 2012; Mason 2018) with the social identity of followers being inextricably tied to the candidate (Greene 2004; Haslam et al. 2010). Because presidential primary debates largely remove this element by all contenders having a shared social identity, there is likely a greater reliability in participant response to the candidates based upon their policy positions, style, and approach.

Second, while these analytic methods, especially the psycho-physiological approaches of eye tracking, facial expression analysis, and other forms of measurement, provide insights that would not be available otherwise, they do not necessarily indicate what *matters* to the audience as a whole. It is here that understanding the most primal of political activities, observable audience response (OAR), helps provide insight into what audience members as a group are feeling—and willing to act upon. This is because the dynamic between followers and leaders is not just about coordination between them in the communication of information and following of orders, but coordination among the followers in establishing a social group with a coherent identity. Appreciating both of these relationships—how individuals become followers and how they become group members—is key for understanding why debates are important in the choice of leaders. It also provides an appreciation for how the structuring of choices regarding leaders and group membership influences the outputs and outcomes of a political system. While this means appreciating the role played by candidates challenging for leadership, perhaps more importantly, this means placing the audience and their OAR at the foreground of analysis.

As leaders provide the solution to a myriad of collective action problems—which is focused on later in this chapter—understanding the roots of human sociality in the forming of a collective is the first and most important step. In

other words, to understand leadership and the political activity it implies, we must consider how followers move from being atomic individuals to being group members. This means taking an evolutionary-based approach that asks "Tinbergen's four questions" (Tinbergen 1963). We first ask the process-based questions of how did these group utterances evolve and how did they develop over a person's life span before focusing on the product-based questions regarding how they work and what function these different forms of chorusing play.

THE EVOLVED CONNECTION BETWEEN
LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS

Leadership, and the followership it requires, occurs in response to recurrent evolutionary problems that rely upon coordination and cooperation among group members to survive and thrive (Spisak et al. 2015). According to evolutionary leadership theory (ELT) these problems include dealing with intergroup conflict that may occur due to resource exploitation and/or war, and addressing intragroup conflict, including such decisions regarding exploration to find resources and/or the coordination of activities to maintain internal peace (Smith et al. 2018; Van Vugt & Smith 2019; Van Vugt & von Rueden 2020). With these adaptive survival problems, the coordination and cooperation solutions a leader provides to followers (Van Vugt & Smith 2019; Van Vugt & von Rueden 2020; von Rueden 2020) may include such behavioral strategies as broadening and building coalition size, tending and befriending group members especially in the face of loss, and rallying and responding to external threats in an aggressive manner.

At the forefront of collective action is understanding that not only must leaders communicate to their followers, followers must reciprocate in a conversation with the leader not just by listening, but through their response, which may take the form of applause, cheering, laughter, chanting, booing, jeering, or whistling, among other individual and collective responses. Even the absence of collective feedback such as this can provide important information regarding the connection and coordination, or lack thereof, between the speaker and audience (Bull 2018; Choi et al. 2016; Stewart 2012; West 1984). In short, larger-scale audience response provides a form of social grooming that scales upward to include multiple participants, in turn allowing for collective action led by one individual—the speaker and leader—toward a specific goal in a unified manner.

There is no doubt that relationships between speakers and their audiences are influenced by the rhetoric used. As initially developed by Atkinson (Atkinson 1984), Heritage and Greatbatch (Heritage & Greatbatch 1986),

and Clayman (Clayman 1992, 1993; Clayman 1995), and more thoroughly developed by Bull and colleagues (Bull 2000, 2006, 2016; Bull & Feldman 2011; Bull & Miskinis 2014; Bull & Noordhuizen 2000; Bull & Wells 2002; Bull 1987; Choi et al. 2016; O'Gorman & Bull 2020; Wells & Bull 2007), different forms of rhetorical tools invite collective response thanks to their predictability. Contextual elements affect the rhetorical tools used and in what manner, especially speech content and nonverbal delivery (Bull 2006 2016). Choi, Bull, and Reed report that, when comparing political speeches in the United States, the UK, Japan, and Korea, substantial variation in type and rate of audience response is observed (Choi et al. 2016). While OAR varies based upon the type, purpose, and the audience of the speech, as well as the rhetoric used, the role of the audience remains substantial and obvious regardless of the culture studied.

Thus, it can be expected that in presidential primary debates, with their heightened competitiveness, there will be substantial variation in the type, strength, and rates of OAR. At the same time, competing factions attending the event and supporting distinct candidates will attempt to sway the nonaffiliated and weakly connected followers through the social influence of their OAR, all the while strengthening their own connection with each other. However, it should be noted that while the social influence of OAR can be compelling by being automatically mimicked in some cases, and thus highly contagious emotionally and behaviorally, this influence is not absolute. As put by Drury and Reicher "individuals come to act in terms of social values, norms and beliefs" when social identity becomes salient (Drury & Reicher 2020). In this case OAR may serve as a spur to collective action through mutual monitoring at the event itself (Clayman 1993).

OBSERVABLE AUDIENCE RESPONSE
AS SOCIAL GROOMING

A major factor, even beyond that of mutual monitoring and social contagion of OAR at a public venue, is that of intra-audience communication. In this case, the viewer of media is affected by the OAR of those in the audience in person. Here, the applause and cheering, laughter, booing, and combinations of these—especially when there is disagreement between audience members—can influence how the viewer evaluates a popular figure.

From an evolutionary perspective, Tinbergen's four questions provides a means to understand behavior such as this, whether human or nonhuman, in a systematic, scientific, and interdisciplinary manner (Bateson & Laland 2013; Tinbergen 1963). These four questions are separate, although not mutually exclusive, and are complementary by looking at both population

and individual behavior. The first two questions address proximal causes of individual behavior by considering what motivates an individual to behave in a particular manner at a specific moment in time They do so by asking: *How did it develop?* And *How does it work?* The last two questions address ultimate causal factors and can be seen as applied to populations by inquiring: *Why did it evolve?* And *Why is it functional?*

While developmental and evolutionary-based reasons are important for more fully understanding observable audience response (see textbox 3.1), beyond consideration of laughter—our starting point—applause, cheering, booing, chanting, and other forms of collective chorusing remain comparatively underexplored. As a result, the focus here is on asking two questions. The first regards what purpose collective response serves at the population level—in other words, what are the group benefits of OAR. The second question considers how OAR works at the micro level of the individual and group. We expect that the more primal the OAR, the stronger its effects on appraisal, especially as it affects perceived implications. For instance, extensive research across species, including decidedly social species such as humans, suggests that laughter's social contagiousness and social effects can be connected to it being easily identified due to its multimodality (Cummins & Gong 2017; Gillespie et al. 2016; Hermans et al. 2006; Stewart et al. 2018). However, substantially less research has considered applause, cheering, booing and other collective chorusing in a similarly systematic manner (Clayman 1992, 1993; Stewart et al. 2016; West 1984). This is especially the case in the political arena; while work does exist that is insightful and thoughtful, namely by Peter Bull and colleagues, whose cross-cultural work has found commonalities and differences across the world (Bull 2016; Bull & Feldman 2011; Bull & Miskinis 2014; Choi & Bull 2021; O'Gorman & Bull 2020), it largely focuses on the rhetoric eliciting collective response while leaving questions open regarding the audience's role and how and why such utterances are salient. Hence, developing an evolutionary-informed perspective, no matter how rudimentary, provides a useful starting point.

What Is Observable Audience Response For?
The Social Brain Hypothesis

Ultimate causation considers the functional cause of a behavior in terms of how it promotes the passing of an individual's contributions (genetic and cultural) to future generations; it does so through the enhanced reproductive fitness of individuals possessing certain and/or using distinct characteristics and/or behavioral strategies. Using Tinbergen's terminology (Tinbergen 1963), the question concerns survival value, asking "what is it good for?" However, just because something has an adaptive value does not mean it was

TEXTBOX 3.1. TINBERGEN'S DEVELOPMENTAL QUESTIONS

Ontogeny

The "how did it develop" question concerns the process of ontogenetic development by looking at the roots of and development of behavior over an individual's lifetime. Both environmental and internal factors play a role, albeit one that is intertwined and difficult to separate. Here, the question concerns whether there are innate tendencies in upbringing or development of an individual over her or his life span that triggers particular behaviors. However, while ontogeny considers development over an individual's life span, there is greater plasticity and development occurring earlier in life. Ontogenetic-based understanding of leadership and followership thus importantly involves ethological consideration of behavior among children as they form and navigate social relationships with these interactions forming the template for future behaviors especially as their social networks expand to include multiple individuals.

Phylogeny

The "why did it evolve?" question considers how behavior develops in a species over its phylogenetic history by considering similarities and differences in behavior among several closely related species. This allows for homologies to be made through a common biological heritage, with resultant lessons learned and applied to social behavior and leadership. Waller and colleagues (2011) endorse four specific criteria for assessing homology in behavior, by asking: (a) is it stereotyped and identifiable in a manner that makes it recognizable by conspecifics? (b) are there similarities in multiple observable elements? (c) are there similarities with the underlying musculature and neural substrates? and (d) is it present in a large number of related species?

The need for more extensive communication among conspecifics in larger social groups is pointed out by Dobson (2009) with his research regarding facial movements as "Species that live in larger social groups tend to produce a greater variety of facial movements than expected from body size alone." (417). The variety of communication played by facial behavior can be seen as likewise important in conflict management and social boding to maintain group cohesion, as larger behavioral repertoires, enhanced signal strength, and greater signal conspicuousness helps build group strength.

selected for this purpose. In other words, there is not a one-to-one causal link in the evolutionary selection process.

With leadership and followership, taking a functional-level perspective means seeing there are adaptive benefits for possessing traits and strategies that allow for group-decision making and action. Accomplishing this, all while maintaining group unity, is especially important in situations where choice options and behavioral uncertainties abound. This allows for economies of scale and specialization to develop, providing for even greater group success (Kameda et al. 2012). At the same time, the leader might benefit directly through enhanced reproduction, alliances, and/or deference from others or indirectly by benefitting kin, offsetting energy and opportunity costs as well as risks to their health and/or reputation (Van Vugt & von Rueden 2020). Thus both leaders and followers benefit from a dialogue contributing relatively quick, efficient, and informed decision making.

The underlying premise of leadership and the followership that makes it possible is that humans are an eminently social animal. Like other social species, humans rely on cooperation with fellow group members to survive, reproduce and thrive in a range of environments. In comparison other social species, expanded cognitive capacity has given humans the ability to not only engage in larger social networks, but also to hierarchically organize these networks into social structures. Research suggests that individual variation in the size of personal networks occurs in concert with the size of specific brain structures implicated with social cognition, affect, and behavior as there is a positive correlation between orbital prefrontal cortex size and intentionality competence (Dunbar 2021). In other words, there is a connection between brain structure and the ability to develop an extended theory of mind (ToM) that predicts the intentions and mental states of others and the actions that result. Evidence likewise suggests there is not just variation between social species with the size of social networks, but there are also differences between individuals. However, whether network size and connectivity are based upon brain structures or brain structures response to increased network size, or both interacting is still an open question. Regardless of difficulties with causality, the resultant theory—the Social Brain Hypothesis—provides an important starting point for understanding collective behaviors.

This relationship between group size and neocortex size in primates is the main assertion of the Social Brain Hypothesis. "Dunbar's Number" extrapolated from this by predicting that humans should live in social groups averaging around 150 individuals (Barrett et al. 2002; Dunbar 1993). Evidence for this was first seen in Christmas card lists, which average 153.5 per person (Hill & Dunbar 2003), and has been found, despite the potential for communication technologies to massively expand virtual societal groupings (De Ruiter et

al. 2011), social networks such as Facebook friend lists (Christakis & Fowler 2009) and reciprocal Twitter networks (Gonçalves et al. 2011), as well as in such traditional technologies as the telephone (Dunbar 2021). Furthermore, this number has been corroborated by cross-cultural ethnographic and historical evidence concerning human social groupings (Dunbar 1993), suggesting a scaling effect with social structures.

The Social Brain Hypothesis and Group Structure

The social brain hypothesis does an excellent job of characterizing how cognitive limits can influence group size and structure, including why groups may start fissioning at certain threshold numbers (Bretherton & Dunbar 2020). Despite the power afforded through the social brain hypothesis, there remains the question of the structuring of these groups, both within the group itself as well as the fusing together of groups. Zhou and colleagues found evidence for a hierarchically inclusive sequencing of groups at the following numbers of individuals: three to five individuals for a "support clique" in which personal advice and help in times of severe emotional and financial distress might be sought; a "sympathy group" in which an individual has special ties with and has contact with at least once a month; "bands" in which groups of thirty to fifty individuals are drawn from the group's average 150 members, albeit in a manner that is unstable in comparison with the previous grouping patterns (Hill & Dunbar 2003; Zhou et al. 2005). Beyond this, larger scale groupings of approximately five hundred individuals in a "megaband" and one thousand to two thousand members of a tribal unit occurs (Zhou et al. 2005). In short, human social behavior systematically moves from being personal to being political.

What Dunbar and colleagues have found regarding these groupings is that there is a preferred scaling ratio of around three that affords the structuring of individuals and then groups into hierarchies. An example of this grouping can be seen in military organizations, perhaps the earliest in-group/out-group human organizational structure developed. In the first level of hierarchical group there are squads of ten to fifteen soldiers which are then organized into platoons comprised of three sections (of about thirty-five). From there, companies are organized from three to four platoons (~120–150), with battalions made of between three and four companies and support units (~550–800). At this point, three regiments or brigades, which are usually made up of three battalions and support units (~2,500+), typically make up a division, with corps, the highest level, made up of two or three divisions (Zhou et al. 2005).

The patterns seen here are replicated in a range of human organizational structures, whether militaristic or not. This suggests that the absolute size of

an organization is not as important as how its social structure is organized to allow for human cognitive processing. While the rationale for this specific structural pattern is unknown, whether it is based on cognitive capacity, time budgeting (Gonçalves et al. 2011), or other reasons, the pattern holds. Additionally, there is a question as to how these patterns are developed, whether through an expanding network, with each individual interacting with new individuals, or discrete subgroups linked by specific individuals who play a broker role by fusing together populations (Christakis & Fowler 2009).

The Social Brain Hypothesis and Group Communication

With ever increasing group size, not only is there the need for the cognitive capacity to remember the faces and identity of fellow group members, but also the ability for "integrating and managing information about the constantly changing relationships between individuals within a group" (Zhou et al. 2005). Evidence suggests that there is a scaling of subgroups of individuals to allow for greater or lesser amounts of information about them to be processed. Arguably, at a certain threshold social identity, in which group identity supplants individual relationships in the organizing or social connections, occurs (Pearce et al. 2017; Pearce et al. 2016; Weinstein et al. 2016a 2016b). It is here where the ability to communicate, even if only in a primal and cursory manner, becomes important for ongoing group functioning. As a result, the next step for understanding how groups integrate information when communicating with their leaders and each other is to consider the functions and mechanisms of the different types of OAR.

How Does Observable Audience Response Work?

Causation, also known perhaps more accurately as "mechanisms of control" (Bateson & Laland 2013), asks research questions concerning "how does it work?" It does so by ascertaining those mechanisms that produce different types of individual behavior in the immediate context. This not only affects leader selection in a competitive context, it also affects perceived appropriateness of behavior based upon the leadership strategy to be employed. Leaders not only must win the support of followers, they must also respond to different types of challenges where they might, alternately, need to broaden and build their coalition, rally and respond to threats from outside the group, or tend and befriend followers in times of loss. Leaders should be able to effectively communicate their behavioral intent and receive feedback that this information is interpreted consistently, whether by followers, the opposition, or bystanders (Stewart et al. 2009).

In other words, the best way to consider leader-follower interactions is as a conversation. Here the leader is the speaker who is actively listened and responded to by the audience through such OAR as laughter, applause, cheering, booing, and combinations thereof. A major point is that the audience is an active participant in the conversation with the speaker, although the manner of response is necessarily limited.

The socially important signals of OAR should be socially contagious, or at least mimicked, in order to allow for the broadening and building of groups and their cohesiveness. As defined by Hatfield and colleagues (Hatfield et al. 2014) social contagion is "The tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person's and, consequently, to converge emotionally" (169) and thus can be seen as almost requisite for group success. The first of group vocal chorusing that is considered is laughter. While laughter is an important starting point by facilitating social bonding among large groups, it can be relatively difficult to elicit and hard to sustain among large groups, especially in comparison with applause, cheering, booing, and other forms of collective response—including singing (Savage et al. 2021).

Laughter

Laughter has long been appreciated by public figures for its role in engendering positive feelings within individuals and affiliation between group members. Due to its easily mimicked characteristics, with laughter occurring alone or preceding applause-cheering, booing, chanting, and other observable audience responses sequentially, it is a highly salient indicator of support. As a result, public figures seek laughter and all it implies through well-developed rhetoric (Stewart 2012; Wells & Bull 2007). While the occurrence of laughter during politician speeches varies cross-culturally as well as by context and audience (Bull 2016), in the US presidential election races where it has been considered, those candidates eliciting the greatest amount of laughter occurrences tend to be those most successful in attracting support and votes (Bull & Miskinis 2014; West 1984). However, it should be noted that laughter should be considered part of an energetic audience's response, albeit one that may more reliably reflect electoral enthusiasm thank other forms of collective audience response.

What Is Laughter Good For?

Laughter is among the most studied of social mammalian behaviors with primates such as chimpanzees, gorillas, siamang monkeys, orangutans, and bonobo chimps (Briefer 2012; Gaspar et al. 2014), dogs (Faragó et al. 2010)

and rats (Kisko et al. 2015; Panksepp 2007; Panksepp & Burgdorf 2003; Pellis et al. 2014), in addition to humans, having laughter-like vocalizations. With a shared evolutionary legacy based upon acoustic properties (Ross et al. 2009) and facial behavior (Preuschoft & Van Hooff 1997; van Hooff & Preushoft 2003), laughter among primates can be seen as reaching back from ten to sixteen million years. The positive emotionality signaled through laughter is redundant and reliable through multimodal attributes of stereotypical vocalizations, facial behavior, and associated body movements. This allows for social coordination starting with rough-and-tumble play (Davila-Ross et al. 2015; Mancini et al. 2013) where implicit cooperation is highly important to reduce the potential for injury through ongoing feedback to escalate or de-escalate intensity (Pellis et al. 2014), and extends to a host of other social behaviors. The ability for individuals to easily and reliably coordinate can be seen as a boon for individuals and groups by allowing for the sharing and practice of behaviors enhancing their survival and reproduction.

Humans' lifelong emphasis on playfulness and the learning of various skills allows for multiple environmental and interpersonal challenges to be addressed. Because humans are a free-ranging species that alternately disperses and congregates together, laughter provides an essential survival tool (Dunbar 1993; Zhou et al. 2005). Combined with the easy scaling of laughter, with multiple individuals sharing in this vocalization, laughter can be seen as allowing for enhanced and increased social grooming (Dezecache & Dunbar 2012; Dunbar 1993; Van Vugt et al. 2014). Because of this, laughter may be seen as the root of large-scale sociality and cooperation due to it being easily, if not automatically, mimicked and emotionally contagious. Indeed, laughter may be seen as playing an important role in human sociality by not only allowing for the broadening and building of coalitions through positive interactions, but also presenting a means by which individual social signals become group social signals. In other words, laughter may be seen as the initial form of group voting.

At the same time, laughter may have provided for the emergence of the first charismatic leaders. Those individuals capable or attaining and maintaining the dominance of attention are by definition considered leaders (Chance 1967; Cheng et al. 2022; Gerpott et al. 2018; Salter 2007). Through their elicitation of laughter, individuals likely found their prestige enhanced through both the voluntary and noncoercive nature of laughter, the positive feelings generated, and the group connections created or strengthened. Namely, by a leader making others laugh, the engendering of social identity through shared vocalizations can be seen as beneficial to all group members through the coordination of emotions and resultant behaviors.

How Does Laughter Work?

The easy and accurate recognition of the emotional state and resultant behavioral intent provides individuals reliable physical and social information influencing perceptions of emotional state and resultant behavioral intent. This reliability is accentuated when it is emotionally costly to produce by communicating underlying physiological states potentiating specific behavior; even when faked, physiological change can and does occur with costly signals such as this. Reliable indicators of emotion may be defined as being first, an accurate recognition of the emotional state of the communicator, and their resultant behavioral intent, and second, the signal being an index of the sender's underlying state by being costly to produce (Mehu et al. 2011). Laughter is a costly, and thus reliable, signal by it either, when evoked, being difficult to control, or when faked, the initially emitted laughter leading to physiological change (Bachorowski & Owren 2001; McGettigan et al. 2015; Provine & Yong 1991; Ruch & Ekman 2001). Individual laughter likewise serves as a social lubricant by affecting subject mood states by decreasing negative affect, increasing positive affect and pain tolerance while increasing social cooperation and group identity (Van Vugt et al. 2014).

Because laughter provides for affiliative social interactions that go beyond physical contact and is inclusive of large numbers of individuals, it needs to be recognized easily and accurately to indicate the underlying behavioral intent of the senders. Thus, it is likely due to the important role it plays by allowing for extended social grooming that laughter is one of the most reliable of nonverbal signals. Laughter, as an important communicative signal, should also be socially contagious, or at least mimicked, to allow for the cohesion, broadening, and building of groups. While group laughter is readily identifiable and distinct from other types of OARs, it does not appear to have distinguishable characteristics that allow for the differentiation of members of different social groups from each other (Ritter & Sauter 2017), nor in identifying nuanced social intent, as is the case with individual laughter (Bachorowski & Owren 2001; McGettigan et al. 2015; Szameitat et al. 2009).

Although group laughter has not been characterized in such a thorough manner as has been the case regarding individual laughter, just as the playful characteristics of individual laughter can carry with it less-than-positive signaling aspects, so too group laughter can be used as a tool of social sanction. Specifically, mobbing may be seen as occurring when laughter is in response to ridicule. While there is still an element of playfulness through this vocalization, as group mobilization does not signal preparation for the coordination of violent activities, a contemptuous—certainly aggressive—aspect may be

perceived in the laughter eliciting comments of ridicule (Bull & Miskinis 2014; Janes & Olson 2000; Keltner et al. 2001; Keltner et al. 1998; Stewart 2012; Stewart et al. 2018; Wells & Bull 2007).

However, most research focuses on the positive attributes of laughter. Experimental research considering how individuals respond to group laughter when presented through audiotapes of jokes, funny stories, and stand-up routines tends to focus mainly on perceptions of how funny a stimulus is (Chapman & Chapman 1974; Freedman & Perlick 1979; Fuller & Sheehy-Skeffington 1974; Gruner 1993; Lawson et al. 1998; Martin & Gray 1996; Nosanchuk & Lightstone 1974; Platow et al. 2005; Young & Frye 1966). When the source of the humor is taken into account, findings show that group laughter leads to individuals within the group being perceived more favorably across multiple dimensions relevant to leadership, including potential for success (Platow et al. 2005), authoritativeness, character, dynamism, and interestingness (Gruner 1993), and credibility, likability, and lowered aggressiveness (Vraga et al. 2014).

While each of these experimental studies were influenced by multiple factors, Vraga and colleagues accurately comment that, "a humorous cue might be more important when faced with a more ambiguous context . . . as people have substantially less information on which to rely" (2014, 145). Much of this research focuses on entertainment figures in which preconceptions either do not play a role due to low awareness, or by being so heterogeneous as to be randomly distributed.

Political figures are different. Not only does their humor play a role in audience response, the group membership and social status of politicians predisposes perceptions and the response of most observers (Platow et al. 2005). Politicians, through their leadership role in society, belong to a clearly demarcated social group that is defined by a more restrictive set of social rules. Thus, the effects of receiving and perceiving laughter within a political context could be manifestly greater than in a nonpolitical context, where it is expected and therefore part of the routine dialogue. An example of the effect of group membership can be seen in a study by Platow and colleagues (Platow et al. 2005) that found in addition to more favorable ratings of the speaker, there were significant behavioral differences based upon perceived social group as "Participants laughed longer when the audience contained in-group rather than out-group members" and "laughed more (nearly four times as much) when they heard an in-group audience laugh" (548). In short, a politician playing to their followers will be more amusing, or at least they will seem that way to those observing.

Applause and Cheering

Applause and cheering are distinct forms of collective audience response, with the former percussive in nature and the latter being vocalic. As pointed out by Heritage and Greatbatch concerning applause "The action of applauding is invariably a display of affiliation which, in the context of political speeches, expresses support or approval for the assertion that follows" (1986, 111). However, both applause and cheering may be seen as overlapping and complementary in their communicative intent: that of asserting support. When analyzed as distinct forms of audience response in twenty-one South Korean campaign, acceptance, and inauguration speeches, applause was seen most often as a unitary response in the more restrained and circumspect inauguration speeches; however, with the other more in-group-focused campaign and nomination acceptance speeches, cheering was heard in conjunction with applause—whether preceding or following—as well as sequentially prior to chanting (Choi et al. 2016). In other words, the composite audience response of cheering occurred alongside applause as audiences indicated their enthusiasm for a speaker's utterance. Essentially, the speaker invites these forms of response through recognizable rhetorical devices, whether implicit or explicitly dialogic with the audience in the expectation of building support both from the audience in person, as well as those not present, in hopes of building excitement and momentum for the campaign (Bull 2016).

Applause can be conceptualized as either asynchronous and tumultuous marked by high frequency clapping or as synchronized, rhythmic waves with intense and thunderous noise at the global level. In most cases, asynchronous applause resolves into synchronous clapping at about twelve seconds (Néda, Ravasz, Brechet, et al. 2000; Néda, Ravasz, Vicsek, et al. 2000). Because the volume of clapping provides an acoustic indicator of proximity to other applauding audience members, spatial proximity is not as important (Mann et al. 2013). However, contextual elements such as the size of the audience (Heritage & Greatbatch 1986), culture, and the proximity of members to each other (accentuated when indoors and attenuated when in a spread out and/or outdoor venue) play a role in the intensity and length of applause (Néda, Ravasz, Vicsek, et al. 2000). As put by Mann and colleagues (Mann et al. 2013), applause stops based upon "the relative weights of internal cues (how long I have clapped) and external cues (how many others are still clapping)" (4).

The political system in which events happen can also play a role. As pointed out by Neda and colleagues "In communist times it was a common habit to applaud by rhythmic applause the 'great leader' speech. During this rhythmic applause the synchronization was almost never lost. This is very nice evidence of the fact that spectators were not enthusiastic enough and

were satisfied with the obtained global noise intensity level, having no desire to increase it" (6691–92). While presidential debates occur in a more demo-cratic system without overt coercion playing a role, there are certainly norms that influence audience response, although as seen in chapter 1, these norms may be broken.

Content and context can play a role in how quickly and accurately audi-ence members applaud public figures. Heritage and Greatbatch note that with political speeches the window of applause initiation is between 0.3 and 0.5 seconds of sentence completion (Heritage & Greatbatch 1986). This dif-fers from the applause coming at the end of informative presentations, with the average time from the cessation of speech (e.g., "thank you" or "any questions?") being 2.1 seconds (Mann et al. 2013). This difference likely reflects the conversational nature of political speeches, with their implicit and explicitly dialogic rhetorical invitations for audience response combined with nonverbal behavior signaling completion points. While applause in response to short (~seven-minute) presentations have bouts of from nine to fifteen claps, with some lasting up to thirty claps, it can be expected that this average applause of 6.1 seconds (Mann et al. 2013) will vary both in length and intensity during the conversation of public speakers with their followers, especially when combined with the chorusing vocalizations of cheering sup-porters. For example, in a study of twenty-one speeches by UK politicians Theresa May (M = 10.26 seconds) and Jeremy Corbyn (M = 9.45 seconds), the average collective applause duration was roughly ten seconds, even with-out the much lengthier applause bouts occurring at the beginning and end of their speeches (O'Gorman & Bull 2020). Thus while applause-cheering can be seen as relatively stereotyped, there is greater variation in this form of OAR than laughter and likely booing.

What Are Applause and Cheering Good For?

In a manner similar to applauding, the vocalization of cheering has the ability to communicate group assent or dissent—albeit through a different channel. Because applause and cheering occur concurrently, their combination may be seen as a reliable index of support by requiring more extensive energetic expenditure across nonverbal channels, in turn increasing its recognizability and credibility (Mehu et al. 2011). This may be seen as reflective of evolved patterns of differentiated communication that have been observed in chim-panzees as maintaining different sets of social relationships (Roberts & Roberts 2016). Because elaborated forms of vocal communication have been seen in multiple social primates, with increased repertoire size associated with social bonding (McComb & Semple 2005), and can be seen as build-ing from laughter as a form of social grooming extending well beyond the

one-to-one physical grooming to broaden and build social networks (Dunbar 2017), its evolutionary roots may be more fully studied and appreciated.

Research testing assumptions from the social brain hypothesis regarding the development of large-scale social connections through the vocalic activity of singing suggest a mechanism by which social identity may form without prior individual connections (Pearce et al. 2017). As pointed out by Pearce and colleagues, "Creating group-level social cohesion is not necessarily synonymous with establishing personal connections with individual members; it is possible to feel a sense of group closeness without necessarily having personal relationships with others in the group" (2017, 506).

Bonding by communal chorusing happens quickly even among strangers, with its effects seen within six minutes (Pearce et al. 2016). This connection works by building feelings of positivity, inclusion, and social connection (Pearce et al. 2017; Pearce et al. 2016), with effects that are enhanced in larger collectives when compared to smaller groups (Weinstein et al. 2016a, 2016b). Even when competing against other groups (as well as when cooperating) group members felt positively toward not only to their own group members, but also to their competitors. This might be due to the synchronized chorusing signaling coalition quality of the opposition in terms of their willingness and capability to work together as a team. In essence, singing becomes a form of advertisement (Pearce et al. 2016). As a result, it can be expected that such OAR as applause-cheering is an important social tool as groups move from the personal to the political.

How Do Applause and Cheering Work?

Experimental studies considering the effect of positive audience response tends to combine applause with cheering, yelling, and overall enthusiasm. With public events such as music performances (Hocking et al. 1977) or sporting events (Cummins & Gong 2017; Sapolsky & Zillmann 1978), audience enthusiasm leads participants to perceive the event as more exciting and leading to greater felt immersion in the event itself (Cummins & Gong 2017). Likewise, such OAR leads participants to enjoy the event to a greater extent (Sapolsky & Zillmann 1978) and perceiving the performance to be of higher quality (Hocking et al. 1977). However, when policy arguments made by public figures are considered, participant attitudes are largely unaffected by the presence of an enthusiastic audience applauding and cheering (Axsom et al. 1987; Wiegman 1987). This is likely driven by audience member characteristics. As pointed out by Axsom and colleagues "High involvement subjects, processing systematically, were little affected by the audience response cue; for them argument quality influences persuasion. In contrast, low-involvement subjects were more responsive to the audience cue,

presumably because the lesser systematic processing they engaged in failed to provide them with information that contradicted the consensus heuristic" (36). Put concisely, participants use OAR as a shorthand decision tool when other useful information is not available.

Booing and Jeering

Despite their utility for audiences, booing and jeering are rarely observed. Even when present, the negative vocalizations of booing and jeering are not so straightforward as might be expected; instead, combined they serve as a multifaceted tool. For instance, speakers may endeavor to elicit booing from an unfriendly audience to establish bona fides (Bull & Miskinis 2014; Clayman 1993; West 1984). Bull and Miskinis, in their analysis of campaign speeches by Barack Obama and Mitt Romney during their 2012 presidential election (Bull & Miskinis 2014), suggested that latter "provoked a pre-dominantly hostile audience into booing him, thereby seeking to enhance his standing not with the audience in the conference hall, but with an audience elsewhere, namely that of hardline Republicans" (14). Speakers can even intentionally invite booing and jeering to galvanize audience opposition to a person, party, or policy, although this might be distinctive to US political culture (Bull 2016).

In competitive settings as is the case with debates, the composition and the arrangement of an audience can be seen as influencing the likelihood of dis-affiliative booing occurring, even competing with affiliative responses (Clayman 1992, 1993). As pointed out by Clayman, "the prospective booer should be encouraged knowing that although a substantial segment of the audience supports the speaker, those nearby oppose the speaker and will be predisposed to join in counter-affiliative booing response" (120). However, even in competitive context of presidential general election debates where there is substantial audience response, as was the case of the three 1988 debates between George H. W. Bush and Michael Dukakis, as well as their respective running mates Dan Quayle and Lloyd Bentsen, which saw 169 audience responses over the course of 270 minutes of debate time, booing was rare—occurring only eight times (4.7 percent of OAR).

What Are Booing and Jeering Good For?

When carried out collectively, booing and jeering provide for the synchro-nization of emotional state by signaling joint aggressive behavioral intent (Dezecache et al. 2015). Because these forms of vocalization signal belliger-ence, their synchronization would reduce the perceived risk from those in proximity by their sharing hostile intent. This in turn would reduce the risk of

being seen as a potential target for the opposition by signaling not just group membership (Roberts & Roberts 2016), but also coalitional strength and with it formidability, especially in conflictual contexts (Fessler & Holbrook 2016).

Combined with the synchronized nature of booing, the intensity and strength of this form of chorusing indicates the presence of an unsympathetic faction willing to aggressively signal their discontent, whether as a form of social sanction or as requested by the speaker. As suggested in research concerning sporting events, booing can impair the performance of the audience's target, while at the same time providing the opposition a boost (Greer 1983). In short, the social influence of audience booing affects both those being booed and those who experience the support by being part of the booing faction. At the same time, if countered by substantial laughter, applause, or cheering from other coalitions within a larger audience, booing may be seen as indicating either lack of unanimity on specific points, or even division within the group present at the event.

How Do Booing and Jeering Work?

Three experimental studies considering political content and contexts, while dated, provide useful insights into the effect of negative observable audience response such as booing and jeering. Two studies from the 1970s found that heckling, involving boos, sneers, and catcalls, diminished the effect of a speech even when it did not have effect on content recall (Silverthorne & Mazmanian 1975), and when involving agreement over policy statements of the 1970 US presidential candidates Richard Nixon and Edmund Muskie. This effect persisted two months later, despite the respective candidate speeches being only around six minutes long (Sloan et al. 1974). The possibility that such negative response undermined the speaker's credibility (Silverthorne & Mazmanian 1975) was supported by Fein and colleagues' fourth experiment carried out over thirty years later. This study, regarding the 1992 third and final US presidential debate (Fein et al. 2007), considered the effect of confederates applauding one candidate, in this case Republican Party nominee and incumbent President George H. W. Bush and Democratic Party candidate Bill Clinton, while jeering and hissing the other. Findings showed that while these audience responses did not influence perceptions of the debate winner nor intended vote, they affected audience perceptions of candidate performance, their leadership traits, and also led participants "to infer that these judgments were diagnostic of national public opinion" (186). In other words, like laughter and applause-cheering, the negative audience response of booing-jeering can be seen as playing a heuristic role by providing information for those without strongly held opinions.

CONCLUSIONS: LEADER-FOLLOWER
COMMUNICATION THROUGH
OBSERVABLE AUDIENCE RESPONSE

The role played by the collective response of audiences to speakers is that of feedback in a conversation that involves multiple parties beyond followers and leaders. There is not only social signaling going on between the speaker and in-group members who respond with laughter, applause-cheering, and booing, as well as other forms of chorusing, but also to those who are not affiliated or are even in opposition. Observable audience response (OAR) allows for scaffolding from intra-individual networks to larger groups by in essence providing a means through which social identity can be asserted and fortified. Ultimately, the audience is an active participant in these conversations even if their responses are limited to the different types of OAR.

OAR provides for near instantaneous communication through and across social networks, albeit with caveats. In addition to intrinsic limitations to the size and structure of intra-individual social networks, external factors may also play a role in how many individuals are in a group and how they interact. Networks not only benefit individuals by facilitating cooperation (e.g., communal child care, food sharing, grooming, cooperative hunting, coalition formation and communal group defense) (Kasper & Voelkl 2009), they also benefit individuals within the group through the transmission of information and resources (Sueur et al. 2011; Wey et al. 2008).

A second role played by social networks concerns the transmission of information. Here, information may concern specific cognitive factors, or maybe the emotional feelings one experiences in relation to a putative leader. Networks play a role in the spread of emotional contagion, as Fowler and Christakis (Christakis & Fowler 2009) found that happiness spreads dynamically through large social networks, even up to three degrees of separation. In their words, "the social network effect of happiness is multiplicative and asymmetric" (2008, 6) with happiness having a stronger effect than unhappiness and with greater numbers of happy "alters" having more of an impact than increased unhappy "alters."

Finally, network size and structure influences the ability for spread through a population, and hence has an influence on the well-being of a group (Read, Eames and Edmunds 2008). The transmission of pathogens functions in much the same way as transmission of resources and information such as produced by OAR. In the words of Krause et al. (2007: 21): "From a network's perspective an individual's chance of getting infected is primarily a function of how many connections it has in a network, what proportion of its network

'neighbors' are infected, the frequency and intensity of contact with those neighbors and the potential directedness of those connections (i.e. in some cases transmission may be dependent on who initiates the contact or takes with role in the interaction)."

Thus, the flow of resources, information and, indeed, pathogens through a network may be seen as an interaction of the structure of the network, characteristics of individuals within the network, and the nature of the transactions between individuals within the network. Politics, and the inference of leadership within social networks, assumes that there are asymmetric flows of resources and information (albeit not pathogens). Specifically, even in face-to-face bands, leaders can expect to receive greater attention from their followers than they can be expected to give (Chance 1967; Cheng et al. 2022; Gerpott et al. 2018; Salter 2007). This difference between attention received and attention given is even greater in the modern era where leadership is mediated through mass communication modes such as television, radio, and the internet. Specifically, individuals may give their attention to a person and/or the cause they represent in order to feel good about themselves, with the optimism a candidate conveys about their shared future received by the follower in return.

We expect that there will be asymmetry in the relationship between followers and competing leaders; at the same time the political parties will compete in the "information niches" they inhabit. Specifically, the Republican and Democratic Party can be expected to attract different individuals to themselves based upon the interplay of factors internal and external to their potential followers and the social identity that the political party and its leadership constructs. As a result, while the stance of a political party matters, as do the traits of individuals, it may ultimately be the shared conversation between the leader and followers, and perhaps more importantly among the followers themselves through their OAR of laughter, applause-cheering, and booing that serve to construct their social identity as a cohesive group. In the end, while political parties and their leaders are most visible, it is likely through their intragroup and primal communication of OAR that the audience shapes what their social identity will be.

Playing the "Trump Card" during the 2016 Primary Debates

The increased public awareness regarding presidential primaries over the past two primary decades, and especially debates, to a great extent reflects ongoing media trends. But the elevated attention to the 2016 presidential primaries—arguably a media frenzy—can be seen as largely due to the presence of reality television star and Republican Party candidate Donald Trump. With his outspoken populism and mastery of the gossip media, Trump attracted media and public attention from the very start of his campaign. However, his emergence as a serious candidate for the Republican Party was principally due to his performance during the first two GOP primary debates on FOX News and CNN, both of which drew well over twenty million viewers. Although these debates introduced the other, lesser-known candidates to the curious public, they mainly served to fortify focus on the main attraction, Donald Trump.

While the 2016 election might eventually prove anomalous and politics eventually returns to a monotonous pragmatism, early debates do play a role in providing voters initial and often lasting impressions that can ultimately influence an election's outcome (Damore 1997; Lanoue & Schrott 1989; McKinney 2021; Racine 2002). Thus, candidates seek to build follower enthusiasm and acquire additional supporters through their respective debate performances. With party identity and even issues positions less important than the candidates and their performances (Benoit et al. 2002; Lanoue & Schrott 1989; Pfau et al. 1997), primary debates provide the interested public the opportunity to make choices based upon the contenders' abilities to survive and thrive in a competitive and relatively uncontrolled environment. Without the unmistakably tangible and reliable feedback of votes and financial contributions, primary debates occurring at the very start of a presidential campaign season provide the media and general public indicators of the candidate's comparable abilities as well as the intensity and type of

emotional connection they have with the in-person audience (Stewart 2015). More specifically, candidate performances can be compared across the stage by considering patterns in their speaking time and the candidates ability to connect with the audience through the potential followers applause-cheering, laughter, boos, and/or combinations thereof.

This chapter thus analyzes the content of both candidate speaking behavior and the observable audience response (OAR) to their debate performance for both political parties during the initial 2016 debates. We first consider the Republican Party's first two primary debates before analyzing the first two presidential primary debates for the Democratic Party. The 2016 Republican Party debates held by FOX News and CNN had a ground-breaking ten and eleven candidates onstage, respectively. By comparison the 2016 Democratic Party had a much smaller contingent onstage, with five and three candidates for their CNN and CBS hosted debates.

To evaluate the influence of these debates we first review literature about dominance of attention and leadership before considering the role of OAR in influencing those watching. From there we analyze candidate debate performance in terms of the in-person audience's response to the candidates through applause-cheering, laughter, and booing and combinations of these collective utterances for each of these four initial debates during the 2016 presidential campaign. These OAR not only indicate the level of support and prestige gained or lost by the candidates during their debate performance, they also potentially indicate opposing factions in an audience. Furthermore, these forms of group utterances can exert social influence over the attitudes toward and expectations of the presidential contenders by those watching at home.

DOMINATING ATTENTION BY
DOMINATING SPEAKING TIME

It is a well-established finding that when dealing with social animals, including but not limited to humans, one of the best (if not the best) indicators of leadership is dominance of group attention (Chance 1967; Cheng et al. 2022; Gerpott et al. 2018; Gong & Bucy 2016; Masters et al. 1991). In other words, leaders may be defined as those who are either given more speaking time or are more successful at seizing it by interrupting other individuals. Because media presentation of candidates, especially during debates, often places them virtually face-to-face with viewers in a manner that is artificially intimate (Grabe & Bucy 2009; Masters 1989; Mutz 2015), candidates with more speaking time (and the camera time that comes with it) have significant advantages through increased viewer preference and trust. This is especially the case when there is high perceived social connectedness between the

viewer and the candidate, as exposure to the candidate on its own can lead viewers to be more likely to vote for that particular candidate (Verrier 2012).

Greater amounts of candidate speaking time, especially in comparison with the other contenders for leadership, primes the viewers to see those obtaining more speaking time as particularly viable. Whether candidates dominated viewer attention, when compared with their competition, is assessed through their aggregate and proportion of speaking time. Using these indicators provides a straightforward way to consider contemporaneous electoral status. The number of speaking turns taken by candidates during these debates, and implicitly how many interruptions were attempted, provides insights into the strategies engaged in to attain and maintain social dominance. For instance, those with longer average speaking times are less likely to have either attempted to interrupt others as well having been less likely to have been interrupted themselves by either the other candidates onstage, the moderators, or even the audience. As a result, it can be expected that those with less social dominance in comparison with others onstage will attempt to interrupt more often, and likely be unsuccessful; conversely, those with greater dominance will be less likely to accede to attempted interruptions by continuing to use their speaking turn.

Observable Audience Response to Political Figures

When evaluating observable audience response (OAR) in response to speakers a key factor, if not the most important factor, is how reliably these collective reactions are in reflecting the audience's emotions and ultimately their behavioral intent. Reliable indicators of emotion and behavioral intent such as OAR may be defined by two major characteristics. First, observers must be able to accurately recognize the emotional state of the communicator, and with it the intended behavior from the signal. Second, the signal should provide an index of the sender's underlying emotional state. This is done typically by being difficult to fake, or if the emotional state and behavioral intent is feigned, leading the individual posing the emotion to physiologically feel the emotional state (Ekman 2003; Mehu et al. 2011).

Because of the social nature of OAR, these group utterances should be stereotyped and contagious. Stereotypic utterances are easily understood and mimicked, allowing for the involvement of consenting individuals, whereas contagion provides for rapid coordination of social action. As stated by Hatfield and colleagues (Hatfield et al. 1994), emotional contagion is "the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person's and, consequently, to converge emotionally" (169).

Generally speaking, one can identify three general types of OAR during presidential debates. These OAR in turn might be mixed depending on the makeup of the audience and the intensity of their response. Specifically, applause-cheering, laughter, and booing serve to signal shared audience response to political candidates and their utterances and with it the willingness to support or oppose the contenders. These group utterances can likewise be seen as a major means by which large groups of followers can provide their leaders signals indicating the level of their support and appreciation or opposition and approbation for different statements. As pointed out by West (West 1984), OAR accomplishes multiple objectives. Specifically, OAR provides immediate feedback regarding speaker the success of rhetoric, can be used to continuously monitoring the audience, and perhaps most importantly, is unobtrusive while providing an index of support or lack thereof for those watching on television or other media sources through the intensity (length and loudness of an OAR; see chapters 1, 6 and 7). Furthermore, OAR in the forms of applause-cheering, laughter, and booing may be seen as accurately indicating coalition size and strength (Dezecache & Dunbar 2012).

However, it should be noted that the length of an OAR may be accentuated or attenuated premised upon its type (as discussed in chapter 3). Here we note that at least three distinct types of group utterances that can be observed during debates with each serving specific communicative ends. Specifically, laughter, applause-cheering, and booing allow for audiences to communicate their support or disapproval for statements by leaders and putative leaders, with concomitant perceived intensity and mixtures providing insight concerning intensity and unanimity toward these positions within the audience at the event.

Applause and Cheering

Of all the forms of OAR, applause-cheering is most likely to be observed in presidential primary debates due to both the ease of expression and control audience members have over its manifestation. As a result, applause-cheering has been appreciated for the role it plays in providing an important barometer of a politician's appeal to distinct groups within the audience (if not all present) or in direct competition with other candidates during debates. However, because applause-cheering is not as costly to produce physiologically and is easier to inhibit than laughter (Stewart 2015), it might not be as reliable a social signal. That does not mean that this activity is not stereotyped and as a result easy to identify and join in with other participants. As a result, even small groups of under twenty individuals can, with the range of clapping from nine to fifteen claps per person (Néda et al. 2000) incite applause in larger groups. As discussed in chapter 3, this activity typically begins with an

uncoordinated loud burst of high-frequency clapping that then synchronizes through social contagion and coordination before diminishing rapidly. Thus, while the initial applause is louder, and during debates often accompanied by cheering that enhances this OAR's perceived intensity, the synchronicity of the responding audience suggests connection between audience members and the speaker with their utterances being reciprocated (Mann et al. 2013).

In the context of general election debates, and especially in comparison with the more partisan primary election debates, applause-cheering in response to candidate statements has been quite rare. This is likely due to both moderator instructions to applaud the candidates only before and after the debate. The norms of politeness and the nature of the audiences themselves likewise affects not just the applause-cheering that occurs, but also their willingness to follow instructions during these general election events. This was the case with the 2012 Republican Party presidential primary debate in Tampa, Florida, where moderator instruction diminished the total amount of applause that occurred, much to the chagrin of populist candidate Newt Gingrich, whose campaign was built upon his rhetorical connection with the audience (Stewart 2015).

Thus, the volitional nature of applause-cheering, especially in the context of debates where time constraints lead to more concise and pointed rhetoric, is the major means by which audiences can converse with the candidates and convey their support or opposition. Furthermore, the partisanship of general election audiences tends to be mixed, often selected by their candidates' campaigns based upon their higher status and seated in a manner that does not allow for social groupings to occur easily (Farah 2004; Minow & LaMay 2008; Schroeder 2016). In comparison, applause-cheering during primary debates is very much in evidence, especially in crowds not dominated by higher-status partisans.

Laughter

Vocalic utterances such as laughter are limited physiologically to a much greater extent than those created through rhythmic mechanical noisemaking such as applause in combination with volitional cheering. This makes it a potentially more reliable indicator of audience members' emotional state. Extensive research suggests laughter by individuals may be seen as a costly signal by virtue of it being evoked in a manner that is difficult to control and that even when initially faked can lead to physiological change (Hofmann et al. 2017; Manninen et al. 2017; Trivedi & Bachorowski 2013). Individual laughter likewise serves as a social lubricant. It does so by decreasing negative affect, increasing positive affect and pain tolerance, while at the same time increasing social cooperation and group identity (Dezecache & Dunbar

2012). With this latter exception, much of the extant research considers laughter from the lens of individual behavior with interpersonal implications; the emergent qualities of laughter as representing group preferences have only recently been explored in a tentative manner.

Laughter as a group vocalic utterance is much more stereotyped in length than applause-cheering, and likely booing—although the rarity of these types of group utterances makes strong assertions untenable. When humorous comments are savored by larger social groups, applause-cheering prolongs the OAR. This is likely due to the physiologically taxing demands of laughter itself, with extended "laughing jags" being comparatively rare (13, 16). This underscores the reliability of laughter as a highly important social signal concerning behavioral intent.

Booing and Jeering

Much rarer than supportive in-person audience response through laughter and applause-cheering are those disaffiliative vocalizations of boos and jeers. While they have been observed in political events, boos and jeering are quite rare. Specifically, West in his analysis of 1980 campaign speeches found that Republican Party candidate Ronald Reagan elicited more than twice as many boos as both his Democratic Party competitor Jimmy Carter and independent presidential candidate John Anderson (West 1984). While West found that being booed by the "right" crowd enhanced Anderson's electoral status by emphasizing his willingness to take an unpopular stand (for that audience), this study did not systematically analyze the strategic nature of such boo elicitations. More recently, Bull and Miskinis (2014) found that affiliative booing—in other words, booing that is invited through attacks on out-groups and policy positions—occurred in roughly equal proportions for Republican candidate Mitt Romney and incumbent Barack Obama when they considered nearly two and a half hours of campaign speeches by each candidate. Thus, inviting booing and jeering, either from an unfriendly audience or in a manner that underscores the unpopularity of a target with a friendly audience, is a form of OAR sought after by candidates.

When general election debate behavior is considered, the comparatively meager literature suggests that, like booing during political speeches, booing behavior in general election debates is relatively rare. Specifically, in a study of two 1988 presidential and one vice presidential debates, only eight instances of booing occurred out of 169 total events (Clayman 1992). Here, the audience members only appeared to boo in response to attacks by a candidate. In other words, booing was a defensive gesture employed by audience members in a politically mixed audience, as opposed to the politically homogenous audience of primary debates.

In summary, applause-cheering, laughter, and booing provide means by which the audience present with a politician can make their voices heard in distinctive ways. While preverbal, these utterances can be used successfully by groups to strategically communicate factional preferences not just to the speaker, but also to other potential group members. As a result, there are social benefits and costs from joining or not joining in; indeed, audience members must consider if engaging in these forms of group utterances will be more socially costly to them for not joining in or joining in when candidates break norms of politeness and civility. These costs become accentuated when there is within-group competition for leadership and, with this, influence over the social identity of a political party.

THE FIRST FOX NEWS 2016 REPUBLICAN PARTY PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATE

The first in the series of twelve Republican Party 2016 presidential nomination debates occurred on August 6, 2015. Here, the top ten GOP candidates, as determined by the average of the top five national polls, met to take part in a two-hour prime-time debate at the Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland, Ohio—the locale for the Republican Party's 2016 presidential nomination convention. Businessman Donald Trump, former Florida governor Jeb Bush, and Wisconsin governor Scott Walker led the field with double-digit poll numbers. They were joined onstage by former and present governors Chris Christie, Mike Huckabee, and John Kasich, current senators Ted Cruz, Rand Paul, and Marco Rubio, and retired pediatric neurosurgeon Ben Carson. A "sold out" and highly vociferous crowd of 4,500 Republican partisans packed the arena (Beres 2015) with the debate likewise drawing a viewing audience well beyond the cable television norm. Specifically, twenty-four million viewers watched live with numerous others following through simulcast video streams (2.5 million) or watching it afterward (8 million video streams).

Candidate Speaking Time during the FOX News Republican Party Debate

The first and most obvious finding when considering candidate speaking time during the FOX News debate is just how much more speaking time, both comparatively and in total, Donald Trump had. Although most all of the nine other candidates clustered close to the expected 10 percent of speaking time apportioned to them, Trump had more than half again as much at nearly 16 percent (see table 4.1). While the home state favorite, Ohio governor John Kasich, received nearly 10 percent of the speaking time available to the

Table 4.1. FOX News GOP debate Candidate Speech and Observable Audience Response (OAR): Total time (Turns)

Candidate	Speech time (turns)	Average Speaking time (%)	Applause-Cheering	Laughter	Booing	Applause-Cheering & Booing	Applause-Cheering & Laughter	Laughter & Booing	OAR Total time (turns)
Jeb Bush	489.78 (10)	48.98 (11.6%)	112.18 (20)	2.57 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	114.75 (22)
Ben Carson	395.73 (9)	43.97 (9.4%)	91.61 (14)	2.81 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	25.83 (4)	0 (0)	120.25 (21)
Chris Christie	387.84 (12)	32.32 (9.2%)	45.24 (8)	1.07 (1)	4.37 (1)	4.87 (1)	3.64 (1)	0 (0)	59.19 (12)
Ted Cruz	400.57 (8)	50.07 (9.5%)	114.07 (21)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.73 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	115.8 (16)
Mike Huckabee	399.91 (8)	49.99 (9.5%)	83.59 (12)	0 (0)	3.77 (1)	18.05 (1)	18.15 (2)	0 (0)	123.56 (18)
John Kasich	408.50 (9)	45.39 (9.7%)	105.91 (15)	0 (0)	0 (0)	16.22 (1)	9.27 (2)	0 (0)	131.4 (18)
Rand Paul	327.56 (15)	21.84 (7.8%)	71.28 (17)	0 (0)	16.25 (1)	9.48 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	97.01 (19)
Marco Rubio	388.93 (8)	48.62 (9.2%)	77.98 (13)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	11.14 (1)	0 (0)	89.12 (14)
Donald Trump	660.00 (28)	23.57 (15.7%)	78.68 (14)	3.04 (1)	12.57 (2)	39.91 (6)	45.71 (8)	0 (0)	179.91 (33)
Scott Walker	352.75 (12)	29.40 (8.4%)	67.03 (15)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	7.74 (1)	0 (0)	74.77 (16)
Candidate Total	4211.57 (119)	35.39 (100%)	847.57 (149)	9.49 (9)	36.96 (5)	90.26 (11)	121.48 (19)	0 (0)	1105.76 (193)

candidates despite his fringe electoral status, this only amounted to a grand total of under seven minutes speaking time. In raw time, Trump's eleven minutes speaking time exceeded fellow front-runner Jeb Bush by just under three minutes and was more than double that of the candidate with the least time—Rand Paul.

This was in great part due to Trump's aggressive style whereas he more than doubled all other candidates' speaking turns, largely due to his interruptions. By comparison, the lowest-ranking candidates on the very margins of the stage—Chris Christie and Rand Paul—had more speaking turns than almost all the other candidates but less speaking time. This was thanks to their arguably engaging in a lower-ranked contender's strategy of aggression through interruption, which was exemplified with their contentious interaction with each other early in the debate. While Scott Walker had similar numbers, this was not necessarily due to his interruptions so much as his inability to effectively fill his allotted speaking time. Trump's speaking turns (28) and average speaking time (23.57s) are revealing in that they show a front-runner engaging in a challenger's strategy. In essence, Trump had the best of both worlds as a front-runner dominating the speaking time he was allotted while aggressing on the other candidates' speaking time through interruptions like a challenger would.

Observable Audience Response (OAR) during the Fox News Republican Party Debate

The nearly two hundred OAR and just over eighteen minutes of applause-cheering, laughter, and booing in response to the candidates during the just under two-hour debate time (1 hour, 49 minutes) provide evidence of an expressive and enthusiastic audience for the initial Republican Party presidential primary debate. As expected, Donald Trump led the pack with three minutes of total audience response (see table 4.1). Trump was followed by home state Ohio governor John Kasich, 2008 presidential hopeful and then FOX News talk show stalwart host Mike Huckabee, neurosurgeon and political novice Ben Carson, and Tea Party favorite Ted Cruz. Only then came front-runner and party-insider favorite Jeb Bush. On the other hand, those candidates eliciting the least amount of audience response were Christie, at just under a minute, and presumed front-runner Walker with a minute and quarter of audience response.

Despite the exuberant audience that saw most every candidate receiving OAR as a result of their utterances, Christie, Paul, Walker, and Trump all had comparatively low ratios of OAR to speaking turns (see figure 4.1). This likely reflects starkly different strategies by the candidates. With all the candidates onstage, with the exception of Trump, having fewer speaking turns,
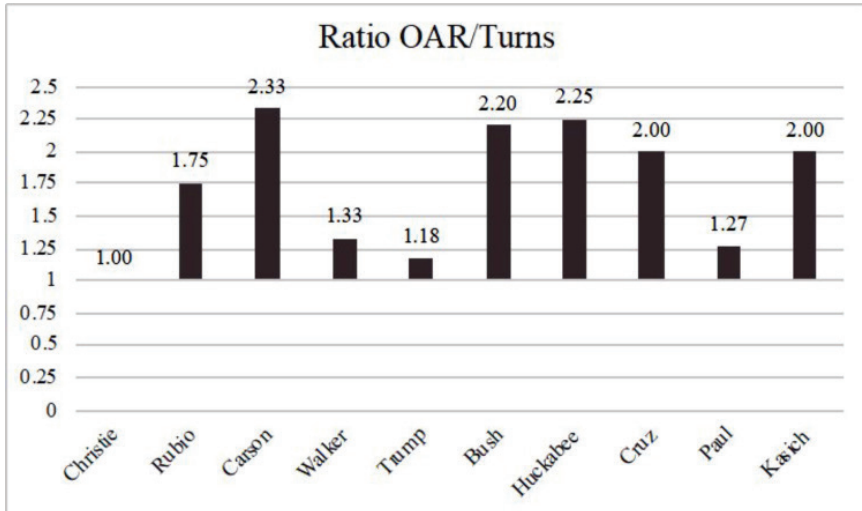
Figure 4.1.   Ratio of OAR to Speaking Turns during FOX News 2016 Republican Party Debate. *Source:* **Created by the author.**

the ratio likely represents a solid metric of audience support. However, with Trump interrupting or interjecting at such high rates his ratio was suppressed whereas his total OAR time was elevated well beyond that of the rest of the field (see table 4.1).

Further disambiguation of the Cleveland audience's response helps clarify their relationship with the speakers, as well as candidate rhetorical strategies. For instance, Cruz and Bush led all other candidates in applause, yet elicited precious little other response types. On the other hand, Carson not only received a minute and a half of applause alone, he also elicited nearly a half minute of combined laughter and applause, suggesting the audience responded predominantly in a positive manner to him and his performance. On the other hand, Paul appeared to elicit the most negative response from the audience. Whether invited or not, Paul received the largest proportion of response in audience booing. Finally, the most divisive candidate, when considering the range of positive, negative, and mixed response, was Trump. Although Christie and Huckabee were both able to elicit a full range of audience response, what they received was dwarfed in both amount and proportion by Trump.

THE FIRST CNN 2016 REPUBLICAN PARTY
PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATE

CNN hosted the second GOP primetime debate on September 16, 2015. CNN originally considered the average of fourteen polls to determine eligibility for the debate's ten podiums. However, due to Carly Fiorina's FOX News drive-time debate performance and her resulting increased electoral standing, she was added to the prime-time field. With the addition of this eleventh candidate, debate time was increased by an hour to a total of three hours. In addition to the added time, the candidates were crowded to within two feet of each other in the cramped and sweltering Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, with many of the candidates obviously sweating. At the same time, the crowd was much less boisterous with many of the only five hundred seats being reserved for party elites.

The CNN prime-time Republican Party debate was watched by nearly as many people (22.9 million on television and 4.5 million live streams) as the FOX News debate, suggesting a continued fascination with Trump and his competition. Although the polling numbers showed Trump building his lead as fellow front-runners Bush and Walker saw their numbers drop slightly, the greatest interest before the debate was how Fiorina would perform. This attention was even more focused due to Trump's feuding with Fiorina over her appearance and his burgeoning feud with FOX News debate moderator Megyn Kelly after she questioned him during the debate regarding his treatment of women.

Candidate Speaking Time during the
CNN Republican Party Debate

Although Trump was the winner in terms of total and proportion of speaking time, besting his next-closest competitor Jeb Bush by over four minutes and three percent more time, respectively, CNN's debate saw a more prepared field of contenders and moderators. With the addition of Carly Fiorina, eleven candidates onstage tussled for speaking time.

Even with two hours and twenty-three minutes available to them, and as can be seen in table 4.2, there were arguably three tiers of candidates based upon speaking time. The bottom-tier candidates were those who spoke less than 8 percent of the time. While these candidates, Ted Cruz, Mike Huckabee, John Kasich, Rand Paul, and Scott Walker, received more speaking time than was the case during the FOX News debate, the nine to eleven minutes did not come close to matching the rest of the debate field. The contenders were those candidates with around 9 to 12 percent of speaking time (Bush, Carson,

Table 4.2. CNN GOP debate Candidate Speech and Observable Audience Response (OAR): Total time (Turns)

Candidate	Speaking time (turns)	Average Speaking time (%)	Applause-Cheering	Laughter	Booing	Applause-Cheering & Booing	Applause-Cheering & Laughter	Laughter & Booing	OAR Total time (turns)
Jeb Bush	1008.21	25.21	58.78	20.82	0	0	29.63	0	109.23
	(40)	(11.7%)	(10)	(2)	(0)	(0)	(2)	(0)	(14)
Ben Carson	799.29	33.30	24.55	6.61	0	0	6.84	0	38
	(24)	(9.3%)	(5)	(2)	(0)	(0)	(1)	(0)	(8)
Chris Christie	789.37	30.36	84.41	15.12	0	0	0	0	99.53
	(26)	(9.2%)	(15)	(5)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(20)
Ted Cruz	683.88	31.09	46.72	2.6	0	0	0	0	49.32
	(22)	(7.9%)	(11)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(12)
Carly Fiorina	873.11	18.19	124.03	11.41	0	0	5.11	0	140.55
	(48)	(10.1%)	(13)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(1)	(0)	(15)
Mike Huckabee	590.20	49.18	45.95	1.7	0	0	11.15	0	58.8
	(12)	(6.9%)	(8)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(3)	(0)	(12)
John Kasich	605.08	25.21	27.49	1.5	0	0	0	0	28.99
	(24)	(7.0%)	(5)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(6)
Rand Paul	671.91	22.40	37.94	5.83	0	0	4.34	0	48.11
	(30)	(7.8%)	(9)	(2)	(0)	(0)	(1)	(0)	(12)
Marco Rubio	762.20	31.76	95.87	12.59	0	0	0	0	108.46
	(24)	(8.9%)	(14)	(3)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(17)
Donald Trump	1266.24	18.35	33.55	57.76	0	0	0	3.24	94.55
	(69)	(14.7%)	(7)	(17)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(1)	(25)
Scott Walker	554.77	27.74	37.6	2.5	0	0	0	0	40.1
	(20)	(6.4%)	(8)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(9)
Candidate Total	8604.26	25.38	616.89	138.44	0	0	57.07	3.24	815.64
	(339)	(100%)	(105)	(36)	(0)	(0)	(8)	(1)	(150)

Christie, Fiorina, and Rubio), with speaking time ranging from Marco Rubio receiving just under thirteen minutes to presumptive front-runner Jeb Bush approaching seventeen minutes.

However, it was Donald Trump who dominated speaking time with nearly 15 percent of the total available to the candidates, which amounted to just over twenty-one minutes of him dominating discussion in one way or another. In a manner reminiscent of the first FOX News primary debate, Trump's strategy of interrupting early and often can be inferred from his many speaking turns (sixty-nine), which was double the average during this debate, and his brief average speaking time, which at just over eighteen seconds was the shortest of all candidates onstage. In short, Trump not only was conferred substantial consideration as a front-runner, he seized whatever attention he could from the other candidates through aggressive verbal tactics.

Observable Audience Response (OAR) during the CNN Republican Party Debate

Despite his now-established status as a serious candidate, Trump trailed Fiorina, Bush, Rubio, and Christie in total OAR time (see table 4.2). While this is potentially due to an audience not inclined toward him, it is notable that Trump did elicit the greatest number of audience utterances with twenty-five, outpacing the next closest candidate (Christie) by five. At the low end of the audience reaction was Kasich, whose less than a half minute and only six audience reactions to his comments were well below that of Carson (thirty-eight seconds, eight OAR) and the free-falling Walker (forty seconds, nine OAR). This further underscores the importance of the "home-field advantage" Ohio native Kasich held during the first debate in Cleveland, Ohio, where he ended as the second-ranked candidate in terms of OAR time received

Analysis of applause suggests Fiorina was far and away the leader with audience approval of her statements at over two minutes total, nearly thirty seconds more than the next closest candidate Rubio. This was likely due to her being the only candidate with a home-state audience and her being the most visible antagonist to Trump, especially as she was a major target for his ridicule prior to the debate. Fiorina was likely invited onto the main stage from the FOX News drive-time debate for the also-ran candidates due to this antagonism and to take advantage of their interpersonal conflict to draw viewers. For their part, Carson, Kasich, and Trump received the least applause in terms of both total time and events, with Trump's diminished reception notable in light of his front-running status.

When considering the ratio of OAR to speaking turns (see figure 4.2), the difference between the highly enthusiastic and large Cleveland, Ohio, audience in attendance at the FOX News debate and the more reserved, smaller
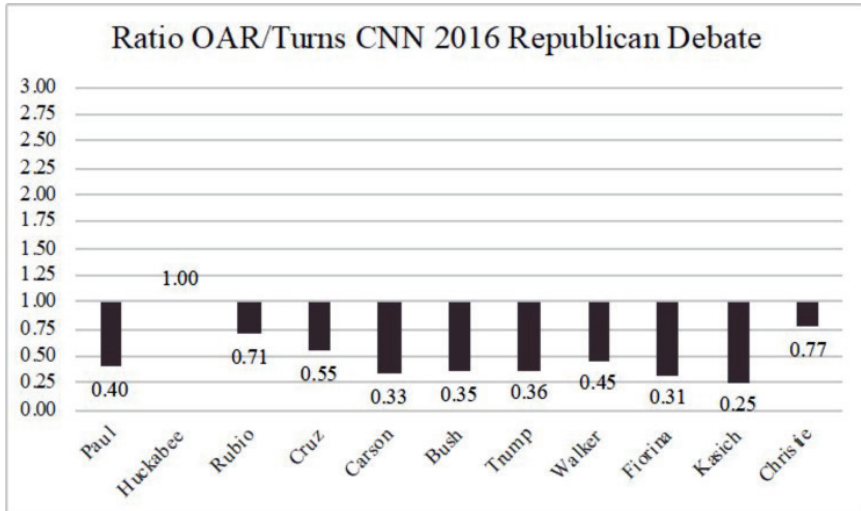
Figure 4.2. Ratio of OAR to Speaking Turns during CNN 2016 Republican Party Debate. *Source:* **Created by the author.**

audience for the CNN debate is obvious. While Huckabee led the pack with a one-to-one ratio of OAR to speaking turns, and John Kasich trailed all others with only one OAR per four utterances, the front-runners in the middle of the stage—Carson, Bush, and Trump—elicited audience reaction in roughly only one-in-three utterances. While Bush had four times as many speaking turns as during the first 2016 primary debate on FOX News, he could not engage the audience as effectively as could Trump with his overtly aggressive interrupt-and-interject strategy.

Trump, however, elicited substantial amounts of laughter time and events from an audience that, if not unfriendly, was not as positively predisposed toward him as was the case during the FOX News debate. His nearly one minute of laughter substantially outpaced all other candidates, although Bush received abundant amounts of laughter and laughter combined with applause. This, however, came about as the result of only four OAR, of which two accounted for over half of his time. By contrast, Trump elicited laughter seventeen times, substantially more than the rest of the field (see table 4.2). Further, while there was not the degree of contentiousness as in the FOX debate when considering booing, Trump was the only candidate to receive a mixed reaction from the audience, as one instance saw him arousing laughter followed by booing.

At the other end of the spectrum, Cruz, Kasich, and Walker were not particularly humorous in their interactions with the audience. Here, each candidate elicited audience laughter only one time apiece with each lasting

less than three seconds. While these three candidates did not stimulate booing either, the lack of impassioned response likely reflected both their style and the audience's political predispositions.

THE FIRST CNN 2016 DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATE

In contrast to the Republican Party debates, the field of contenders for the Democratic Party presidential nomination was relatively small, with only five candidates reaching the threshold average of one percent in three national polls taken from August 1 to October 10, 2015. While many observers and pundits hoped that Vice President Joe Biden would enter the race in time to be a part of the October 13 debate, this was not to be. Instead, the debate proved to be mainly a competition between front-runner Hillary Clinton and her chief adversary Bernie Sanders, as the other three contenders—Lincoln Chaffee, Martin O'Malley, and Jim Webb—polled only in the lower single digits.

Although the number of viewers did not reach the level achieved by the first two Republican Party debates, the 15.3 million viewers, along with 980,000 live streams, led this debate to be the most watched Democratic primary debate in history (see chapter 2). And while the choice of holding a debate in a Las Vegas casino was considered slightly odd, Nevada's swing-state status likely played a similar strategic electoral role to that played in the Republican Party's debates in Ohio.

Candidate Speaking Time during the CNN Democratic Party Debate

The percentage of speaking time given the top two Democratic Party candidates—Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders—was substantial with the proportions given each reflecting their status as front-runners. At roughly half an hour of speaking time apiece (see table 4.3), both were able to explore issues and policies in greater detail than had been the case with the Republican Party debates. Indeed, given the smaller field of candidates, the nearly eighteen minutes received by second-tier candidates Martin O'Malley and Jim Webb, and the just under ten minutes doled out to fringe candidate Lincoln Chaffee, was substantially more than experienced by the majority of the candidates for the Republican Party during their initial two debates.

The smaller debate field, half the size of the Republican Party's, was likewise reflected in the average length of speaking turns. Although O'Malley acted like a challenger, as could be expected, by having more speaking turns with a lower average duration whereas field leader Clinton had more and

Table 4.3. CNN Democratic Party Debate Candidate Speech and Observable Audience Response (OAR): Total Time (Turns)

Candidate	Speaking time (turns)	Average Speaking time (%)	Applause-Cheering	Laughter	Booing	Applause-Cheering & Booing	Applause-Cheering & Laughter	Laughter & Booing	OAR Total time (turns)
Lincoln Chaffee	569.96 (19)	30.00 (9.0%)	18.22 (5)	8.18 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	26.4 (7)
Hillary Clinton	1867.35 (50)	37.35 (29.4%)	252.65 (42)	3.04 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	32.45 (5)	0 (0)	288.14 (49)
Martin O'Malley	1090.23 (50)	21.80 (17.2%)	122.45 (25)	3.57 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	126.02 (26)
Bernie Sanders	1709.91 (54)	31.67 (26.9%)	390.33 (75)	3.03 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	19.78 (2)	0 (0)	413.14 (79)
Jim Webb	1108.68 (23)	48.20 (17.5%)	43.44 (10)	1.5 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	11.78 (2)	0 (0)	56.72 (13)
Candidate Total	6346.13 (196)	32.38 (100%)	827.09 (157)	19.32 (8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	64.01 (9)	0 (0)	910.42 (174)

Source: Created by the author

substantially longer speaking turns on average, Webb was an anomaly. By having relatively few, but comparatively long, speaking turns he was not heard from at a similar rate as fringe candidate Chaffee (twenty-three versus nineteen turns, respectively), but either did not interrupt as often as Chaffee or held his speaking turns without being interrupted.

Observable Audience Response (OAR) during the CNN Democratic Party Debate

While it can be expected that the Democratic Party front-runners Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders would dominate audience response, with both accounting for over two-thirds of the more than fifteen minutes of applause and laughter (see table 4.3), and nearly three-quarters all these audience events (73.6 percent), Sanders's dominance may be seen as unexpected. Specifically, he received over two minutes more audience reaction time with nearly seven minutes from nearly half of their OAR (45.4 percent) when compared with Clinton's nearly five minutes and almost fifty audience events. Although Martin O'Malley lagged behind the front-runners with over two minutes of OAR to his comments, he was well ahead of Webb and Chaffee, who respectively received under one minute and a half minute of OAR.

As can be expected from the total audience reaction time received by Bernie Sanders, he was the sole candidate to receive a greater than one-to-one ratio of OAR to speaking turns (see figure 4.3). This was despite his having
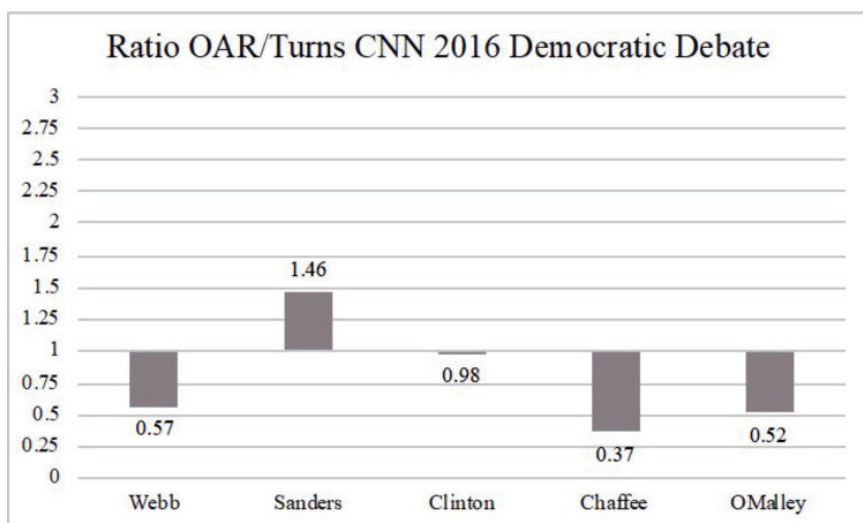

Figure 4.3.   Ratio of OAR to Speaking Turns during CNN 2016 Democratic Party Debate. *Source:* **Created by author.**

marginally more speaking turns than the other four candidates (see table 4.3). For her part, front-runner and Democratic Party favorite Hillary Clinton had nearly a one-to-one ratio, whereas the other three contenders lagged substantially behind the two front-runners.

Whereas both Republican Party debates featured copious amounts of booing, likely reflecting negative audience response regardless of whether it was invited or not, what is most striking is the lack of booing by the (presumably) Democratic Party members in attendance. At the same time, laughter was comparatively sparse. While all candidates elicited laughter, Clinton obtained more laughter, both in terms of total time (thirty-five seconds) and bouts (seven) than all other candidates. Sanders, however, was able to invoke substantially more applause (6:30, seventy-five events) than almost all other candidates combined (47.2 percent of total applause; 47.8 percent of total bouts). By comparison Lincoln Chaffee and Jim Webb were substantially shunned by the audience both in terms of bouts and time spent responding to them.

THE FIRST CBS DEMOCRATIC PARTY
PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATE

The second Democratic Party debate on November 14, 2015, was notable for multiple reasons. Despite the debate field shrinking to the two front-runners, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, along with Martin O'Malley, there was a renewed outcry concerning there being too few debates to properly introduce the party's contenders to the electorate. Furthermore, there was the perception that, by airing the debate on a Saturday evening late in the college football season, the Democratic Party was attempting to limit public attention and awareness to protect their front-runner, Hillary Clinton. There appeared to be a good deal of validity to this charge, as the debate was viewed by 8.5 million viewers, and had only 1.2 million live streams (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, the debate itself was overshadowed by terrorist attacks on Paris earlier that week.

A further notable change was the introduction of a novel means of presenting the debate that used the product of cosponsor Twitter. Here, the screen seen by viewers was set up so that the candidates themselves only took up slightly more than half the television screen (~54 percent), with the remainder taken up by tweets from a range of individuals, including Republican Party presidential candidates, on the screen's right-hand side and infographics concerning the amount of tweets referring to the candidates and different topics on the bottom of the screen. While the saturation of information may have been an attempt to attract younger, more tech-savvy viewers, the information presented in these graphics may have distracted the viewers from the

candidates and their message. Regardless of the contextual influences or technological innovations used, the debate was still carried out in a more-or-less traditional manner.

Candidate Speaking Time during the CBS Democratic Party Debate

Despite the field of contenders being reduced to three, the amount of speaking time each candidate received was quite like their first debate on CNN (see table 4.4). Clinton again received nearly a half hour to make her case to the viewing public, while Sanders received three fewer minutes than on CNN and O'Malley only one minute more. In part this was due to the CBS debate being substantially shorter in time the candidates received. However, comparisons of proportion of speaking time suggest Clinton benefited the most with 40 percent of the time available to the candidates, whereas Sanders received his expected one-third speaking time, and O'Malley being treated as the long-shot candidate he ultimately proved to be with just over a quarter of the available time.

However, it was with speaking turns and average speaking time that the difference in candidate treatment becomes most clear. While Clinton's speaking turns were on average forty seconds long—marginally more than her average speaking time during the first Democratic Party debate—and indicative of her front-runner status, both O'Malley and Sanders were treated and acted like challengers. Both had more speaking turns than Clinton and both had roughly the same average speaking time as each other, an average that was just over half again as much as Clinton's.

Observable Audience Response (OAR) during the CBS Democratic Party Debate

Audience response during the CBS debate, especially during the initial stages, was greatly diminished due in great part to the terrorist attacks that occurred the day prior. Specifically, both OAR time and number of bouts was well under half that of the CNN debate even when difference in time was taken into consideration. With this in mind, Hillary Clinton was able to reverse course from her first 2016 debate appearance with her CBS performance. Specifically, she was able to receive fifty seconds more audience response time than her closest competitor, Bernie Sanders, in the three-candidate debate (see table 4.4). While Martin O'Malley was the recipient of a minute and a half of audience vocalizations, he was well behind the two front-runners.

Despite Clinton having the same number of OAR (25) as Sanders did, she had the most favorable ratio of OAR-to-speaking turns, with an audience

Table 4.4. CBS Democratic Party debate Candidate Speech and Observable Audience Response (OAR): Total Time (Turns)

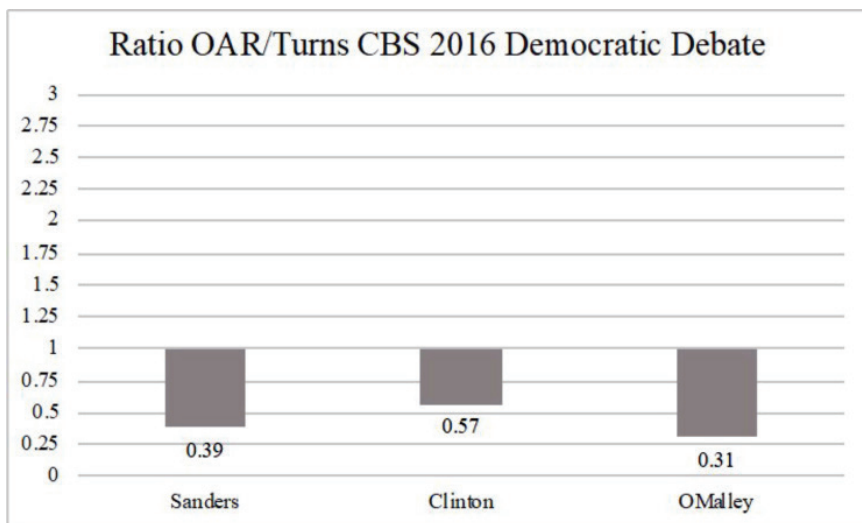| Candidate	Speaking time (turns)	Average Speaking time (%)	Applause-Cheering	Laughter	Booing	Applause-Cheering & Booing	Applause-Cheering & Laughter	Laughter & Booing	OAR Total time (turns)
Hillary Clinton	1774.73	40.33	144.54	3.97	0	0	19.65	0	168.16
	(44)	(40.0%)	(20)	(2)	(0)	(0)	(3)	(0)	(25)
Martin O'Malley	1146.99	22.49	57.2	9.44	0	0	22.89	0	89.53
	(51)	(25.9%)	(9)	(4)	(0)	(0)	(3)	(0)	(16)
Bernie Sanders	1516.13	23.69	60.56	11.08	0	0	49.05	0	120.69
	(64)	(34.2%)	(13)	(4)	(0)	(0)	(8)	(0)	(25)
Candidate Total	4437.85	27.91	262.3	24.49	0	0	91.59	0	378.38
	(159)	(100%)	(42)	(10)	(0)	(0)	(14)	(0)	(66)

Figure 4.4. Ratio of OAR to Speaking Turns during CBS 2016 Democratic Party Debate. *Source:* **Created by the author.**

reaction for roughly every two speaking turns (see figure 4.4). This ratio was better than either Sanders or O'Malley, with the more constrained audience not responding as often nor as long as in the previous debate, largely due to the events that led to a circumspect environment.

When audience response was disentangled, Clinton received more applause-cheering than both the other candidates combined. However, when it came to laughter and the combination of laughter then applause-cheering, Sanders nearly matched his own applause total of one minute each. Indeed, he had substantially more of these positive audience bouts (twelve) than both Clinton (five) and O'Malley (seven). Finally, as was the case with the CNN debate, no audience booing occurred. In summary, while there were tangible differences between the candidates, there were apparently no schisms in the audience that revealed competing factions, unlike the Republican Party and their experience with Donald Trump.

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE INITIAL 2016 REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC PARTY DEBATES

While both parties contended for an open presidential seat with neither a sitting incumbent nor a vice president as candidate, the Republican and Democratic Parties took markedly different approaches to their presidential debates. With as many as eleven candidates onstage at once, the Republican

Party prioritized wide-open, crowded, and often chaotic events during their initial debates. This stood as counterpoint to the more traditional approach taken by the Democratic Party with their five candidates being quickly whittled down to three by the second debate. While the outcomes of the initial debates for both parties were certainly influenced by both the numbers of candidates onstage—and the time available to them—and the audience, the presence of loosely affiliated candidates may ultimately be the crucial factor defining the 2016 presidential primary election campaign.

The difference between the two parties and their candidates' behavior in the resulting debates is stark and can be best appreciated by considering speaking time and speaking turns. Although the average speaking time per turn was on average around thirty seconds for both Democratic Party debates (CNN = 32.38s; CBS = 27.91s) as well as for the Republican Party FOX News (35.39s) with the crowded CNN GOP debate averaging slightly less (25.38s), what matters most for both the candidates and the discerning public is the total time each candidate had to make their points. With only five candidates onstage, even the Democratic Party candidate with the least amount of speaking time, Lincoln Chaffee (570s), received more speaking time than all Republican Party candidates with the exception of Donald Trump (660s) during their FOX News debate.

Although CNN tried to make up for the large numbers of candidates onstage, by extending their debate to three hours, thus allowing candidates to speak for from nine (Scott Walker) to twenty-one minutes (Trump), both candidates and the audience were arguably pushed to exhaustion. Further, even with this valiant attempt at fairness the Republican Party candidates received substantially less time compared with any of the Democratic Party candidates during their first two debates. In summary, when the speaking time pie is divided amongst many candidates, the ultimate loser is likely the unfulfilled viewer.

When it comes to the role of the audience, presidential primary debates are serious affairs that introduce the public to potential leaders. However, any democratic interaction may be seen as potentially messy. The networks and moderators hosting debates, as well as the political parties sanctioning them, must consider the need to balance the audience's right to speech through their OAR with control over the proceedings. As pointed out by Newt Gingrich in response to network moderator attempts to silence audience response during the 2012 Republican Party presidential primary debate in Tampa, Florida, audience applause-cheering, laughter, and boos are speech, and thus should be considered protected audience utterances (Stewart 2015). At the same time, and as pointed out by moderator John Dickerson "The Republican National Committee wants people in there excited. . . . It's all about party

fundraising. They want the crazy ruckus to make [the debate] seem like a party, but the problem is when the audience gets out of control" (Stith 2016).

As is apparent from the Republican Party debates, the size and composition of the audience matters. Findings from the first two Republican Party debates during the 2016 presidential primaries are instructive with the crowd nine times larger for the FOX debate (4,500 in attendance) obviously more involved than at the smaller, more elite CNN Republican Party debate (500 attendees), despite the CNN event being an hour longer. However, due to the controllable nature of applause-cheering, these audience utterances do not necessarily reflect voter preferences, as Donald Trump was in the bottom half of both debates' candidates in terms of applause-cheering occurrences and total length.

Arguably the FOX News debate played directly into Donald Trump's strengths as a showman who reads and feeds off a crowd's energy. Here, his experience with professional wrestling where he interacted with large and boisterous crowds while interacting with antagonists gave him a distinct advantage over the other candidates whose experience with audiences likely tended to be comparatively tame. Indeed, when his performance at the CNN GOP debate, where party stalwarts populated an audience limited to five hundred, is compared with his FOX News debate performance in front of nearly five thousand, the reaction he received can be seen as relatively subdued. Regardless, in both cases he energized and polarized the audience through his rhetoric, which in turn led to his massively disproportionate amount of free media.

However, it should be noted that the acoustic qualities of a location may enhance or diminish the subjective emotional and physiological response of audience members. While these forms of group utterances function to bond groups together the larger they get, there is a point of diminishing returns the more dispersed the audience is as the strength of such utterances dissipates. This in turn is influenced by the size and acoustics of the locale where the debates are held, as well as how well microphones broadcasting these events capture audience response (Clayman 1992; Stewart 2012, 2015). Thus, in addition to the type of audience "vocalization" and potential mixtures that might occur, the magnitude of audience response may be best characterized by utterance length.

While inarguably a boon for Trump, the prognosis for the Republican Party may not be so rosy. In a manner similar to individual contributions, primary debates can provide information concerning the internal state of a political party and whether a contest election reveals a divided party (Dowdle et al. 2013). Although not as substantial as contributions, audience response provides an audible, salient, and robust index of a party's unity, especially

with larger more diverse crowds. The research presented here suggests the Republican Party has multiple competing factions, a division more apparent during the initial two GOP debates.

In comparison, the Democratic Party's first two debates were more traditional and arguably sedate affairs. As was the case with 2012 GOP debates prior to the New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Florida primaries (Stewart 2015), there was a lack of booing suggesting an element of partisan negativity for the 2016 Republican Party. Furthermore, the mixture of booing with applause or laughter suggests division within the audiences themselves. While the "big tent" of political parties can accommodate many different and competing factions, what matters is their ability to come together to vote in unity behind a candidate, the key organizing role played by political parties. The ability of the Democratic Party to provide a "big tent" for potential voters while hosting a large number of candidates onstage during the initial 2020 presidential primary debates is considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

2020 Vision

LOOKING BACK AT THE INITIAL
DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRIMARY DEBATES

Due in large part to President Donald Trump's polarizing persona, one that extended well into his stay in the executive office, there became a stark awareness that the office of the presidency does not necessarily change the approach taken by the person holding it. Instead, it largely appeared to give Trump the "bully pulpit" to command attention and license to say and do what he deemed fit. As a result, a plethora of challengers for the presidency arose within the Democratic Party. In turn, the resulting debates may be seen as, in part, a reaction to Trump's approach to the audience—both in person and viewing from home.

The decision by the Democratic National Committee, in conjunction with NBC, MSNBC, and Telemundo, to address this exceptionally large number of contenders for the 2020 presidential nomination was by having two "prime-time" debates on the consecutive nights of June 26 and 27. With twenty eligible candidates, the two ten-person debates carried out in Miami, Florida, ensured there would not be an "undercard" debate night by having equal numbers of top- and second-tier candidates populating each night. These debates provide a unique field experiment due to the random assignment of candidates by status and nights; specifically, this approach provided a means to evaluate how candidates are treated by the network moderators and their peers onstage, act during the debate and are responded to by the audience differently based upon their electoral status.

This chapter evaluates whether some candidates are more "equal than others" in terms of how much attention they received and/or seize based upon speaking time and turns. In keeping with understanding how the audience decides, candidate connection with the audience is assessed depending on

the amount and type of observable audience response (OAR) contenders receive—whether applause-cheering, laughter, booing, and combinations of these. In short, by considering patterns in candidate speaking time and turns as well as the audience reaction to them through observable audience response (OAR), having double-digit numbers of contenders onstage during the increasingly important initial debates can be assessed and ultimately compared with the groundbreaking 2016 presidential primary debates.

PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATES IN THE POST-TRUMP ERA

The unprecedented field experiment approach of assigning candidates to different nights reflects a systematic response to issues raised during the 2016 presidential primaries, most notably on the Republican Party side. Specifically, the seventeen-candidate GOP field saw FOX News hosting a two-hour prime-time debate with ten candidates; this debate in turn was preceded by a one-hour "drive-time" debate with the seven candidates with lower polling numbers. Presumably because of the separation into the "kiddie and adult tables," there were no "breakout" candidates able to make their way into the top ten of Republican candidates. Although Carly Fiorina was added to the next Republican Party headliner debate on CNN, this decision was premised upon her FOX News performance and personal conflict with Donald Trump. While the enmity provided scintillating television and ratings, the eleven candidates onstage led to an onerously long and packed second debate (Stewart et al. 2019).

Within-party debates about policy particulars have been a part of the aptly named "invisible primaries" due to their "inside-politics" perspective that typically draws only the hard-core partisans (Adkins & Dowdle 2002; Cohen et al. 2009; Dowdle et al. 2013; Steger et al. 2004). Any misconceptions about the changing nature of the presidential primaries and the party debates were fundamentally altered when these debates became a ratings juggernaut during the 2016 presidential primaries. With 24 million viewers watching the first Republican Party debate live, another 2.5 million watching via simulcast video streams, and yet another 8 million viewing the debate afterward, this event was a spectacular ratings success for FOX News (see chapter 2). While the next Republican Party debate did not reach such ratings heights, with 22.9 million viewers watching CNN live on television, and another 4.5 million live streaming the event, these packed debates were among the most watched live events in television history. However, the diminished viewership of the FOX News and CNN "drive-time debates" might have been seen in retrospect as missed opportunities for additional viewers and, with it, advertising revenue.

Potentially due to the fear of an "undercard" debate drowning out half an expanded field of candidates and their ideas, the Democratic Party prepared for the 2020 race well in advance of the first debates. Due to the divisiveness of President Donald Trump, the Democratic Party's 2020 presidential field was not only wide-open but populated with a broad range of candidates. Candidates representing a diverse array of issue positions and, concomitantly, possessing diverse demographic characteristics in regard to age, sex/gender, and ethnicity found their way onstage. With six female candidates, five visible minorities (two African American, two Asian American, and one Latinx), a historically first openly gay candidate, and an age range from thirty-seven to seventy-seven years old, in addition to a range of political attitudes and beliefs, the twenty-person debate field represented a substantially diverse mix of persons, professional backgrounds, and policy positions. Perhaps most salient for the increasingly open approach to the presidential primary debates, not only was Democratic Socialist Senator Bernie Sanders back as a front-running contender, many of the candidates had limited to no elective office background, with two, Marianne Williamson and Andrew Yang, not having held political office.

Combined with the ratings and revenue opportunities for the hosting networks, the opportunity to host back-to-back debate nights with top- and second-tier challengers can be seen as irresistible to NBC and the Democratic Party. At the same time these debates provided a potential ratings juggernaut for the network, as was the case with the 2016 primary debates, they promised increased public interest, enthusiasm, and possible converts to the Democratic Party. However, at the same time the debates provided a practical boon for the organizers, it also provides the opportunity to evaluate media coverage in a competitive context regarding how candidates were treated and their onstage tactics in terms of speaking time as well as how they were received by the audience in terms of OAR. In combination with the analysis carried out regarding the initial 2016 presidential primary debates, these debates provide a systematic field experiment to assess what works and what does not in the current process by which the political parties' candidates are vetted.

Electoral Status

The ability of candidates to obtain the speaking time necessary to communicate their messages and, concomitantly, enhance their electoral position can be seen as premised upon the electoral status prior to the debate as well as their in-person performance. In both cases, the moderators—by the nature of their job—and the audiences—by their being motivated and educated party activists—can be seen as potentially affected by the overarching electoral

context and contemporaneous elements they face. Likewise, the candidates can be expected to craft strategies to take these factors into account.

Candidate eligibility was based on their receiving donations from 65,000 unique donors from at least twenty states (with at least two hundred donors per state) or their polling at 1 percent or greater in at least three national surveys or surveys in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, or Nevada (Stewart et al. 2021). The top eight "top-tier" candidates (polling more than 2 percent) were randomly assigned across both nights, with the remaining "lower-tier" candidates assigned to the remaining spots to prevent the "status-stacked" debates seen in the 2016 Republican presidential primaries. Thus, for the average viewer electoral status can be seen as conferred both through the definition of the top-four candidates in each night's debate ("high status") compared with the other candidates in the second, lower tier ("low status") which in turn was based partially upon poll standing. Because the outcome of preprimary polls tends to rest on name recognition as a determinant of viability (Kam & Zechmeister 2013), electoral status is determined by factors external and prior to the debates considered and ranged from 2 to 29.2 percent among the twenty candidates ultimately onstage.

Onstage position likewise affects how candidates are perceived and received. Because there is a central fixation visually with most humans (King et al. 2019), combined with dominance of attention being considered synonymous with leadership in behavioral studies (Chance 1967; Cheng et al. 2022; Gerpott et al. 2018; Salter 2007), in practice this means the candidates located at center stage will be perceived as the most viable and having the highest electoral status. The question then becomes whether the benefits of greater visibility (see chapter 2) are categorical, extending only to the top two at center stage, with the rest of the candidates (relatively) dismissed, or whether the status extends outward, decreasing the closer one gets to the periphery as poll standing decreased. Thus, the structure of onstage dominance and what it means for candidate speaking time and turns, as well as how the audience reacts with OAR, can be more fully explored, albeit recognizing the idiosyncrasies of those candidates taking part.

Dominance of Attention by Dominating Speaking Time

The first and most contemporaneous behavioral indicator of electoral status during a debate is the dominance of attention in comparison with the other candidates present. During debates the percentage of speaking time received by a candidate in comparison with the other contenders is on its face the most pertinent indicator of dominance. However, whether this speaking time was granted by moderators and deferential fellow candidates or was seized

through interruptions may be a more revealing indicator of status held prior to the debate or contested for during the event. Thus, the average speaking time, as a function of total speaking time divided by speaking turns, may be seen as providing insight into the opportunities given based upon electoral status and political prestige and the dominance strategies employed to assert oneself over others. Based upon findings in chapter 4, it is expected that candidates with greater electoral status will have proportionally more speaking time than the other lower-status candidates, whereas candidates with lower electoral status will have shorter average speaking turns, largely due to their attempting to interrupt and obtain attention.

Observable Audience Response to Political Figures

While the speaking time received and/or attained to a great extent reflects how the network moderators treat candidates and how the contenders regard and respond to each other, what may be seen as the most reliable indicator of candidate charisma—in this case, their connection with the audience present—is the amount, types, and strength of OAR received. As explored in detail in chapters 3 and 4, laughter is less easily controlled than are the other major forms of OAR considered here, that of applause-cheering and booing. Thus laughter-eliciting humor tends to be a tool used to a greater extent by challengers (Stewart 2012, 2015; Stewart et al. 2016), especially as humor is a risky strategy if it falls flat or is seen as insulting. Thus, candidates with lower electoral status will be more likely to attempt to garner, and ultimately elicit, audience laughter.

   The more controllable forms of OAR, whether applause-cheering or booing, can be seen as reflecting electoral status both in amount of time and number of occurrence as well as the average length of the OAR. Specifically, higher status candidates can be expected to receive greater average OAR whether as an intended result of their campaign rhetoric or due to audience enthusiasm. While it might be expected that audiences might react in anticipation or, or misinterpreting the candidates rhetoric as inviting OAR, the candidate continuing to speak over the OAR may be seen as indicating their having greater status through their perceiving it as an interjection, whereas allowing the audience to disrupt their speaking time might be perceived as either their being lower in status or as being polite (Dailey et al. 2005; Hinck et al. 2021). Thus, the ratio of OAR to speaking turns may be seen as indicative of the candidates' strategies based upon their self-assessed electoral status and their contemporaneous relationship with the audience.

FIRST NIGHT OF 2020 DEMOCRATIC PARTY
PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATES

The first of the pair of 2020 Democratic presidential primary debates was held at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts in Miami, Florida, on June 26, 2019. This venue has a capacity of up to 2,400. While no official numbers were readily accessible, both nights revealed packed audiences. Both two-hour debates were broadcast starting at 9 p.m. EST and were cohosted by NBC, MSNBC, and Telemundo, all part of the same television network group. Rachel Maddow, Chuck Todd, and Lester Holt moderated each debate.

Candidate Speaking Time during the
First NBC Democratic Party Debate

With the ten candidates onstage for the first night of the initial NBC-hosted 2020 Democratic Party presidential primary debates, comparison of the expected proportion of speaking time to actual percentage, based upon total speaking time received, would suggest all candidates receive roughly 10 percent of the total available to the candidates, regardless of electoral status. What we find, as can be seen in table 5.1, is that that top-tier candidates Cory Booker (13.6%, ~11 minutes), Amy Klobuchar (10.8%, ~9 minutes), Beto O'Rourke (13%, ~10½ minutes), and Elizabeth Warren (11.4%, ~9 minutes) received proportionally more time than did the second tier of candidates. The one exception to this was Juan Castro, whose polling numbers neared the threshold of top-tier and whose Latino background resonated with the Miami audience, and was evidenced by his receiving 11 percent speaking time, slightly more than Klobuchar and slightly less than night's top candidate, Warren. The candidates who found themselves at a substantial disadvantage were Bill de Blasio (7.3%, ~6 minutes) and Jay Inslee (6.1%, 5 minutes) as they received less than half the time of the top two candidates, Booker and O'Rourke.

Perhaps the story of the night was Elizabeth Warren's performance. Despite being the highest-polling candidate of the night, and hence the presumptive front-runner, both O'Rourke and Booker had more speaking time, all the while using few speaking turns. Indeed, Warren's number of speaking turns (twenty-four) was the highest of the night, surpassing second-tier candidates John Delaney and Tim Ryan, while her average speaking time of twenty-three seconds was below the night's average, and ten and twelve seconds less than Booker and O'Rourke's respectively.

Table 5.1. NBC Night 1 2020 Democratic Party Debate Candidate Speech and Observable Audience Response (OAR): Total time (Turns)

Candidate	Speaking time (turns)	Average Speaking time (%)	Applause-Cheering	Laughter	Booing	Applause-Cheering & Booing	Applause-Cheering & Laughter	Laughter & Booing	OAR Total time (turns)
Cory Booker	667.92 (20)	33.40 (13.6%)	82.08 (21)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	82.08 (21)
Juan Castro	539.28 (19)	28.38 (11.0%)	108.96 (23)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6.96 (1)	0 (0)	115.92 (24)
Bill de Blasio	357.8 (11)	32.53 (7.3%)	41.20 (9)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	41.20 (9)
John Delaney	428.84 (23)	18.65 (8.8%)	25.68 (6)	2.92 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	28.6 (8)
Tulsi Gabbard	411.16 (16)	25.70 (8.4%)	44.44 (12)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	44.44 (12)
Jay Inslee	300.84 (13)	23.14 (6.1%)	31.68 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3.52 (1)	0 (0)	35.2 (7)
Amy Klobuchar	526.64 (20)	26.33 (10.8%)	43.36 (10)	1.00 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	44.36 (11)
Beto O'Rourke	635.24 (18)	35.29 (13.0%)	45.8 (12)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	45.8 (12)
Tim Ryan	474.56 (23)	20.63 (9.7%)	48.68 (10)	2.80 (1)	2.7 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	54.24 (12)
Elizabeth Warren	556.32 (24)	23.18 (11.4%)	60.96 (12)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	8.04 (1)	0 (0)	69 (13)
Candidate Total	4898.60 (187)	26.20 (100%)	532.84 (121)	6.72 (4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	18.52 (3)	0 (0)	560.84 (129)

Source: Created by the author.

Observable Audience Response (OAR) during the First NBC Democratic Party Debate

As can be expected, given the largely Latino South Florida audience, Juan Castro received the greatest number and amount of OAR, and was one of the recipients of the relatively rare audience laughter (see table 5.1). What is perhaps most unique is that, despite taking nineteen speaking turns—roughly the average number received by all candidates—Castro received a half minute more audience reaction coming from twenty-three OAR. Likewise, as presented in figure 5.1, his ratio of OAR to speaking turns substantially exceeds all other candidates. This suggests a highly motivated and connected audience willing to interrupt his speaking turns with their supportive reactions.

By comparison, at the other extreme of audience connection lay second-tier candidate John Delaney. Despite taking his insurgent role seriously by seizing the second-most speaking turns of the Night 1 candidates (twenty-three), Delaney received the least amount of audience reaction (see table 5.1) and the worst ratio of OAR to speaking turns (see figure 5.1) as only eight of his twenty-three speaking turns evoked response.

While the presumptive front-runner for the night, Elizabeth Warren, did receive substantial amounts of OAR and reaction time from the audience, including from the longest laughter-then-applause eliciting comment, she still lagged behind fellow front-runner Cory Booker in both OAR time (see table 5.1) and proportion of OAR to speaking turns (13/24; figure 5.1), with Booker receiving some form of audience reaction for every speaking turn he took
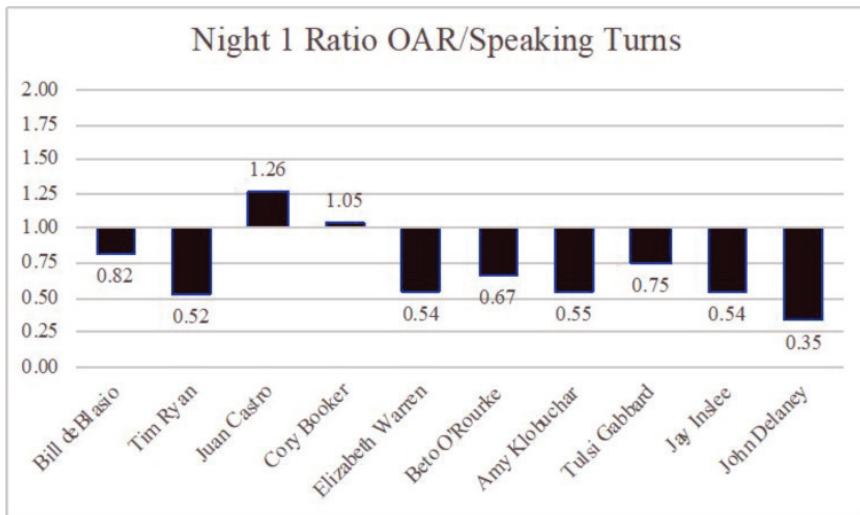

Figure 5.1.   Ratio of OAR to Speaking Turns during NBC Night 1 2020 Democratic Party Debate. *Source:* **Created by the author.**

(21/20). This suggests Warren either had difficulty obtaining and maintaining her speaking turns or engaged in rejoinders due to her front-runner status.

Finally, for their parts front-runners Amy Klobuchar and Beto O'Rourke were nearly indistinguishable from each other in OAR time and reaction amounts and proportion of speaking turns to OAR utterances (see table 5.1 and figure 5.1). Indeed, their numbers were quite similar to those of the rest of the candidates, suggesting their top-tier status was either unrecognized by the moderators and in-person audience or not exploited effectively by the candidates.

SECOND NIGHT OF 2020 DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATES

The second of the paired debates occurred on June 27, 2020, and promised continued insight into which Democratic Party presidential candidate would emerge as the preferred opponent to President Donald Trump. As was the case with the previous night's debate, the venue and moderators (Maddow, Todd, and Holt) remained the same. What differed was the candidate slate onstage and (potentially) the audience in attendance.

Candidate Speaking Time during the Second NBC Democratic Party Debate

The second night of the initial 2020 Democratic Party presidential primary debates was arguably the headlining night. Even with top- and second-tier candidates being randomly assigned to either of the two nights, having the top two polling candidates, Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders, square off was bound to draw interest. Combined with the media-genic fellow front-runners Kamala Harris and "Mayor Pete" Buttigieg, public and media interest was high.

As could be expected (and seen in table 5.2) preferential treatment was afforded the top tier of candidates. Joe Biden (16.3 percent, ~13½ minutes) and Kamala Harris (15 percent, ~12½ minutes) received a substantially greater proportion of speaking time than the expected average of all candidates on the night (10 percent, ~8½ minutes) surpassing fellow front-runners Buttigieg and Sanders. The candidates who suffered the greatest reduction in speaking time were John Hickenlooper, Eric Swallwell, Marianne Williamson, and Andrew Yang, with their respective percentages hovering around 6 percent, or in Yang's case, just 3.6 percent.

While Swalwell acted like the insurgent candidate he portrayed himself as, taking more talking turns and having a shorter average speaking time as a result (see table 5.2), the other second-tier candidates were less active. In the

Table 5.2. NBC Night 2 2020 Democratic Party debate Candidate Speech and Observable Audience Response (OAR): Total time (Turns)

Candidate	Speaking time (turns)	Average Speaking time (%)	Applause-Cheering	Laughter	Booing	Applause-Cheering & Booing	Applause-Cheering & Laughter	Laughter & Booing	OAR Total time (turns)
Michael Bennet	494.36 (12)	41.20 (10.0%)	22.06 (6)	0.91 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	20.63 (7)
Joe Biden	808.92 (25)	32.36 (16.3%)	91.1 (23)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	91.1 (23)
Pete Buttigieg	634.6 (20)	31.73 (12.8%)	64.54 (14)	7.69 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	72.23 (17)
Kirsten Gillibrand	496.56 (19)	26.13 (10.0%)	25.68 (8)	2.92 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	28.60 (9)
Kamala Harris	745.16 (19)	39.22 (15.0%)	126.9 (24)	3.84 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	130.74 (25)
John Hickenlooper	306.56 (9)	34.06 (6.2%)	15.23 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	15.23 (6)
Bernie Sanders	676.2 (20)	33.81 (13.6%)	77.36 (21)	3.6 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	80.96 (23)
Eric Swalwell	314.36 (19)	16.55 (6.3%)	29.12 (7)	2.48 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	31.6 (8)
Marianne Williamson	308.44 (14)	22.03 (6.2%)	28.44 (8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	28.44 (8)
Andrew Yang	177.92 (8)	22.24 (3.6%)	10.76 (4)	1.48 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	12.24 (5)
Candidate Total	4963.08 (165)	30.08 (100%)	491.73 (121)	22.92 (10)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	513.74 (131)

Source: Created by the author

case of Marianne Williamson and Andrew Yang, this was likely due to their novice status onstage and their lack of political experience; while Williamson attempted to interrupt and/or interject at a proportion similar to Swallwell, she was similarly unsuccessful.

Observable Audience Response (OAR) during the Second NBC Democratic Party Debate

Although the presumptive leading candidate for the Democratic Party nomination, Joe Biden, received close to a minute and a half of applause, he was upstaged by Kamala Harris in multiple different ways. First, Harris received substantially more audience reaction time with nearly forty-five seconds more applause-cheering and laughter than Biden (see table 5.2). Likewise, she received a greater number of OAR. Finally, her proportion of OAR to speaking turns (19/25) was substantially over a one-to-one ratio (see figure 5.2). This suggests that the audience not only responded to her rhetoric, but also enthusiastically interjected upon her comments with applause-cheering and/or laughter (see table 5.2). For his part Biden had fewer OAR than speaking turns (25/23), for a negative proportion. The other two top-tier candidates, Bernie Sanders and Pete Buttigieg, trailed Biden and Harris in audience reaction time and OAR events but had substantially better response than any of the second-tier candidates.
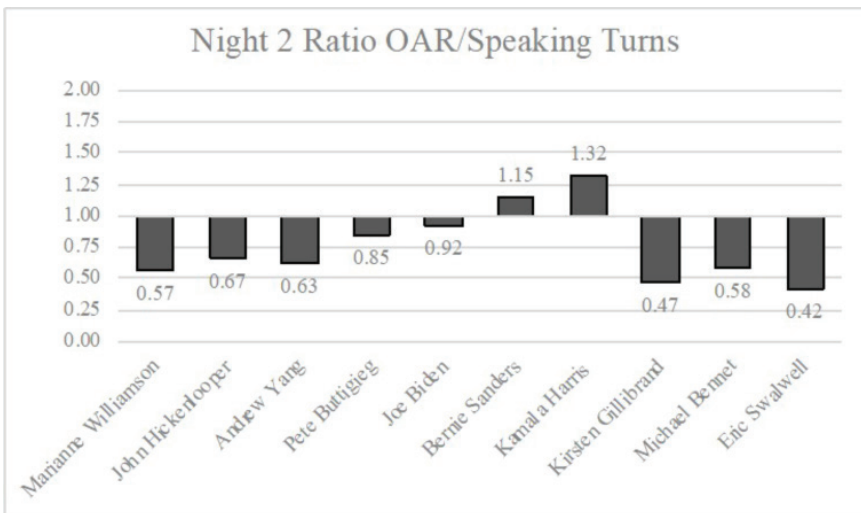
Figure 5.2. Ratio of OAR to Speaking Turns during NBC Night 2 2020 Democratic Party Debate. *Source:* **Created by the author.**

While all the second-tier candidates received substantially less OAR time, with each receiving less than a half minute apiece and fewer audience reactions than the top-tier candidates (see table 5.2), this was due in large part to either them not receiving many speaking turns or being unable to connect with the audience. In the cases of Marianne Williamson (fourteen turns), Michael Bennet (twelve turns), John Hickenlooper (nine turns), and Andrew Yang (eight turns), there appeared to be little effort to aggressively seize speaking time. With both those candidates that aggressively attempted to attain speaking time, there was a substantial lack of success in eliciting audience reaction, as both Eric Swallwell (19/8) and Kirsten Gillibrand (19/9) largely failed to connect with the audience. Indeed, analysis of figure 5.2 concerning the ratio of OAR to speaking turns reveals an apparently linear pattern suggesting that the candidates closer to the edges of the stage are least likely to elicit the audience's response.

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE INITIAL 2020 DEMOCRATIC PARTY DEBATES

It is readily apparent from consideration of candidate speaking time during both nights of debate reveals that top-tier candidates benefit at the expense of the second tier of contenders. While more assertive candidates can attempt to obtain more speaking time through interjections and interruptions, the best that might be expected is to outspeak and thus outshine the other second-tier contenders onstage. As a result, the illusion of fairness—with each candidate accorded equal time during the primary debates—should be put to rest based upon the proportion of speaking time distributed during both nights of the debates. And while Juan Castro receiving an additional 1 percent speaking time during the first night's debate may be presented as countervailing evidence, this may be explained by the "home field" advantage he held in front of what was apparently a heavily Hispanic audience. Perhaps more revealing is the proportion of speaking time received by the eventual presidential and vice presidential nominees Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Both exceeded the proportion of speaking time given the top candidates during night 1 of the debates (Cory Booker and Beto O'Rourke) with Bernie Sanders, that candidate with the third-highest proportion, matching Booker's high during the previous night.

Regardless of which candidate benefited at the expense of the opposition, the greater numbers of candidates onstage meant less total speaking time for all candidates. While the average candidate speaking turn remained comparable to the thirty-second average for the initial 2016 Republican and Democratic Party debates (Night 1 = 26s; Night 2 = 30s), total time was sparse and

unevenly distributed. As expected, the presumptive front-runner Joe Biden received the most time of all candidates with roughly thirteen-and-a-half minutes, whereas political novice Andrew Yang compiled just under three minutes speaking time. While this extreme low was not seen in any of the 2016 debates considered in Chapter 4, the average time reflected the obvious lack of exposure. And, as may be argued regarding the initial 2016 presidential primary debates, the ultimate losers were those viewers hoping to gain greater insights into the candidates' personalities, positions, and policies.

Perhaps the most telling story is that of the amount of audience reaction to individual candidates. Over both nights, only two candidates received over a minute and a half of observable audience response (OAR), with Juan Castro receiving a minute and three-quarters of applause-cheering and laughter on the first night and Kamala Harris receiving over two minutes of OAR during the second debate night. The total time of OAR received was underscored by the ratio of OAR to speaking turns being positive for both candidates. In other words, not only were the respective audiences responsive, but they were also enthusiastic in their reactions, with more OAR than expected by their speaking turns.

On the other end of the spectrum were the marginal candidates John Delaney and Eric Swallwell. Lesser known and having little electoral status in comparison with the other contenders onstage, both engaged in aggressive strategies to obtain speaking time at the expense of their onstage counterparts. However, neither Delaney nor Swallwell received much audience reaction, both in total (tables 5.1 and 5.2) or as a ratio of OAR to speaking turns (figures 5.1 and 5.2).

While having twenty presidential candidates onstage over the course of two nights may be seen as a coup for the Democratic Party and NBC, and a boon for researchers studying electoral status and how these contenders are treated by network professionals as well as both the in-person audience and those watching at home, questions still may be raised as to what purpose the debates serve, and whether they accomplish it. As we have seen in this with the initial 2016 and 2020 presidential primary debates, these effects are measurable and substantial; the question remains as to what effects the audience has through their OAR on how the press covers these important events. With this in mind, the next chapter considers how the audience decides what are critical moments for them and defining moments to be covered in the media for the sake of the interested public.

Chapter 6

Defining Moments during the Initial 2016 and 2020 Primary Debates

Evidence presented throughout this book shows that in-person audiences reflect their support or antagonism toward candidates—and the utterances they make—through observable audience response (OAR). In turn, the in-person OAR can influence those viewing at home. The question remains as to whether the OAR emanating from the in-person audiences impacts the reporters crafting the debate stories in the same manner they exert social influence over the average viewer. Because these stories affect not only those relying on mediated information, but also those having viewed the debate, these debate recaps can have a substantial impact on public perceptions in the aftermath (Donovan & Hunsaker 2009; Newton et al. 1987; Shaw 1999; Shaw & Roberts 2000). In other words, the OAR itself may have an effect on those facing a deadline to tell a concise and obviously entertaining narrative, essentially doubling down on the effect of OAR-eliciting comments.

The pitch and spin placed upon interpretations of the debates certainly has the potential to set expectations and affect interpretation of winners and losers, respectively (Norton & Goethals 2004). Although debates are seen as more often a venue for producing losers (Schrott & Lanoue 2008), there is the potential to create narratives that resonate with the general public during, in the immediate aftermath, and even long afterward. In short, discrete events and exchanges may lead to "defining moments" not just for a debate, by symbolizing this event, but also for a campaign as a whole by defining a candidate or candidates (Clayman 1995). While visibility and name recognition by the voting public might be the initial goal (Donovan & Hunsaker 2009; Pfau et al. 1997), ultimately establishing a media narrative that reflects positively on the candidate may be seen as the chief aim due to the media providing information about candidate viability and character (Benoit 2013;

Benoit et al. 2004; Jamieson & Waldman 2004; Newton et al. 1987; Racine 2002; Vancil & Pendell 1984).

There are also challenges intrinsic to debates faced by those reporting on them. This is especially the case with those initial debates in which several candidates, often without recognized national profiles, take the stage. As pointed out by the Racine Group in their landmark debate research review (Racine 2002), because of the presence of multiple candidates onstage, there is a reduction in "the amount of time each candidate has to respond, the number of topics covered, depth of analysis, opportunities for defense as well as attack, and the direction of candidates' address" (205). What this means is that the media will provide disproportionate amounts of coverage to early debates (Damore 1997), and because the nearly indistinguishable issue positions between the candidates, will instead focus on candidate image and style (Lanoue & Schrott 1989), which in turn will be characterized by a limited amount of defining moments.

THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS IN
CHARACTERIZING DEFINING MOMENTS

These defining moments, which can persist as cultural touchstones decades later, can be seen as structuring journalist choice of candidate quotes through three basic considerations. The first necessary, but not sufficient, consideration is its *narrative relevance*; in other words, this factor considers whether a quote summarizes and defines the story being told (Clayman 1995). Because debates, regardless of jurisdiction and level, are at their roots competitions between individuals for positions of leadership, conflictual elements can be expected as the initial defining factor.

The second factor influencing whether a quote is reported on and ultimately ends up defining an event, such as a debate, is its *conspicuousness*. Here, the intrinsic factors to a quote, including the rhetorical devices used (Atkinson 1984; Bull 2018; Heritage & Greatbatch 1986), departures from norms, and the OAR elicited from those at the event impact how conspicuous a quote is deemed (Clayman 1995). Humorous comments or witty remarks often function well in debates for this reason, as candidates will develop a repertoire of jokes and one-liners in anticipation of their being used and ultimately covered by the media (Fein et al. 2007; Gardner 1994; Stewart 2012).

A final factor in whether a quote rises to the level of being a defining moment is its *extractability*. As pointed out by Clayman (Clayman 1995) remarks are favored if they "can stand on their own with little or no journalistic elaboration" (127). This means that concise, even disjointed utterances

with easily identified beginnings and endings are favored over more ambiguous or exhaustive statements for the sake of composing shorter segments.

Ultimately, journalists are involved with the priming and framing of news events (Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Iyengar & McGrady 2007; Moy et al. 2016; Scheufele 2000), whether during the normal course of political campaign events or in response to the major "set pieces" of campaigns such as debates. Because of the time constraints imposed, which have been exacerbated in the twenty-four-hour news cycle, news value regarding candidate stories, according to Haapanen (Haapanen & Perrin 2017) involves their being "*predictable*, *meaningful*, *unambiguous*, and *logistically easy to cover*" (374, italics theirs). As pointed out by Vaccari due to these constraints, as well media outlets wishing to meet public expectations (Vaccari n.d.), there is an "editorial line that emerges . . . that treats debates as a show, a sporting event, a staged performance where substance matters less than appearance and stage skills" (22). Thus, while the social media–using public may identify multiple resonant moments within a debate (Lukito et al. 2021), ultimately the media must craft a story that reflects their interpretation of what matters most to the general public. That is not to say there will be an absence of implicit (Gidengil & Everitt 2000) or explicit biases (Hutchby 2016) in the reporting that ensues, just that there will be media-based incentives and constraints that preference defining moments to prime and frame coverage of events such as debates.

THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE IN
IDENTIFYING DEFINING MOMENTS

With these latter two factors, the role of the audience can be seen as clear and well-defined. Their responding with applause, cheering, laughter, and even booing serves to identify candidate statements that matter. In addition to the purpose served by *conspicuous* OAR, the audience's response enables easier *extraction* by creating a buffer at the comment's (successful) conclusion. Furthermore, the louder and more intense audience response enhances the *conspicuousness* and increases the ease of segment *extraction* by the journalist. For example, Clayman's groundbreaking article on defining moments uses Lloyd Bentsen's attack on Dan Quayle during their 1988 vice presidential debate as a compelling example (Clayman 1995). Here, by asserting that Quayle was "no Jack Kennedy" Bentsen elicited roughly twice the length of applause (sixteen seconds) of what was normal (133). Because the vigorous audience reaction underscored and illuminated a shrewd political attack, the comment lived on well after the debate itself, and even the participants, were forgotten. As a result, we expect that intensity of OAR will drive the presence

of candidate quotes in media coverage of a debate, by indicating both conspicuousness and extractability.

Connected with the effectiveness of OAR, albeit not so obviously, is the *narrative relevance* of a candidate's utterance. Because debate narratives are inherently competitive narratives (Clayman 1995), any audience response that hints at dramatic conflict between the audience and the candidate (whether themselves or the target of their utterance) and even between audience members themselves, will likely focus attention. More specifically, the presence of booing—thanks to its agonistic characteristics—can be expected to increase the likelihood of a quote being reported. To a greater degree it can be expected that booing, when juxtaposed with another form of more supportive audience response such as applause-cheering, laughter, and so on, will enhance the likelihood of a quote being covered. This was the case with the Bentsen-Quayle fracas, as there was booing, presumably by those in the Quayle camp, mixed in with the applause and cheering in response to the "you're no Jack Kennedy" comment by Bentsen (Clayman 1995). As a result, the expectation is that competing OARs will viscerally represent within-audience conflict and hence be more likely to embody the three elements of a defining moment, starting with the precondition of narrative relevance.

MEASURING DEFINING MOMENTS AND THE OBSERVABLE AUDIENCE RESPONSES THAT IDENTIFY THEM

Observable Audience Responses (OAR) may be seen as a diagnostic tool used by journalists reporting on political events such as debates, even if it is not recognized as such. By indicating viscerally satisfying or antagonistic moments in a debate, and even intra-audience conflict, OAR functions as a proxy measure for the audience viewing video of the event. Thus, the expectation can be that OAR diverging from the norm focuses reporter attention on a candidate utterance. This will be the case whether intensity of OAR by those watching via video, and/or the mixture of OAR type, especially booing, which will likely have a heightened effect when intermixed with applause-cheering and/or laughter, will. While the intensity of OAR, measured in an additive manner based upon the length of the OAR and the judged intensity of the audience response (Eubanks et al. 2018; Stewart et al. 2018), can be expected to be both *conspicuous* and *extractable*, the type of OAR can indicate dissent and thus underscore the *narrative relevance* of competition amongst the candidates.

The selection of quotes as the initial step to identifying defining moments can be seen as relatively straightforward by using quotation marks in

newspaper articles to ascertain candidate utterances during debates. Because most research considers general election debates that have well-established seasons, media coverage has defined beginning and end points (Clayman 1995; Gidengil & Everitt 2000; Vaccari n.d.). When time ranges are considered, previous research considering name mentions has spanned from five days before to five days after primary debates (Stewart 2012) or seven days after the presidential debate (Tan et al. 2018). Due both to the twenty-four-hour news cycle and their being the initial primary debates, as well as the expectation that coverage will devolve to commentary, it can be presumed that the bulk of interest and resultant coverage will be in the immediate aftermath of these debates with the three days immediately after each debate being considered.

The search strategy uses archival inquiry of the top national newspapers covering politics in-depth (the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Washington Post*), with the search query term being "presidential debate." Candidate quotes identified in the newspaper articles for each of the initial 2016 and 2020 primary debates provide the basis for understanding how OAR may, or may not, influence the choice of candidate utterances to report on. Because the potential impact of stories including candidate quotes is being considered, stories that are reposted—whether with changes to the text or with new headlines—are included in analysis.

From there, identifying information for the article allows for greater understanding of the impact that these quotes may have, and which ones rise to the level of being defining moments. Certainly, name recognition of the candidates—and hence their electoral prospects—will be enhanced with greater availability of their quotes to the reading public. Thus, the number of times a candidate is quoted in the days immediately following a debate will matter. Likewise, whether the name of the candidate appeared in the headline will increase the availability of their name to readers. Importantly, whether OARs played a role in a quote appearing in an article is assessed provided that quoted comments are different from other non-quoted comments based upon the intensity of the OAR and the type of audience utterance, whether applause-cheering, laughter, booing, or combinations of these OAR.

THE 2016 FOX NEWS REPUBLICAN PARTY PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATE

The first presidential primary debate of the 2016 electoral season was hosted by FOX News on August 6, 2015, and involved two consecutive debates involving seventeen total candidates. While viewership was substantial, newspaper coverage was relatively modest. In the three days afterward only

eighteen articles featured the search term "presidential debate" of which only eight had candidate quotes reported. The day after the debate had the most articles (six) with only one article in each of the following days, suggesting diminished coverage, yet not necessarily public interest.

Because of the unique situation faced by the Republican Party and FOX News, the decision to host back-to-back debates during the same night found, on the one hand, the seven lowest-ranked candidates in front of a sparse, if not nonexistent studio audience during the "drive-time" debate. On the other hand, the ten highest-ranked candidates were afforded a sizeable and enthusiastic in-person audience accompanied by national attention during the "prime-time" debate. While, as expected, the "prime-time" candidates as a whole received greater newspaper coverage than did the "drive-time" candidates, the coverage was not apportioned proportionately. Specifically, media coverage was not necessarily in line with electoral status before the debate nor speaking time or OAR during the debate.

Over the course of both debates the candidates were quoted in newspapers a total of sixty-one times, of which forty-seven were extracted from the prime-time debate. Of those twenty-five quotes, 53 percent, were accompanied by OAR with only ten candidates being quoted. "Prime-time" debate contenders Ted Cruz, Mike Huckabee, and Scott Walker were not quoted at all, whereas the only "drive-time" debate participants to be quoted were Carly Fiorina, Rick Perry, and Rick Santorum. While Perry, who just missed the "prime-time" debate cut by coming in as the eleventh-ranked candidate, and Santorum were both presidential contenders in previous Republican Party primary elections, the number of quotes attributed to them in the newspapers—four and two quotes respectively—were substantially less than political novice and businessperson Fiorina, an ex–Hewlett Packard CEO who was quoted eight times total. Furthermore, Fiorina received "prime-time" debate coverage as well as audience applause-cheering by being mentioned favorably by fellow "drive-time" debate contender Rick Perry and being shown in a video clip attacking President Barack Obama.

With ten candidates on the main stage during the "prime-time" debate and competing for attention and enhanced electoral status, there is no doubt that Donald Trump emerged as the runaway winner. Not only did he acquire proportionally more speaking time than the other candidates (see chapter 4), while obtaining greater support from the audience in terms of both numbers and amount of OAR time, Trump dominated media coverage (see table 6.1). His thirty quotes represent nearly two-thirds of all candidate quotes from the "prime-time" debate and just under half of the total amount of quotes seen in print for both FOX News debates that day. Furthermore, by being the only candidate to see his name in headlines of presidential debate-related articles—twice—Trump was far and away the winner of the legacy media sweepstakes.

Table 6.1. FOX News GOP Debate—Newspaper Coverage and OAR Intensity in Response to Quotes

Candidate	Newspaper Quotes	Newspaper Headlines	Applause-Cheering	Laughter	Booing	Applause-Cheering & Booing	Applause-Cheering & Laughter	Laughter & Booing
Jeb Bush	3	0	11.26 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Ben Carson	1	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	11.24 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Chris Christie	2	0	7.17 (1)		7.87 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Ted Cruz	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Mike Huckabee	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
John Kasich	3	0	12.41 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Rand Paul	3	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	19.75 (1)	13.48 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Marco Rubio	3	0	10.88 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	16.14 (1)	0 (0)
Donald Trump	30	2	9.15 (3)	3.80 (2)	7.20 (1)	8.47 (2)	12.53 (3)	0 (0)
Scott Walker	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
OAR Average Intensity			5.689	1.054	7.392	8.205	6.394	0
Standard Deviation			2.772	0.456	5.136	5.171	3.846	0.000
Total # OAR			(149)	(9)	(5)	(11)	(19)	(0)

Source: Created by the author

The raucous nature of the FOX News debate meant that not only was there near incessant OAR, the intensity of the in-person audience reactions was extreme, and there was a good deal of variation in types and combinations of OAR that were previously unseen in any modern presidential debate. While applause-cheering predominated with the intensity of OAR for quoted candidate comments one to two standard deviations above the average (see table 6.1), eliciting audience booing, either alone or in combination with applause-cheering or laughter, and laughter or laughter-then-applause, showed greater correlation with being quoted than any other OAR. Because many of the humorous comments eliciting laughter involved ridicule, these patterns suggest that competitive interactions were most likely to draw media attention to the candidates.

Closer analysis of table 6.1 suggests that while top-tier contender Jeb Bush took a less-combative approach, a strategy in line with traditional front-runners, as did home-state candidate John Kasich, and received newspaper quotes only with comments over two standard deviations above the average, the rest of the field took a more diverse and aggressive approach. For instance, Rand Paul's reputation as a Republican Party gadfly, due largely to his libertarian ideology, were underscored by the coverage he received in which his quoted comments were met by extremely strong booing or applause-cheering and booing.

Most obviously, Donald Trump's use of humor to draw audience laughter and eliciting boos from factions in attendance through controversial statements worked extremely well. Indeed, while Trump was quoted in eight instances where OAR did not punctuate his comments, given the nature of the event and Trump's pugnacious approach, these quotes were largely embedded between OAR-eliciting comments, making them both conspicuous and extractable. Taken together, the debate context combined with Trump's confrontational style arguably led to high levels of quotability as he worked to obtain his defining moment on the campaign trail.

Donald Trump's Defining Moment: "Fat pigs," "Slobs," and "Disgusting animals"

Of Trump's quotes, the exchange covered the most—both in number of quotes and in terms of detail—was between him and FOX News anchor Megyn Kelly when she confronted him for referring to women he disliked as "fat pigs," "slobs," or "disgusting animals." After first deflecting the question by quipping "only Rosie O'Donnell" in reference to his longtime celebrity nemesis, he defended himself by blaming "political correctness" before pivoting to attack Kelly for asking the question (see textbox 6.1). This exchange

TEXTBOX 6.1. DONALD TRUMP'S EXCHANGE WITH MEGYN KELLY DURING THE 2015 FOX NEWS REPUBLICAN PARTY PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE CONCERNING TREATMENT OF WOMEN (NEWSPAPER QUOTES IN ITALICS)

KELLY: Mr. Trump, one of the things people love about you is you speak your mind, and you don't use a politician's filter. However, that is not without its downsides, in particular, when it comes to women. You've called women you don't like "fat pigs, dogs, slobs, and disgusting animals." (LAUGHTER—Intensity = 4.7) Your Twitter account . . . (LAUGHTER—Intensity = 2.6)

TRUMP: *Only Rosie O'Donnell.* (LAUGHTER & APPLAUSE-CHEERING - Intensity = 22.48)

KELLY: No, it wasn't. Your Twitter account . . .

TRUMP: Thank you.

KELLY: For the record, it was well beyond Rosie O'Donnell.

TRUMP: *Yes, I'm sure it was.*

KELLY: Your Twitter account has several disparaging comments about women's looks. You once told a contestant on *Celebrity Apprentice* it would be a pretty picture to see her on her knees. Does that sound to you like the temperament of a man we should elect as president, and how will you answer the charge from Hillary Clinton, who was likely to be the Democratic nominee, that you are part of the war on women?

TRUMP: *I think the big problem this country has is being politically correct.* (APPLAUSE-CHEERING—Intensity = 7.8) I've been ch . . . I've been challenged by so many people, and I *don't frankly have time for total political correctness. And to be honest with you, this country doesn't have time either. This country is in big trouble.* We don't win anymore. We lose to China. We lose to Mexico both in trade and at the border. We lose to everybody.

   And frankly, what I say, and oftentimes it's fun, it's kidding. We have a good time. *What I say is what I say. And honestly Megyn, if you don't like it, I'm sorry. I've been very nice to you, although I could probably maybe not be, based on the way you have treated me.* But I wouldn't do that. (BOOING & APPLAUSE—Intensity = 10.57) But you know what, we—we need strength, we need energy, we need quickness and we need brain in this country to turn it around. That, I can tell you right now. (APPLAUSE-CHEERING—Intensity = 11.61)

led to him being quoted in national newspapers eight times in four different articles. Later the next day he doubled down on his attacking Megyn Kelly by calling into Don Lemon's CNN show and claiming "You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever. In my opinion, she was off base." The resulting media coverage suggests Trump recognized that leaning into this exchange would be a particularly conducive strategy for obtaining and maintaining attention.

Closer analysis of how this might influence and structure journalist choice of quotes suggests it met the three factors for constructing a defining moment (narrative relevance, conspicuousness, and extractability) for multiple reasons (see textbox 6.1). First, the well-publicized feud between public personalities Donald Trump and Rosie O'Donnell was highlighted and at the same time created a personal, parasocial connection for the audiences of *Celebrity Apprentice* and *The View*, respectively. It also provided evidence for the combative and self-proclaimed politically incorrect Trump to act aggressively toward the well-regarded host of the debate on an ideologically friendly network. In short, it underscored Trump's willingness to not be beholden, nor polite, to those who would naturally be friendly toward him.

However, the most obvious factor driving this exchange toward being a defining moment for the FOX News debate, if not the entire 2016 presidential primary campaign, was the audience response. Not only was this exchange *conspicuous* by the range of OAR, including applause-cheering, laughter, and the comparatively unheard booing, and the time the audience spent in their response, it was also *extractable* thanks to this OAR. Specifically, Trump's response "Only Rosie O'Donnell"—arguably a throwaway line and certainly of no political relevance—was quoted twice likely due to its reception in which the audience laughed and applauded-cheered at a rate two standard deviations above the average OAR for that debate (see table 6.1).

Ultimately, one unique factor that set this exchange apart was the combination of booing and applause-cheering. Not only was the conflict between the candidate and the moderator highlighted, there was also conflict within the audience. In other words, this exchange became even more *conspicuous* by the rarity of disapproving booing meeting supportive applause-cheering, but also the *narrative relevance* of there being competing factions within the audience. In essence, Donald Trump forced the audience to decide between him and FOX News Megyn Kelly; as the only presidential candidate involved with this exchange, Trump stood to lose little to nothing to any of the other candidates onstage.

THE 2016 CNN DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATE

The first Democratic Party presidential primary debate, held over two months after the FOX News–hosted Republican Party debate, was hosted by CNN and received substantially more media attention. In the three days after the debate (October 14–16) twenty-five newspaper articles featuring "presidential debate" were downloaded with eleven possessing candidate quotes. There was also more sustained attention, with five of these articles being published the day after the debate, and three each in the two days that followed. Of the fifty-nine quotes contained within the newspaper articles, just under two-thirds (36) were punctuated by OAR in the immediate aftermath, although it should be noted that the CNN audience was governed by shared norms of politeness to a substantially greater extent than the FOX News debate.

With five candidates onstage, and arguably only one close competitor—Bernie Sanders—it could be expected that the front-runner Hillary Clinton would dominate newspaper coverage in the same manner she commanded the most speaking time onstage (see chapter 4). However, the number of headlines and the number of quotes she received in these newspaper articles were substantially more than might be predicted. Clinton was quoted twice as often as Sanders and mentioned in four headlines compared with her closest competitor (see table 6.2). Likewise, while Clinton's quotes were largely punctuated by OAR, over one-third (12/33) did not elicit audience reaction. In some cases, this was due to her terse and extractable comments (e.g., "We are not Denmark. I love Denmark. We are the United States of America."); however, in multiple cases long quotes regarding policy positions or being part of defining moments were reported.

While Clinton had marginally more speaking time than Sanders, the audience was substantially more receptive to what Sanders had to say based upon the total time and amount of OAR received by the Vermont independent Senator. Of the five non-OAR-accompanied quotes, most were quips, although two involved the Sanders-Clinton exchange over the economy ("going to win because we're going to explain what democratic socialism is"). For their parts, the other three candidates barely received notice from the newspapers. Martin O'Malley, standing next to Clinton onstage, was quoted only six times, whereas Lincoln Chaffee and Jim Webb merited only two quotes apiece. In summary, there was the front-runner, her closest competitor, and a supporting cast of participants.

Table 6.2. CNN Democratic Party Debate: Newspaper Coverage and OAR Intensity in Response to Quotes

Candidate	Newspaper Quotes	Newspaper Headlines	Applause-Cheering	Laughter	Booing	Applause-Cheering & Booing	Applause-Cheering & Laughter	Laughter & Booing
Lincoln Chaffee	2	0	8.54 (1)	2.07 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Hillary Clinton	33	4	10.11 (11)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	22.02 (1)	0 (0)
Martin O'Malley	6	0	5.50 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Bernie Sanders	16	1	9.51(13)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	14.28 (1)	0 (0)
Jim Webb	2	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	10.31 (1)	0 (0)
OAR Average Intensity			5.268	2.415	0	0	7.112	0
Standard Deviation			3.726	1.450	0.00	0.00	5.929	0.00
Total # OAR			(157)	(8)	(0)	(0)	(9)	(0)

Source: Created by the author

The overall patterns in audience intensity of OAR and the types elicited suggests that there was little overt dissent within the audience, with no booing occurring (see chapter 4). Likewise, it should be no surprise that the most intense type of OAR was laughter in combination with applause-cheering. Extreme intensity from this type of OAR, as well as from applause-cheering on its own, was more likely to have the eliciting comments quoted in newspaper articles. In comparison with the FOX News debate, this can be seen as a more traditional primary debate as the most intense OAR to candidate comments were connected with newspaper quotes thanks, presumably, due to the lack of audience discord.

Analysis of patterns of OAR to individual candidate utterances, and then being quoted in the newspaper, reveals a distinct disjoint in response between the top candidates and the second tier in terms of OAR intensity and newspaper coverage. Chaffee, O'Malley, and Webb, when they were quoted, had audience reactions within one standard deviation from the average. This is likely due to their lower status, and likewise their receiving substantially less time to talk (see chapter 4) than either Clinton or Sanders. For their part, both top-tier candidates had applause-cheering and laughter combined with applause-cheering with intensity that averaged at least one standard deviation above the average leading to their being quoted in the newspapers.

Hillary Clinton's Defining Moment: "Damn Emails"

One candidate exchange between front-runners Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders stands out by being reported on with multiple quotes in a number of newspaper articles. This most quoted exchange involved Sanders remarking upon America being sick of hearing about Clinton's using a private email server as President Barack Obama's secretary of state; Clinton, for her part, agreed with Sanders that the Republican Party generated attacks were not welcome (see textbox 6.2). With the four of eleven articles quoting candidates covering this exchange in the contenders' words, three of the articles quoted both candidates—with Clinton being portrayed as benefiting from Sanders's statement.

The exchange between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton can be seen as a more traditional defining moment by involving the top two contenders onstage. However, the *narrative relevance* of this interchange may be seen as deriving by it subverting competitive conventions. Here, the challenger not only agreed with the front-runner, he appeared to emphatically defend her position. Sanders's support, as can be expected, was unreservedly appreciated by Clinton as she thanked him multiple times. That this was a united front in resisting the opposition party, the Republican Party, and their continued efforts to advance the narrative that Clinton's use of a private email server

**TEXTBOX 6.2. BERNIE SANDERS'S EXCHANGE
WITH HILLARY CLINTON DURING THE 2015
CNN DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRESIDENTIAL
DEBATE CONCERNING HER EMAIL SERVER
(NEWSPAPER QUOTES IN ITALICS)**

SANDERS: Let me say this. Let me say - let *me say something that may not be great politics. But I think the secretary is right, and that is* (APPLAUSE-CHEERING—Intensity = 7.57) *that the American people are sick and tired of hearing about your damn emails.* (LAUGHTER & APPLAUSE-CHEERING—Intensity = 14.28)

CLINTON: *Thank you. Me, too. Me, too.* (CLINTON LAUGHTER)

SANDERS: You know? The middle class—Anderson, and let me say something about the media, as well. I go around the country, talk to a whole lot of people. Middle class in this country is collapsing. We have 27 million people living in poverty. We have massive wealth and income inequality. Our trade policies have cost us millions of decent jobs. The American people want to know whether we're going to have a democracy or an oligarchy as a result of Citizens Union. (APPLAUSE-CHEERING—Intensity = 32.59) Enough of the emails. Let's talk about the real issues facing America.

CLINTON: *Thank you, Bernie.* Thank you. (CLINTON LAUGHTER)

COOPER: It's obviously very popular in this crowd, and it's—hold on. I know that plays well in this room. But I got to be honest, Governor Chafee, for the record, on the campaign trail, you've said a different thing. You said this is a huge issue. Standing here in front of Secretary Clinton, are you willing to say that to her face?

CHAFEE: Absolutely. We have to repair American credibility after we told the world that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, which he didn't. So there's an issue of American credibility out there. So any time someone is running to be our leader, and a world leader, which the American president is, credibility is an issue out there with the world. And we have repair work to be done. I think we need someone that has the best in ethical standards as our next president. That's how I feel.

COOPER: Secretary Clinton, do you want to respond?

CLINTON: *No.* (APPLAUSE-CHEERING – Intensity = 22.02)

while serving as secretary of state violated federal law, and that the best response was to "lock her up," suggests a conflict-based narrative was still at the heart of this defining moment, albeit a partisan-based conflict.

Although the observable audience response to Sanders's comment did not rise to the extremes of the Trump versus Kelly defining moment earlier in the campaign, the audience interrupted his support of Clinton with applause-cheering ("the secretary is right") and then responded with laughter followed by applause to his punch line. Thus, the quote was highly *conspicuous* and *extractable* thanks to the extended laughter and applause-cheering; furthermore, the exchange became even more *conspicuous* because of moderator Anderson Cooper commenting on the popularity of this perspective with the studio audience. However, it should be noted that, despite attempts to portray her negatively, Clinton was able to parlay minimal words into maximal audience support.

THE 2020 NBC DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATES

The initial two 2020 presidential primary debates provided a unique situation by being held on back-to-back nights, having ten candidates onstage, and a randomized synthesis of top- and second-tier candidates competing for attention and media coverage. As seen in tables 6.3 and discussed more extensively in chapter 5, these candidates did not receive the same treatment by the network nor the same reception from the audience; as can be expected, national newspaper coverage differed. Furthermore, despite these debates being held on the consecutive nights of June 26 and 27, 2019—with the aim of equal treatment—invariably one night overshadowed the other. The question prior to the debates was which night would provide the most "media friendly" moments.

Major national newspaper coverage of the debates suggests this was a high-profile event as there were a total of 122 articles that had "primary debates" in them. Of these 122 articles, seventy had quotes in them, with all candidates being quoted at least two times over the course of the four days following the first debate. The first day after the initial debate had 142 quotes from twenty-two articles; the day after the second debate likewise had extensive coverage (188 quotes from twenty-six articles), although the coverage in the days following trailed off extensively (June 29 = fifty-two quotes from twelve articles; June 30 = sixty quotes from thirteen articles). This underscores the relatively short shelf life debate news coverage has, even when greater attention was paid in comparison with the initial 2016 presidential primary debates.

Table 6.3. NBC Night 1 2020 Democratic Party Debate: Newspaper Coverage and OAR Intensity in Response to Quotes

Candidate	Newspaper Quotes	Newspaper Headlines	Applause-Cheering	Laughter	Booing	Applause-Cheering & Booing	Applause-Cheering & Laughter	Laughter & Booing
Cory Booker	9	0	6.56 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Juan Castro	20	2	8.06 (5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	10.96 (1)	0 (0)
Bill de Blasio	14	4	4.84 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
John Delaney	2	0	8.86 (1)	3.21 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Tulsi Gabbard	2	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Jay Inslee	14	1	10.67 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6.52 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Amy Klobuchar	25	1	11.87 (2)	3.00 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Beto O'Rourke	8	0	7.64 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Tim Ryan	3	0	0 (0)	5.36 (1)	3.76 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Elizabeth Warren	16	0	8.745 (4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	13.04 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
OAR Average Intensity			4.403	1.680	2.760	0	6.173	0
Standard Deviation			2.239	0.806	0.00	0.00	2.360	0.00
Total # OAR			(121)	(4)	(1)	(0)	(3)	(0)

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE FIRST NIGHT OF 2020 DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

Overall, half of the 113 quotes (61; 54 percent) during the first night of the NBC-hosted debates were accompanied by OAR. Analysis of who was quoted without being prefaced or followed soon thereafter by OAR suggests special attention to specific candidates and their utterances. While this largely reflected electoral status, the presence of a Latino candidate (Juan Castro) and a major US city's mayor (Bill de Blasio) arguably led to more balanced coverage.

Specifically, despite being a second-tier candidate overall, Juan Castro was treated as a front-runner not just by the audience through their OAR, but also by the newspaper media in terms of the number of headlines he was featured in and quotes relaying what he said during the debate. Likewise, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio received an equivalent—or arguably greater due to his marginal electoral status and muted OAR (see chapter 5)—boost in coverage due to his hometown newspaper (the *New York Times*) covering him extensively.

Arguably the candidates who benefited and were disadvantaged most, respectively, were top-tier candidates Amy Klobuchar and Elizabeth Warren. While Klobuchar was only mentioned in one headline, she was quoted most of all candidates on the night—and nine more times than the front-runner onstage, Warren. While this might be chalked up to either speaking time or OAR, Klobuchar was near average on both (see chapter 5). Indeed, the rejoinder of hers to Jay Inslee's acclaim regarding his obtaining reproductive health insurance coverage in his state ("I just want to say, there's three women up here that have fought pretty hard for a woman's right to choose."), was met with relatively intense applause-cheering from the audience (intensity = 11.84) and accounted for 13 quotes in the newspapers studied (see table 6.3). This quip came closest to seeding a defining moment from the first night of debates; however, with one night of debates to follow, the electoral landscape was soon to change.

The rather substantial difference between the first night's front-runner—Elizabeth Warren—and the other candidates, especially those in the second tier, may be based upon her more cerebral and less combative approach. Warren, whose newspaper quotes recounted her attacks on the US political and economic systems being biased toward the very rich and major corporations at the expense of the working class, was quoted sixteen times but with only four of them accompanied by OAR. This means that the great majority of quotes attributed to her came from the course of the debate without audience reaction, and with none of the newspaper quotes recurring to a

great extent, there were no defining moments from Elizabeth Warren. This suggested her focus on policy and addressing systemic inequality in the economic and political systems did not provide preferred news value.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE SECOND NIGHT OF 2020 DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRIMARY DEBATES

The second night of the NBC-hosted Democratic Party presidential primary debates, while receiving equal billing with the first night, was arguably the most anticipated of the two nights. With 164 quotes of the two nights the second night's candidates were most likely to be covered by the newspapers considered in this chapter. Although over half of the quotes (ninety-four; 57 percent) were punctuated by OAR, a substantial number (seventy) were not. With these non-punctuated quotes, it was front-runner Joe Biden (sixteen) and top-tier candidate Pete Buttigieg (twenty-nine) that attained the greatest media attention without OAR.

The emphasis on vice president Joe Biden and quoting him was largely due to his being on center stage. As the presumptive favorite, Biden was the focus of attention as seen through the speaking time he received by being tied as the most quoted over both nights (forty-three) and receiving the second most headline mentions with six (see table 6.4). Concurrently, and as can be expected of the front-runner, he was the focus of the great majority of attacks by the other candidates, with a substantial number of Biden's quotes defending his record. Thus, while there was a good deal of support for his utterances from the audience, the average intensity of the OAR he received for his comments was within one standard deviation of the average received during the debate.

The other major candidate, Bernie Sanders, while receiving substantial speaking time and OAR, attained comparatively sparse media attention. Specifically, he was given one-third the number of quotes and newspaper headlines received by newcomer and fellow top-four candidate "Mayor Pete" Buttigieg. This may be seen as largely due to Buttigieg, in a surprisingly frank manner, admitting "I couldn't get it done" regarding the reform of the South Bend Police Department that he presided over. This unexpected admission led to almost half of his quotes (16/35), in itself a total well above all other candidates except Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

However, the standout performer of the evening not just in terms of speaking time and OAR, but also in the coverage secured from the national newspapers was Kamala Harris. While a top-tier candidate, she established supremacy over all other candidates in terms of headline mentions with eight total and was quoted more often than any other candidate over both nights

Table 6.4. NBC Night 2 2020 Democratic Party Debate: Newspaper Coverage and OAR Intensity in Response to Quotes

Candidate	Newspaper Quotes	Newspaper Headlines	Applause-Cheering	Laughter	Booing	Applause-Cheering & Booing	Applause-Cheering & Laughter	Laughter & Booing
Michael Bennet	9	0	6.08 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Joe Biden	43	6	6.39 (10)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Pete Buttigieg	35	3	9.76 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Kirsten Gillibrand	4	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Kamala Harris	43	8	9.91 (7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
John Hickenlooper	6	0	7.2 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Bernie Sanders	12	1	6.15 (4)	2.88 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Eric Swalwell	6	0	14.18 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Marianne Williamson	3	0	1.08 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Andrew Yang	3	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
OAR Average Intensity			4.604	2.446	0	0	0	0
Standard Deviation			2.239	1.980	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total # OAR			(121)	(6)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)

Source: Created by the author

with the exception of Joe Biden (43). This was underscored by her average quotable moment having an intensity of over two standard deviations above the average OAR (see table 6.4) for night two.

While Harris established her parental presence by quipping "America does not want to witness a food fight" in response to a chaotic candidate exchange, it was yet another event that propelled her candidacy ahead of all other candidates. Most pertinently, her premeditated attack on Joe Biden catapulted her candidacy thanks to an expertly crafted defining moment. This moment resonated not just during the debate, but well afterward through media coverage and discussion as her prefacing comment was quoted in seven news articles and her comment as a whole was quoted twenty-one times. This was three times the next most quoted utterance by any of the candidates (herself included) and led to three different responses by Biden being quoted thirteen times.

Kamala Harris's Defining Moment: "And that little girl was me"

Of all possible defining moments arising from the quoted candidate comments over both debate nights, Kamala Harris succeeded in gaining media and public attention by carrying out perhaps the most well-rehearsed of attacks that was implemented in the most compelling of manners. With her voice quavering with emotion, Harris related her personal experience as a victim of racism after drawing a connection with the larger problems faced by black men (see textbox 6.3). Perhaps most importantly, Harris was able to attack front-runner Joe Biden by discussing how personally hurtful it was for him to celebrate the careers of his senatorial colleagues who had been responsible for the maintenance of southern segregation while confronting him for not supporting the busing she was able to take part in. By stating, prior to her attack, that "Vice President Biden, I do not believe you are a racist" she effectively primed audience perceptions to connect Biden with racism. Likewise, her punch line "And that little girl was me" was succinct, memorable, and well-rehearsed enough that her campaign already had T-shirts in production.

The *narrative relevance* of Kamala Harris's attack on Joe Biden not only highlighted the clash between two top-tier candidates, but underscored the race-based adversity faced within American society that had been aggravated by President Donald Trump's term in office. Thus, this attack and the conflict it represented was both personal and political, making for a compelling storyline. While the extreme intensity of the audience reaction at the completion of Harris's speaking turn punctuated her statement, granting over fifteen seconds

TEXTBOX 6.3. KAMALA HARRIS'S EXCHANGE WITH JOE BIDEN DURING THE 2019 NBC DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE CONCERNING BUSING POLICY (NEWSPAPER QUOTES IN ITALICS)

HARRIS: OK. So on the issue of race, I couldn't agree more that this is an issue that is still not being talked about truthfully and honestly. I—there is not a black man I know, be he a relative, a friend or a coworker, who has not been the subject of some form of profiling or discrimination.

Growing up, my sister and I had to deal with the neighbor who told us her parents couldn't play with us because she—because we were black. And I will say also that—that, in this campaign, we have also heard—and *I'm going to now direct this at Vice President Biden, I do not believe you are a racist*, and I agree with you when you commit yourself to the importance of finding common ground.

But *I also believe, and it's personal*—and I was actually very—it *was hurtful to hear you talk about the reputations of two United States senators who built their reputations and career on the segregation of race in this country*. And it was not only that, but you also worked with them to oppose busing.

And, you know, there was a little girl in California who was part of the second class to integrate her public schools, and she was bused to school every day. And that little girl was me.

So I will tell you that, on this subject, it cannot be an intellectual debate among Democrats. We have to take it seriously. We have to act swiftly. As attorney general of California, I was very proud to put in place a requirement that all my special agents would wear body cameras and keep those cameras on. (APPLAUSE-CHEERING - Intensity= 20.32)

of time for her narrative to fully resonate, arguably it was her declaring "And that little girl was me" that made this story both *conspicuous* and *extractable*. In summary, while Harris's reprimand of Biden was premeditated, it was a masterful rhetorical ambush that made use of a distinctly personal experience to drive home a political point in a memorable manner that extended well beyond the debate stage.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT QUOTABLE
CANDIDATES AND DEFINING MOMENTS

Perhaps the most obvious lesson from this chapter's content analysis of top newspaper coverage of the initial 2016 and 2020 presidential primary debates is the enhanced news value of these debates. The increased coverage in the three days following these events, both within the 2016 campaign, which saw an increase from eighteen news articles in response to the FOX News Republican Party debate to twenty-five articles for the CNN Democratic Party debate, and in comparison with the 2020 NBC Democratic Party debates with 122 articles, is substantial. While this increase may be attributed to two consecutive debate nights, as well as the reposting of subtly changed news articles, there can be no doubt that the initial primary debates are now a major presidential campaign set piece.

This chapter furthermore supports the notion that observable audience response (OAR) has influence over reporters when they write their newspaper stories and choose quotes to make their narrative points, at least during the initial 2016 and 2020 presidential primary debates. By considering candidate quotes, the non-transformed and relatively unmediated comments extracted from the debates, a great many of these quotes can be seen as accompanied, if not punctuated, by applause-cheering, laughter, booing, and combinations of these. The time pressures involved with covering and writing news stories about such contemporaneous events as debates suggests OAR enhances the likelihood of a candidate being quoted. While certainly not the only factor, as between half to almost two-thirds of quotes were punctuated by some form of OAR, that greater intensity and/or uniqueness (e.g., laughter followed by applause-cheering, booing, or mixtures of OAR) was characteristic of all audience reaction to these quotes suggests they played a substantial role in media coverage.

There is an obvious front-runner, as well as home-field, advantage when it comes to being quoted. While this may be attributed to speaking time attained or OAR received, in-depth analysis suggests that the amount of newspaper quotes—and headlines—received is disproportionate to either of these onstage and in-person factors. Regardless, such coverage may be fleeting with the number of stories, and concomitantly quotes, diminishing rapidly from the day following the debate. What ultimately matters for a candidate and the reporters covering them is the ability to construct a *defining moment* that persists throughout a campaign—if not longer.

The role of *narrative relevance*, especially in terms of the editorial line that stories such as presented here be "predictable, meaningful, unambiguous, and logistically easy to cover (Haapanen & Perrin 2017), regarding the

quotes chosen and defining moments presented can be seen as underscored in both the Bernie Sanders—Hillary Clinton exchange (textbox 6.2) and that of Kamala Harris's attack on Joe Biden (textbox 6.3). During the initial 2016 Democratic Party primary debate, despite Sanders cogently and emphatically communicating the argument that representative democracy is being threatened by the current economic and political system that provides polices benefiting the affluent elite—and receiving supportive applause-cheering from the audience that was well beyond the norm—the media coverage suggests that audience support and passion alone does not drive the narrative being constructed. In short, Sanders's statement was *conspicuous* and, arguably, *extractible* in terms of the OAR, but this was not enough to be directly quoted.

For her part, Kamala Harris's attack on Joe Biden seemed to be less about policy positions (although she did mention her special agents as using body cameras during her service as California attorney general), than a re-litigation of Biden's political stance over four decades prior and his willingness to work with segregationist Southern senators. This accomplished at least two objectives: first, it blemished Biden's position as racially progressive due to his being vice president to the United States first African American President, Barack Obama. Second, it subtly highlighted Biden's advanced age by Harris comparing herself as a "little girl" to Biden's work as a US senator. Not only did Harris's chastising have *narrative relevance* by being meaningful and unambiguous through her nonverbal delivery, it was *conspicuous* and *extractible* for those covering the debate thanks in large part to the audience reaction.

Specifically, there is evidence from the three cases and four debates presented in this chapter that the *defining moments* are influenced by, if not predicated upon, the intensity and uniqueness of the in-person audience's response. This is underscored by the fact that each of the three defining moments were accompanied by the most intense OAR of the night (or nights in the case of the 2020 back-to-back debates). Likewise, in all cases there was a series of consecutive OAR during these exchanges, which while not as intense as the "punch line" functioned to fix viewer attention on that altercation. Although the *narrative relevance* of an utterance is not necessarily affected by the OAR (although Donald Trump's conflict with Megyn Kelly, with the resultant booing combined with applause-cheering told a story of intra-audience conflict), the *conspicuousness* and *extractability* of an utterance is enhanced by the attending audience and their reaction to what the candidates said.

Arguably, Trump's doubling down on sexism in the immediate aftermath of the FOX News debate by calling into Don Lemon's CNN show the next night was a savvy decision considering the possibility for another, potentially delegitimizing, *defining moment* that occurred earlier in that debate. Here, after cohost Bret Baier asked for a show of hands for those "unwilling tonight to pledge your support to the eventual nominee of the Republican party and

pledge to not run an independent campaign" Trump was the sole candidate to raise his hand. After the audience booed his action, Trump followed up by saying "I have to respect the person that, if it's not me, the person that wins. . . . If I'm the nominee, I will pledge I will not run as an independent." While this was covered to a lesser extent, Trump's attacking Megyn Kelly specifically and mass media more generally was a much more palatable option than being outed as a self-confessed RINO (Republican in Name Only). At the same time, by creating a conflict between himself and the media, Trump effectively shut out all other candidates from coverage. He thus both diminished their threat as competitors while elevating his own status as a "politically incorrect truth-teller" who would be the Republican Party's leader.

Ultimately, while candidates can elevate themselves through memorable moments punctuated by intense OAR, it is the journalists and their editors (or reporters and their producers) that decide what is quotable and, ultimately, a *defining moment*. Because presidential primary debates are preplanned competitions with multiple candidates onstage, and because there are editorial expectations combined with limited time to craft narratives, OAR can be seen as playing a role in highlighting what gets reported. Indeed, even when acting through the mass media, the in-person audience decides much of what those following election stories perceive as salient, what topics seem important, and who the best candidates are.

Changing Online Candidate Visibility Due to the Initial 2016 and 2020 Primary Debates

There can be little doubt that the US presidential primary debates serve as a venue for candidates to interact with moderators and multiple competitors, engage with the in-person audience, and impress upon spectators following the debate coverage in the days afterward that the putative presidential nominee deserves attention and possesses attributes necessary for effective leadership (Benoit 2013; McKinney 2021; McKinney & Warner 2013; Schroeder 2016; Seiter & Weger 2020; Stewart 2012). Thanks to their providing a relatively unmediated insight into the candidates and their mental fitness, large majorities of the voting public consider debates as helpful and informative (Iyengar 2023). At best the resulting visibility afforded by these debates enhances candidate electoral status by increasing their recognizability (Bawn et al. 2019; Gigerenzer & Todd 1999; Kam & Zechmeister 2013). Successful performances may also be seen as an audition for roles outside of elective office that fulfill the candidate's progressive ambition. And with the initial primary debates in the 2016 and 2020 presidential election campaigns attracting record numbers of viewers, these must-see television events have become even more important for the visibility of candidates onstage. This chapter aims to evaluate the impact of candidate debate performance and connection with the in-person audience, as well as media coverage, on visibility and recognition by the broader American public.

As discussed in chapter 2, visibility matters for candidate electoral status. This recognition is especially important during those early debates where partisan cues are not available and name recognition is at a premium. The potential impact of debate performance is amplified when the top contenders, whether establishment candidates such as Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton during the 2016 primaries, or Joe Biden during the 2020 primary, are not the

preferred option by substantial numbers of the potential electorate. While Donald Trump used high levels of name recognition due to his reality-show persona prior to the 2016 presidential campaign, he and, to a lesser extent, other candidates moved to the forefront of public awareness thanks to their initial debate performance. Concomitantly, the other candidates, especially Jeb Bush and Ted Cruz, found themselves diminished or ignored by the interested public completely as a result of their inability to connect with the audience. In a similar manner, Kamala Harris's performance onstage during the second of the initial 2020 NBC Democratic Party presidential primary debates and the reaction to it by the in-person audience and the press served to catapult her candidacy (Sides et al. 2022). While debates may not matter as much as party support, financial backing, and elite endorsements (Adkins & Dowdle 2002, 2004; Adkins & Dowdle 2008; Cohen et al. 2009; Dowdle et al. 2013; Dowdle et al. 2016; Steger et al. 2004), with the previously invisible primaries now becoming highly visible and open for public consumption, the initial debates increasingly open an avenue that allows the audience to decide who does and does not matter.

Understanding the influence of debate performance and audience reaction, as well as resultant media coverage on the change in candidate visibility is an obvious next step. Although total speaking time, observable audience response (OAR), and media coverage—including the quotes and the defining moments that elevate candidate conspicuousness—matter in raising visibility, what ultimately matters for contending candidates is the name recognition by potential voters, donors, and volunteers among the greater public that such visibility affords. Thus, this chapter will focus more discretely on the analysis of online search behavior from just prior to and then in the aftermath of the initial 2016 and 2020 presidential primary debates. This chapter aims to provide insights into whether changes in online visibility due to the debates occur, for whom, and whether these changes are correlated with candidate dominance of attention, audience reaction to the candidates, and/or legacy media coverage of these events.

MEASURING CHANGING CANDIDATE VISIBILITY

Public opinion surveys are useful tools for assessing electoral status in the latter stages of presidential elections when the respective political parties' candidates are established and the general public has been exposed to them over the course of months, even years (Hillygus & Jackman 2003; Ryan 2018; Sides et al. 2022; Sides & Vavreck 2014). However, during the early stages of the campaign before primary elections occur and front-runners are established, surveys can be seen as suboptimal for multiple reasons. First,

opinion polls are premised upon recognition of candidate names that respondents likely are not familiar with, and thus have little rationale for a thoughtful opinions (Bawn et al. 2019; Kam & Zechmeister 2013), let alone the time and energy to establish rational decisions regarding the candidates (Lodge & Taber 2013; Redlawsk et al. 2007; Schubert et al. 2011).

Even when name recognition does exist, it may reflect factors not necessarily relevant for leadership skills essential for the presidency. This arguably was the case regarding enthusiasm for ex-senator Fred Thompson's 2008 run for the Republican Party nomination which appeared to be largely driven by his acting on the television procedural *Law & Order* and which diminished soon after his first debate performance (Cohen et al. 2009; Stewart 2012). In short, while being able to "play a leader" on scripted television (or not) can have a substantial effect on opinion survey response, this ability is not necessarily reliably associated with debate performance.

Finally, the responses given by survey respondents do not necessarily translate into actions. While public opinion surveys can capture change in name recognition, the questions asked can be seen as best unearthing opinions, attitudes, and knowledge but not necessarily salience and intensity (Page & Shapiro 2010). Even then, respondents may "misreport" their preferences. For instance, Streb and colleagues found strong and consistent social desirability effects at the prospect of voting for a female US president (Streb et al. 2008). As a result, respondents may self-report in a manner that reflects social desirability bias and is not indicative of behavioral intent. In summary due to the demand characteristics of self-report opinion surveys, they may be seen as not necessarily the best tool to assess electoral status early in the campaign season.

Online Information-Seeking Behavior

What may be seen as a superior measure to self-reports, such as public opinion surveys, especially early in the electoral cycle when candidates are just becoming visible to the general public, are data considering online search behavior. Debates provide the opportunity to learn about candidates, especially as online search traffic peaks around these events during the general election season. For instance, Arendt and Fawzi saw online information-seeking behavior peaking ten times during the 2016 general election cycle, with three of these peaks co-occurring with the debates between Trump and Clinton (Arendt & Fawzi 2019). Likewise, in their comparative study of the United Kingdom and United States national elections, in 2010 and 2012 respectively, Trevisan and colleagues found that "notable 'search catalysts' in both countries included planned campaign events" (119) including election days, party conventions, and debates. Underscoring the independence of internet search

behavior from coverage by traditional media sources, they found that the UK third-party opposition leader was searched for online considerably more than either the incumbent candidate or the other major opposition party's leader (Trevisan et al. 2018). As this was due in large part to the debate performance of the third-party candidate, it can be assumed that not only do debates raise visibility overall, these events can also lead to greater recognition and search behavior regarding specific candidates.

Because behavior, even that revealed through information seeking, is more reliable than words alone, this chapter considers online information search behavior. In addition to being successfully applied to a range of economic, public health and other politically relevant concerns, Google Trends search data has been used to effectively predict for the winners of US and Canadian presidential elections from 2004 to 2020 (Prado-Román et al. 2021). This makes this data a powerful indicator for understanding contemporaneous fluctuations in public behavior regarding events such as presidential debates.

As pointed out by Granka (2013) such online information-seeking behavior "is an active form of information acquisition, and it presumes the searcher has some degree of prior knowledge and motivation" (272). Internet search data can be considered more a measure of salience than valence by revealing search popularity in the defined time frame (days, weeks, months, etc.) although not the results of the searches nor the websites visited (Arendt & Fawzi 2019; Trevisan et al. 2018). By being a measure in which both name recognition and intensity of interest are gauged by behavior, the readily accessible and easy-to-use internet search engine can provide insights into how candidate performance, audience reaction, and media coverage of the initial preprimary debates affect change in the visibility of presidential candidates (however, see textbox 7.1).

Google is the most popular of the internet search engines available, being used by 90 percent of the US public as their default engine (Urman et al. 2022). For this chapter, Google Trends data considering change in United States–based web-search traffic from the two days prior to and day of the primary debate to the three days following the debate provides a means by which comparisons regarding candidate visibility may be made based upon searches using their name (e.g., "Amy Klobuchar," "Mike Huckabee," etc.). Because Google Trends data are scaled with the largest volume of traffic being allotted a score of 100, the pre- and post-debate data are averaged; candidates receiving a score of less than 1 are given a proxy score of .9, which might be seen as a conservative estimate and is tested using within-subjects t-tests. While the evening of the debate days may experience a surge in search behavior during and immediately after the debates themselves, there is evidence suggesting the American public tends to engage in search behavior the day after a political event occurs (Trevisan et al. 2018).

**TEXTBOX 7.1. POTENTIAL CONCERNS
WITH USING INTERNET SEARCH DATA**

Systemic issues can be seen when using Google trends data, or any internet search data. While easily accessed and providing a useful source of data that has been used in large variety of contexts beyond elections (e.g., public health, economics, etc.), there are built in path dependencies with using this data—or any other web-based search engine. As pointed out by Trevisan and colleagues (2018), "While search engines are broadly used as a convenient way of retrieving data, they are criticized for filtering and limiting the amount of information that is visible to users. This has led some to argue that search engines reinforce the informational status quo and can become significant barriers to democratization and political literacy" (125–26). In a study across six internet search engines during the 2020 U.S. presidential primary season, Urman and colleagues (2022) found prioritization of legacy media outlets by Google and Bing, whereas Yahoo had a positivity bias toward Bernie Sanders. While this may be reflective of random volatility, even with the same search engine, the outcomes of online search behavior or subsequent voting behavior should be considered closely.

Correlation is used to consider the relationship between first, change in online search behavior and the performance of the candidate based upon their dominating attention through the total speaking time they received and, second, their connection with the audience as measured through total intensity of the OAR received (the length of OAR time + average judged strength of response; see chapter 6) respectively. The influence of the media on changed online search behavior is considered by using the number of quotes received in the major newspapers (see chapter 6) as a proxy. As the number of cases observed in each debate are limited to ten candidates or under, statistical inferences made regarding these relationships are necessarily constrained as are the conclusions made and insights derived.

CHANGE IN ONLINE SEARCH BEHAVIOR DUE TO
THE 2015 FOX NEWS REPUBLICAN PARTY DEBATE

With ten presidential candidates populating the prime-time FOX News Republican Party debate in early August of 2015, there were bound to be winners and losers onstage, not just in terms of dominance of attention, audience reaction earned, and media coverage received, but also in terms of the public interest aroused in the event's aftermath. Although the average amount of Google searches for the prime-time debate's candidates increased from the two days prior to and day of the debate ($M = 11.3$, $SD = 10.04$) to the three days afterward ($M = 19.0$, $SD = 19.32$), there was no apparently uniform trend observed regarding all candidates, $t(9)$ -1.606, $p = .14$. This can be seen more explicitly in figure 7.1 as the great majority of candidates experienced only marginal increases in Google Trends search traffic. However, two candidates onstage (Ben Carson and Donald Trump) experienced substantially more internet searches than the norm whereas yet another two (Jeb Bush and Ted Cruz) experienced a decrease in internet searches.

What is most notable about the patterns of change in online search behavior are the diverging paths taken by the two front-runners: Donald Trump and Jeb Bush. Donald Trump received substantially greater average Google Trends search traffic than any of the other candidates (see figure 7.1). While Trump started with moderately high levels of internet search interest (M = 23.67), as can be expected given his celebrity status, his ostentatious debate
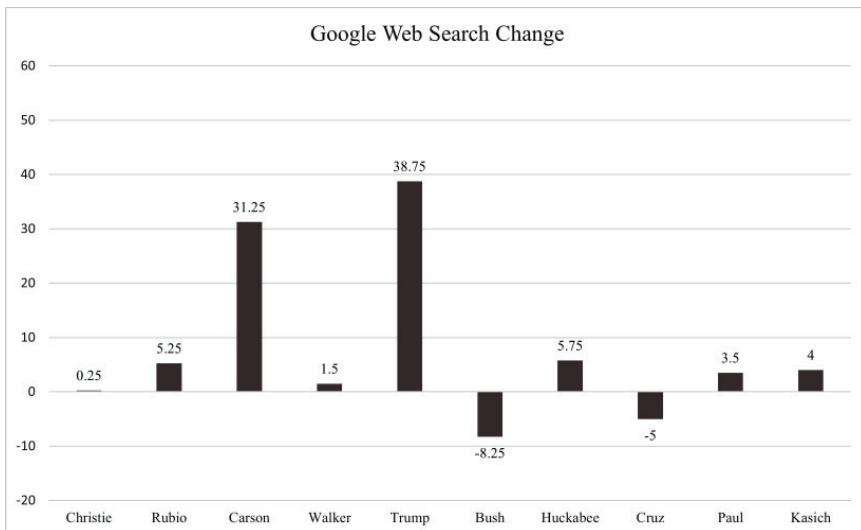
Figure 7.1.   Change in Google Web Searches for FOX News 2016 Republican Party Debate. *Source:* Created by the author.

performance which included a defining moment attacking FOX News moderator Megyn Kelly, then redoubling his personal attack on her during Don Lemon's CNN show the day afterward (see chapter 6), can be seen as the reason for why Trump's online search interest skyrocketed in the days afterward (M = 62.42). In essence, Trump made it near impossible to ignore his transgressions by using the media to amplify his visibility and extend his reach.

However, perhaps most intriguing, and damning regarding establishment candidate Jeb Bush's numbers were that Google Trends traffic regarding him decreased substantially in the debate's aftermath. Prior to the debate Bush was the most searched candidate (M = 27.00) followed by Trump and then fellow front-runner Ted Cruz (20.33). No other candidate experienced such a substantial setback, although Ted Cruz experienced slightly less online search traffic after the debate, and Chris Christie and Scott Walker barely held the internet interest they previously possessed. For an establishment favored candidate arising from a family dynasty that had produced two presidents in recent memory (his father George H. W. Bush [POTUS 41] and brother George W. Bush [POTUS 43]), the diminished interest may reflect both his lack of charismatic connection with the audience as well as a repudiation of the Bush line.

On the other hand, Ben Carson's comparatively understated performance underscored the importance of being likable enough for the audience to generate OAR. The substantial jump in online search behavior for this novice politician was driven by Carson's use of humorous quips in response to attacks while sidestepping difficult questions (Russell et al. 2020; Stewart 2012). Audience reaction to Carson's comments through laughter and even multiple instances of laughter prolonged by animated applause-cheering was substantially more than any other candidate except Trump. This was despite Carson having over four minutes less speaking time than Trump. Arguably, Ben Carson's political career was elevated by his initial debate performance, as he progressed from never before holding public office to becoming a cabinet member for the Trump administration as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

As can be inferred by Bush's electoral plummet as counterpoint to Trump's ascent, the resultant patterns are not necessarily due to electoral status and the benefits conferred prior to the debate so much as debate performance and media coverage. Speaking time, a behavioral measure of dominance of attention, was moderately and positively correlated to increased web search behavior, r (9) = .56, p = .09. The summed OAR intensity in response to candidate utterances for the entire debate evidenced a moderate-to-strong relationship with changes in Google searches, r (9) = .68, p = .03. Finally, the qualitative proxy for media coverage, quotes received by individual

candidates in the three days after the debate, had a marginally stronger correlation with increased Google search activity, r (9), = .70, p = .03.

The near-equivalent correlation between OAR intensity and major newspaper quotes, and their being stronger than total speaking time suggests that the role of the audience is accentuated, especially when considering that OAR intensity likely has both a direct role through the viewing audience, as well as through the quotes that are chosen by journalists. With quoted candidate comments receiving OAR of intensity (M = 10.05) significantly higher, t (211) = -2.325, p = .02, than those comments not quoted (M = 8.06), the relationship between audience reaction in terms of applause-cheering, laughter, booing, and mixtures of all three can be seen as substantial and important for visibility and recognition.

CHANGE IN ONLINE SEARCH BEHAVIOR DUE TO THE 2015 CNN DEMOCRATIC PARTY DEBATE

While the Democratic Party's first presidential primary debate in October 2015 was much anticipated by the news media, by occurring over two months after the first Republican Party debate, public enthusiasm as seen with Google web search data suggests a more muted response. Specifically, average Google Trends search behavior both pre-debate (M = 5.33, SD = 6.58) and post-debate (M = 15.61, SD = 18.09) for the CNN hosted debate was substantially less than for the FOX News GOP debate that preceded it. While there was an increase in online search behavior as a result of the initial Democratic Party debate, this change was not statistically significant, t (4) -1.954, p =.122. In addition to the diminished interest, the comparatively slight change from just prior to after the debate may also be due to the limited number of candidates onstage in addition to the two front-runners, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, having appreciably more popularity and possessing substantially greater public awareness than the other three contenders. This popularity divide can be seen reflected in the online search behavior before the debate for Clinton (M = 10.33) and Sanders (M = 14.33), internet traffic substantially higher than any of the other three candidates. For their part, Lincoln Chaffee, Martin O'Malley, and Jim Webb had Google Trends search traffic that averaged either near or below 1 on the 100-point Google Trends scale.

Online search behavior only increased tangibly for one of the three lower-tier candidates. Specifically, Webb experienced a nearly 8 percent increase in the average Google Trends search metric. This may have been as a result of his response to a question regarding the enemy the candidates were
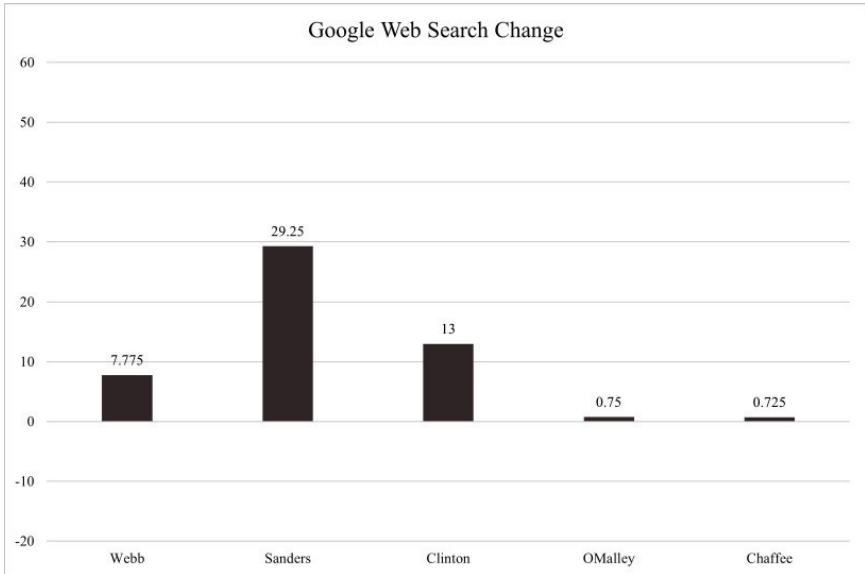
Figure 7.2.   Change in Google Web Searches for CNN 2016 Democratic Party Debate.
Source: **Created by the author.**

proudest of, with Webb stating, "The enemy soldier that threw the grenade that wounded me, but he's not around right now to talk to." For their part, as seen in figure 7.2, both Chaffee and O'Malley realized only slight change.

Although there is no way to explicitly assess how effective Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton's exchange regarding her "damn emails" was in enhancing public interest in the days following the debate, this defining moment can be interpreted as a notable component for increased public interest. The highly quotable nature of this exchange, as well as Sanders combative nature throughout the debate, inspired substantial audience reaction both at the venue and by the broader public. As can be seen in figure 7.2 there was a substantial increase in average Google Trends traffic for Sanders in the days following the debate.

While not enjoying as great an increase of online search behavior as either Donald Trump or Ben Carson from their first debate, Sanders can be seen as providing a counterpoint to the establishment candidacy of Clinton that was welcomed by the interested public. Although Clinton did experience a substantial increase in Google Trends traffic, more than the other three contenders onstage, the comparatively limited public response to her initial 2016 primary debate likely reflected contextual elements, including the debate being held months after the first Republican Party primary debate and it drawing nearly half of the audience.

The influence of five Democratic Party candidates vying for dominance of attention and audience reaction to them during the debate, as well as media coverage in its wake, on public visibility and interest as measured through online search behavior is best considered through correlational analysis. Candidate dominance of attention, as determined by speaking time, possesses a moderately strong and positive association with increased average web traffic, $r(3) = .76$, $p = .13$. On the other hand, the sum of candidate OAR intensity received during the debate is strongly and positively related with change in Google searches, $r(3) = .90$, $p = .04$, findings significant at the two-tailed .05 level. This suggests that audience enthusiasm matters more for increasing search activity than candidate speaking time. Finally, the number of times a candidate is quoted is likewise strongly correlated with increased Google search activity, $r(3) = .88$, $p = .05$, suggesting qualitative media coverage effects candidate visibility.

Although being quoted in major national newspapers may be seen merely as a qualitative proxy, albeit a useful one, further parsing of the data available in light of findings regarding quotable candidates and defining moments suggests that with the initial 2016 CNN Democratic Party presidential debate, OAR may function both directly and indirectly. First, as seen above, correlational analysis suggests aggregate OAR intensity is most strongly related to increased search activity, followed by being quoted by the print press. However, due to there being a highly significant difference, $t(180) = -2.865$, $p < .01$, between the intensity of OAR associated with those utterances that are quoted ($M = 10.15$) compared with all others ($M = 7.40$), OAR can be seen as having both a direct influence on those watching, and well as having an indirect effect through the media reporting on the debates.

CHANGE IN ONLINE SEARCH BEHAVIOR DUE TO THE FIRST 2020 NBC DEMOCRATIC PARTY DEBATE

As discussed throughout this book, the 2020 Democratic Party presidential primary season was substantially different from previous electoral cycles by hosting twenty candidates on the debate stage over the course of two nights. While the attempt to not confer advantage to any candidates by randomly assigning both top-tier and the remaining candidates equally across both nights is on the face of it fair, how this decision affected candidate visibility and ultimately their recognition by the viewing public may be questioned. Due to the wealth of options onstage during the nights of July 26 and 27, 2019, the public likely became cognitive misers using simple decision rules to guide their interest (Gigerenzer & Todd 1999; Lodge & Taber 2013) in the

face of the multitude of candidates, fatigue likely set in during the second night of debates.

The first debate night for the Democratic Party's presidential candidates saw a substantial increase in online search behavior. This was probably due to many of the candidates not being well known outside the three faces of the political party, and is reflected in the significant and positive change in Google Trends traffic, t (9) 14.012, p <.01, from the days before and day of the debate when few searches occurred (M = 3.49, SD = 4.79) to the three days afterward (M = 24.06, SD = 19.24). All of the candidates onstage, with the exception of Elizabeth Warren (M = 16.33) and Beto O'Rourke (M = 6.00) had average Google Trends search numbers in the days before the debate below five on the scale to 100, suggesting a lack of public visibility.

Over the three days after the debate's conclusion multiple candidates, led by Tulsi Gabbard and including front-runners Beto O'Rourke, Elizabeth Warren, and Cory Booker, saw substantially increased average online search traffic. As presented in figure 7.3, there were only two candidates not able to induce additional online search behavior. Despite the Miami audience responding passionately to his performance onstage, Juan Castro barely maintained the same level of traffic from before to after the debate. John Delaney's rather meager increase in average Google Trends traffic likely was due to his marginal candidacy and his comparatively conservative policy positions. All other candidates saw at least moderate increases in search activity.
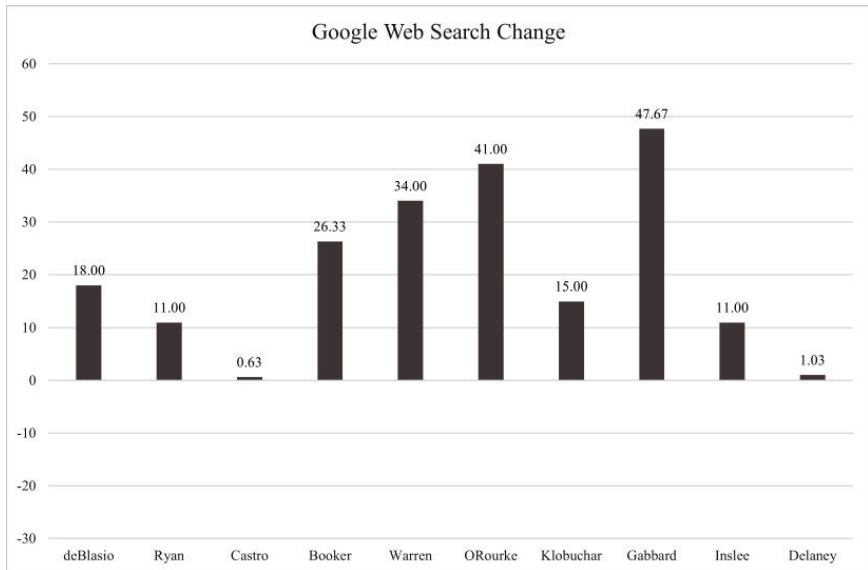
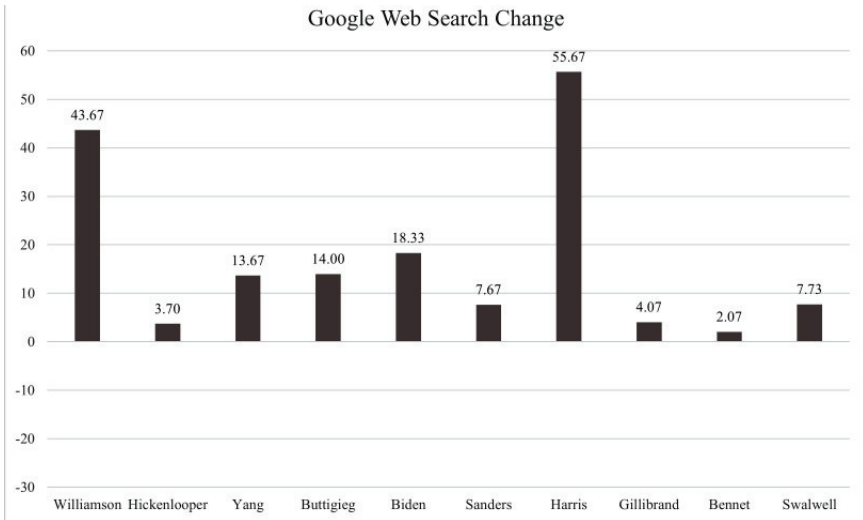**Figure 7.3. Change in Google Web Searches for NBC Night 1 2020 Democratic Party Debate.** *Source:* Created by the author.

What is most unique about the change in online search behavior, especially in comparison with the initial 2016 Republican and Democratic Party debates, is that increased average internet search volume did not appear to be driven by onstage dominance of attention, r (9) = .29, p = .41, or aggregated OAR intensity during the debate, r (9) = .14, p = .69, nor being quoted by top national newspapers in the aftermath, r (9) = .25, p = .48. In short, candidate speaking time, ability to elicit reactions from the audience through their utterances, and being quoted by prestigious print media sources was not correlated with change in average Google Trends search traffic. This comparative inattention may also be related to the lack of significant difference, t (139) = -1.390, p =.17, between the intensity of OAR from quoted utterances (M = 7.98) compared with all others (M = 7.07). In other words, this debate presented aberrant patterns potentially connected with both a low visibility floor of online search behavior, anticipation regarding the following night's event, as well as the two-day overlap of online search behavior with the next night's debate.

CHANGE IN ONLINE SEARCH BEHAVIOR DUE TO THE SECOND 2020 NBC DEMOCRATIC PARTY DEBATE

In a manner similar to the first night, the second 2020 NBC Democratic Party presidential primary debate held on July 27 2019 saw a marked increase in average online search behavior concerning that event's candidates, t (9) 2.970, p =.02. Specifically, average Google Trends search traffic increased substantially from the two days before and day of the debate (M = 3.81, SD = 3.33) to the three days afterward (M = 20.86, SD = 18.55). While Bernie Sanders (M = 10.67), Joe Biden (M = 7.34), and Andrew Yang (M = 6.00) invited moderate interest in the days before the debate, as was the case with the top tier candidates attending first night of debates on NBC, all the other contenders onstage during the second night attracted average online search numbers below 5 on the 100-point Google Trends search traffic metric prior to the debate.

The lower levels of initial interest can be seen, in part, as leading to the substantial increase in search traffic considering candidates in the days following the debate. As seen in figure 7.4, this increase was largely propelled by internet searches regarding Kamala Harris and Marianne Williamson. Both candidates, despite the disparity of their electoral status, experienced extreme jumps in interest thanks to their respective debate performances. All other candidates saw minor or moderate increases in online search behavior. While eventual nominee Biden neared an average twenty-point increase in

Google Web Search Change

Figure 7.4.   Change in Google Web Searches for NBC Night 2 2020 Democratic Party Debate. *Source:* **Created by the author.**

online search behavior, in comparison with the first night, average Google Trends traffic was slightly weaker.

Change in internet search volume regarding the second night of the NBC-hosted event showed that candidates reflected patterns, or more accurately, the lack thereof, seen with the first night of debates. Specifically, speaking time, r (9) = .23, p = .52, was only weakly correlated with increased average online search behavior. However, aggregate OAR intensity, r (9) = .56, p = .10, and being quoted in the major legacy newspapers, r (9) = .45, p = .19, were moderately correlated with change in Google Trends search activity. Thus, while candidate dominance of attention and ability to elicit intense audience reaction during the debate, as well as being covered in the major newspapers in this event's aftermath was correlated with Google Trends search traffic to an extent, these relationships did not exhibit the strong levels of correlation seen in the initial 2016 presidential primary debates. However, compared to the previous night's debate the relationships were stronger. While there were significant differences, t (137) = -1.794, p =.08, between the intensity of OAR associated with quoted utterances (M = 7.46) when compared with all others (M = 6.30), the strength of the relationship was not as strong as seen during the 2016 debates. This suggests that while the intensity of the audience's applause-cheering and laughter had both a direct and indirect impact upon online search behavior, it was not as strong a relationship as seen during the initial 2016 primary debates for both parties.

The drop-off in the average online search behavior from the first to the second night of the Democratic Party presidential debates held and broadcast by NBC may have reflected the overabundance of choices available to viewers and their exhaustion with keeping up with all twenty candidates onstage over both nights. This may be seen as reflected in the online search behavior focusing largely on Kamala Harris and Marianne Williamson. With Harris, her defining moment attacking Joe Biden on his busing policy position in the 1970s can be seen as strongly related to her increased visibility. On the other hand, Williamson's debate performance as a whole was memorably off-kilter, and included a closing statement that ended with the line "I'm going to harness love for political purposes. I will meet you [Trump] on that field and sir, love will win." In short, Williamson's candidacy was notable for the new age guru's unorthodox approach that built upon her fame as spiritual guide for *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. In short, while curiosity may have driven online search behavior for Williamson, interest and enthusiasm were likely behind Harris's increased Google Trends traffic.

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING CHANGING CANDIDATE VISIBILITY DUE TO THE INITIAL PRIMARY DEBATES

The overall patterns of change in online search behavior in the two days prior to and day of the debate when compared with the three days after the event, across the initial four debates of the 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns suggest substantial public attention is aroused and interest invested in the candidates onstage. In essence, these events serve as a "coming out" party for at least a portion of the candidates as they are introduced to the wider political audience. However, closer inspection of figures 7.1–7.4 reveals a "Matthew effect" (Matthew 25:29) in which the majority of the increased average of online search traffic concerns the front-runners; in essence, the "rich" in terms of online search behavior before the debates become "richer" in their aftermath (Bible 1996). In only one case did a top-tier candidate experience a decrease in average Google Trends search traffic. Here Jeb Bush saw over an average of an eight-point decline in online search behavior in the aftermath of the August 6, 2015, FOX News Republican Party debate, largely due to his being overshadowed by Donald Trump's radical performance during the debate and in the days afterward.

Second-tier candidates Ben Carson, Tulsi Gabbard, and Marianne Williamson did experience substantially increased online search behavior in the immediate aftermath of the debates. However, what ensued was the prototypical pattern of discovery, scrutiny, and decline regarding their candidacies (Benoit 2013; Dowdle et al. 2016; Steger 2013). Furthermore, comparison

of the first night of the 2020 NBC Democratic Party debates with the second night suggests that while there was greater increased online search behavior across the majority of the candidates after the first night, the second night evidenced a bifurcated pattern. Here two of the candidates (Kamala Harris and Marianne Williamson) received greater average amounts of Google Trends search traffic, whereas all other candidates experienced diminished interest in comparison with the previous night. This suggests that there might be a level of fatigue with so many candidates onstage over the course of two nights.

The limited number of cases analyzed here constrains conclusions and reflect media ecology but not necessarily individual behavior (Arendt & Fawzi 2019; Trevisan et al. 2018); however, the results from the initial four presidential primary debates from 2016 and 2020 provide insights that reliably reflect these events' effects. Correlational analysis suggests that increased online search behavior may be driven not so much by dominance of attention as by the intensity of the in-person debate audience's reaction. While the qualitative measure of elite legacy press coverage is strongly correlated with change in average Google Trends traffic from the days before to the days after the debate, further analysis suggests that even in this case, OAR intensity plays an indirect role in the choice of candidate quotes (see chapter 6). In short, it appears those acting as spectators are transformed to interested parties in great part through OAR intensity from the in-person audience.

In conclusion, when it comes to increased online search behavior the in-person audience aids the decisions of those following from home by identifying through their applause-cheering, laughter, and booing which candidate or candidates are worthy of greater attention. While the visibility and recognition online search behavior is premised upon does not necessarily lead to voting behavior, the online information searched for and accessed can propel or sink a candidacy. This online search behavior, starting with recognizing a candidate's name, may be used as a means to becoming more involved in supporting a presidential campaign to deal with issues that only they can lead followers through. Thus, the in-person audience can, and likely does, play a substantial role in the decisions by those following presidential campaigns, both directly and indirectly helping the at-home audience decide which option is the best leadership option.

Chapter 8

Debates Are Broken

Can We Fix Them (and Save Representative Democracy)?

The choice of the President of the United States (POTUS), as is the case with any leader, is a difficult one. The decisions voters make are based not just upon trusting that the individual selected represents the optimal choice but is also founded upon the faith that the institutions they aim to lead will filter out the inappropriate options, leaving only the best possible alternatives. Because representative democracy relies upon an informed citizenry, the institutions we tend to rely upon for this information—the political parties and the mass media—play an incredibly powerful role in informing and educating citizens. However, these institutions may no longer successfully be carrying out these functions; indeed, they may be undermining the foundations of representative government by enabling the on-screen misinformation, if not deception, of voters.

This book makes the argument that the once useful tool of presidential debates, which has long provided a forum for comparison, ranking, and choice of national leadership, now apparently has become a liability. With the manner in which debates are currently implemented, candidates use strategies that allow them to present the appearance of possessing leadership qualities that they do not necessarily hold. In other words, presidential candidates can engage in "cheap talk" and deceptive posturing without concerted challenge. The hazards deriving from this lack of scrutiny are accentuated with the primary debates when the respective parties choose their presidential nominees thanks to a process that gives preference to style over substance; perhaps more distressing is that this approach may rely more upon superficial recognition rather than thoughtful cognition. This in turn has led to leadership choices that are arguably mismatched with contemporary problems.

Modern issues are often ambiguous or even seemingly impossible to solve yet demand competent leadership to merely manage. "Wicked problems" such as pandemics, climate change, technological transformation, among others, involve large-scale coordination and trade-offs that are often sub-optimal, and have disproportionate payoffs that call for flexible, subtle, and circumspect leadership (Spisak et al. 2015; Van Vugt & von Rueden 2020; Weible & Sabatier 2018). Because many modern political problems tend be based upon incomplete or contradictory information, multiple opinions, and interconnectedness with other problems (Zahariadis 2019), enterprising individuals wishing to gain power can market themselves as leaders by asserting constructed narratives with ready-made, and often simplistic, solutions they, the putative leader, alone possesses (Shanahan et al. 2017; Spisak et al. 2015). These narratives, in turn, may be seen as appealing to evolved predispositions by matching highly crafted verbal narratives in which the potential leader presents heroic actions to vanquish villainous adversaries and/or save power-less victims with physical capacity cues and nonverbal signal repertoire of a candidate.

The end result of this is frequently a mismatch between the leader that emerges and their ultimate effectiveness in dealing with complex real-world issues. As argued by evolutionary leadership theory (ELT) this is likely due to our evolved preferences for physiological characteristics and behavioral traits that do not address modern problems so much as reprise what was needed in an environment that was not only less complex but also less forgiving (Smith et al. 2018; Van Vugt & Ahuja 2011; Van Vugt & Smith 2019; von Rueden 2020). Debates as they are currently carried out, especially during the most recent presidential primaries, exacerbate the mismatch between our evolved predispositions and our current needs. They do so by providing a mediated face-to-face context (Masters 1989) where competitors and moderators have little opportunity to challenge claims and confront narratives. Furthermore, candidates in these contexts have incentives to exaggerate internal and external threats to rally supporters at the expense of broadening and build-ing the coalition they would lead, or even tending and befriending those suffering loss. Perhaps most importantly, these debates provide only a brief glimpse into the personalities and traits of candidates and in a manner that makes the ability to reliably demonstrate competence and trustworthiness almost random.

In this concluding chapter the findings from all the previous chapters are reassessed in light of how the most important, yet often overlooked, partner in debates—the audience—is affected by the manner in which debates are presented. While presidential debates, especially in the latter stages of cam-paigns, may not necessarily change viewer voting choice, they can inform and educate the viewing public regarding the issues being faced, the policy

options available, and the economic, social, and moral implications of the decisions to be made. Perhaps more importantly, debates provide insights into the candidates themselves. Due to their spontaneity and relatively unmediated nature, especially in comparison with other forms of communication such as speeches and advertisements, debates have the potential to reveal the knowledge, intelligence, thoughtfulness, and associated leadership style and traits of the contenders. This is thanks largely to the open conversational nature of these events in which candidates, moderators, and crucially, the in-person audience are active participants.

Ultimately, the aim of this concluding chapter is to summarize findings and provide insights by which debates, most specifically presidential primary debates, may be altered—or even changed wholesale—to best meet the leadership needs of modern republics. Because the United States presidential primary debates have come to play a consequential part of the electoral process for all citizens, politically involved or not, these events are an especially salient focus. Regardless of the nature of representative government, debates or those events that might replace them, should be informative regarding the nature of the candidates in terms of their knowledge, values, leadership style, and ability to work with and lead others. Thus we start by considering those factors that play a role in the choice of nominees and how the findings presented in this book enlighten their impact.

FACTORS CURRENTLY PLAYING A ROLE IN THE CHOICE OF PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEES

It is easy to claim that debates are broken, especially in light of the last two cycles of presidential general election debates that shone a spotlight on just how ruptured they have become when the norms of politeness are followed by neither many of the candidates nor audience members (see chapter 1). However, debates have long been considered as less-than-useful for deliberate democratic choice. Previously derided as "side-by-side press conferences" (Lanoue & Schrott 1991; Schroeder 2016) with little effect on voting choices (McKinney 2021; McKinney & Warner 2013; Schrott & Lanoue 2008), the relevance of debates has been the focus of much recent tension by both political parties and individual candidates who challenge their relevance.

Less easy to accomplish is diagnosing just what is wrong with debates and how to fix them. Over two decades ago a group of communication scholars, the Racine Group, reviewed research regarding debates and presented findings to inform their structure and, in turn, bolster representative democracy. Their extensive review was a groundbreaking effort that "is not definitive but is a first attempt at codifying, encouraging, and stressing the importance

of . . . research on televised campaign debates" (200). Importantly, it provides a framework to organize the unique observational findings presented in this book while considering the changing nature of primary debates. Now that the "invisible primary" is only too visible and has been penetrated by individuals without the highly important, if not required, political experience needed to lead a nation understanding what works and what does not in these highly watched public proceedings may provide a way forward.

This section considers those factors seen as potentially influencing debates and how they are received by the mass media and the general public in the United States. While findings from this book may be used in reference to other cultures, Bull and colleagues note variation in what elicits OAR based upon the rhetoric, what type of OAR is acceptable, and whether OAR is largely collective or involves individuals (Bull & Feldman 2011; Bull & Miskinis 2014; Choi & Bull 2021; Choi et al. 2016; O'Gorman & Bull 2020). The things that matter include: context (when in the electoral season a debate takes place, the nature of the audience, and how the candidates are presented); format (length of the debate and types of responses to different topics and questions); participants (who takes part and how many); what the candidates say and how they present themselves, and; how the media covers the event and how this coverage is diffused through nontraditional channels including internet search engines. While televised debates in the current format may change, as they have done since the 1960 Nixon-Kennedy presidential debates, the rationale behind debates is something that should be preserved. This means starting with the basic axiom that the audience decides, and then finding those ways of presenting and testing candidates in a manner that not only engages viewer attention but entertains and educates as many individuals as possible.

Context Matters

As pointed out by the Racine Group (Racine 2002) "Debates do not occur in a vacuum nor are they watched and interpreted in one" (206). What held true for the debates prior to the 2000 presidential election can be seen as holding firm in the decades since, albeit in an amplified manner. This intensification is due to the continued influence of the twenty-four-hour news cycle and the pervasive effect of social media. While the 2016 and 2020 presidential primary debates did not see an incumbent onstage (although Joe Biden may be considered as a continuation of the Barack Obama administration—albeit four years later), such factors as timing, location, and audience composition play a role in response.

Timing Matters

Timing can encompass many things, especially as the scheduling of primary debates can affect if they are viewed. Certainly, when during a week a debate is shown can influence viewership with certain nights, such as school nights or on nights competing with popular cultural events, less viewer-friendly. This potential for counterprogramming was the case when FOX Sports broadcast NFL Thursday night football during the third 2020 general election presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden (see chapter 1). Likewise, time of day can affect who views a debate and willingness to pay attention. Lessons learned from the initial 2016 Republican Party debates are that "drive-time" debates are not viewed with the same excitement as "prime-time" debates, largely because there is a perception of those taking part as being "second-string" (see chapters 4 and 6).

Perhaps most important is when during the electoral cycle a debate is broadcast. A major shift in debate viewership has occurred over the past four presidential election cycles. More precisely, peak debate viewership shifted from occurring just prior to important statewide primary elections such as the Iowa caucuses, the New Hampshire primary, and Super Tuesday to the first debate of the preprimary season (see chapter 2). While the debates immediately prior to state elections still draw substantial viewership, since the 2016 presidential election they have been supplanted in sheer viewership by the initial debates with their "big reveal" of prospective political party contenders. This obviously has implications for how candidates present themselves, are covered by the media, and are seen by the viewing public, with more well-known—even notorious—candidates now provoking more anticipation than those long-shot candidates who worked to build slow and inexorable momentum in past elections.

Location Matters

Because OAR is based upon the charismatic connection that a speaker has with followers, which is in turn informed by their sharing social identity, having a better understanding of where the audience comes from and their connection with a political party matters in what the candidates' reception will be. With the United States a republic comprised of fifty distinct states spanning a continent—and beyond—it can be expected there will be a great deal of regional variation in what policy issues are most important and what solutions are more feasible. Likewise, the audience members representing the political party will have different perspectives based upon the faces of the party they represent.

The "Home Field Advantage" Matters

The physical locale where debates are held can play a role in reception of individual candidates by conferring "home field advantage" providing even lower-tier candidates preferential status. During the 2016 FOX News Republican Party debate Ohio Governor John Kasich, despite being on the margins of the debate stage and, consequently, contention received substantially more OAR than did any other candidate, with the exception of Donald Trump, due to being in front of a Cleveland crowd. Likewise, Carly Fiorina's reception by her fellow Californians in the audience eclipsed her competitors, with both her speaking time and OAR well beyond that expected by her electoral status. Finally, during the 2020 Democratic Party primary debates Juan Castro was given a hero's welcome by the first night's Miami assembly, largely due to him being the sole Latino candidate onstage. His reception was so extreme that his OAR overshadowed, even doubled, that received by any of the other candidates that night—including front-runners Elizabeth Warren and Beto O'Rourke. While there may be little way to predict which candidates will ultimately make the stage, there is no place like home—or somewhere that feels like home—for an exuberant audience welcome.

Audience Membership Matters

During the tone-setting first Republican Party debate of the 2016 presidential race, the debate not only had political novices onstage, but arguably also in the audience. Many of those Ohio audience members casting their vocal vote through applause-cheering, laughter, and booing likely did not necessarily represent the first, second, or even third faces of the Republican Party (see chapter 2). Instead, many of the audience members were probably only weakly connected to the Republican Party's established membership, policy positions, and values. On the other hand, the second Republican Party 2016 primary debate audience was a more intimate affair presumably populated largely by party elites and big-money donors. This hard-core partisan audience thus likely had an interest in conserving conservative policies and positions. In other words, the former group likely had no real stake in the political party and it being taken over by pandering populists; conversely, the latter group of establishment elites may have had too much behind the scenes control over the party already (Farah 2004; Minow & LaMay 2008; Schroeder 2016). While the composition of the debate audiences is not known, there was an obvious oscillation between the two whether based upon differences in geography and/or status within the party.

　　Regardless of audience composition, whether at the beginning of presidential electoral campaigns, in the heat of the primaries, or during the final

head-to-head debates, OAR matters. It does so by affecting not just those on the scene, but also those viewing on the screen. Not only do we know this from experience by hearing canned laugh tracks throughout our media consuming lives, research reviewed in chapter 3 shows an effect on viewer perceptions of candidate traits, especially that of trustworthiness. Likewise, evaluation of change in online search behavior due to the debates carried out in chapter 7 suggests individual candidate connection with the audience, as evidenced by intense OAR, matters both directly and indirectly through legacy media coverage. The effect of OAR as a form of social influence can be seen as especially salient when the social identity is not a compelling factor in candidate evaluation, as is the case with primary debates where political party identity is held constant. Due to the social influence of the in-person audience and their OAR, in concert with candidate responses that often are opaque, relying on how the studio audience responds makes sense when the audience decides which candidate is the most appropriate leader.

Format Matters

As noted by the Racine Group, the formats in which debates are presented have been subject to dispute since at least the Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858 (Racine 2002). Whereas these seven pre–Civil War debates were on average three hours long, since the advent of televised presidential debates in 1960, these events have rarely approached that duration. Even in the case of longer debates, such as the 2016 Republican Party debate on CNN with its accommodating of eleven candidates, commercial breaks and the multiple candidates onstage provided a respite from continuous scrutiny. This CNN debate was three hours long to accommodate an additional candidate and give all onstage the opportunity to present themselves and their policy preferences and values but instead, was fatiguing not just for the candidates, but likely for the viewers.

The Number of Candidates Onstage Matters

Televised debates by their nature focus on competition, whether multiple primary candidates onstage jousting and jostling for attention, or general election debates pitting two party candidates against each other. While debates are useful for showing thin slices of intellectual capability and personality traits, these reveals are only skin deep. More disturbingly, events such as debates might preselect for narcissists who have only surface level competence and trustworthiness yet are extremely charismatic and able to fool their audience with cheap talk and posturing.

Selecting leaders based upon such factors as height and weight (Brown et al. 2022; Murray 2014), vocal attributes (Kalkhoff & Gregory Jr. 2008; Klofstad et al. 2012), and facial characteristics (Schubert et al. 2011; Todorov 2017) mattered in our evolutionary past where conflict between groups and individuals was common and leadership requiring dominance was obvious (Spisak et al. 2015; Van Vugt & Ahuja 2011; von Rueden 2020). Leadership, however, is not just about competing for power; it involves mental acuity and agility to navigate a natural and social environment while resolving conflict and creating a shared group goal and identity. The selection for these qualities in our evolved environment involved people who knew each other in a more personal way and opted out of supporting the incompetent or untrustworthy. However, we apparently still automatically make decisions on these bases when choosing leaders (Van Vugt & Smith 2019), even in a modern society where leaders are faced with a varied array of issues and opportunities that are nothing like our evolutionary past (Spisak et al. 2011; Spisak et al. 2015). Such a mismatch between our very real needs for leadership skills that incorporate intelligence, persuasion, and cooperation and the competitive contexts of debates likely leads us to shallow and, potentially, catastrophic choices in leaders that value dominance above all else.

What the Candidates Say and
How They Present Themselves Matters

Ultimately, debates—even with their competitive structure—are conversations with the audience playing an active role through OAR. Put more precisely, according the to the social brain hypothesis (see chapter 3), the upper bounds of conversation groups is four participants, with groups larger than that fragmenting into multiple other conversation groups or, in the case of compelling speakers, audiences (Dunbar 2021; Dunbar et al. 1995; Waller et al. 2011). With debates having a moderator, the audience, and at least one candidate interacting, they can be seen as providing for the upward scaling of participants, largely through increased audience size. Not only have the general election debates largely pitted two candidates against each other as they attempt to win over undecided voters, the great majority of popular sporting contests with individual competitors that lack simple and agreed-upon measures (time, points, etc.) have four participants: the two contenders, a referee/umpire, and the audience. While one candidate and the moderator may have an exchange, as was the case with Donald Trump and Megyn Kelly during his defining moment during the 2016 primaries, ultimately what interests viewers the most are the comparisons made between two candidates.

This on-to-one competitive dynamic breaks down with ten candidates onstage at once, especially when all candidates necessarily rival each other

for attention and electoral visibility. The most obvious and rewarding strategy is interrupting each other for speaking time (as seen in chapters 1, 4 & 5) and then afterward complaining about not receiving their fair share. Furthermore, the nature of the rules put into use allows for a response to an attack or mention by another candidate; this in turn benefits the speaking time of the front-runner because they are most often the target of attacks.

The evidence presented in chapter 2 suggests that the networks and the political parties are complicit in the deterioration of their role in preserving a functioning professionalized representative government by their allowing inexperienced, yet popular public figures, onstage. For the Republican Party in the 2016 presidential primaries this was most obviously the case with not just Donald Trump, but also Carly Fiorina; both were afforded extensive, arguably unearned, coverage by virtue of their being celebrity rich people. In 2020 the Democratic Party equaled this imprudent naivete by hosting two political amateurs, Andrew Yang and Marianne Williamson, providing them precious space and time on the debate stage. While celebrities in politics is not unprecedented—especially considering Arnold Schwarzenegger's ascent to being governor of California thanks in large part to his Hollywood persona—it presents a disturbing trend when seen on a national scale. Furthermore, given the structural limitations of a two-party system, combined with a largely confidential memoranda of understanding regarding debate organization, both political parties are complicit and responsible (Farah 2004; Minow & LaMay 2008; Schroeder 2016).

Media Coverage Matters

Because debates are at their heart media events, the role of those in front of and behind the cameras are substantial in the structuring of outcomes. While they may not be as explicitly responsible as the political parties, the networks are the implementing partners. Decisions made on the fly by moderators and the behind-the-camera team, even with guidance from preset and agreed rules, can have a substantial effect on public perceptions. The unwillingness or inability to enforce agreed-upon rules may lead to chaotic interactions as well as potentially the trafficking in unconfronted falsehoods; on the other hand, too rigid an enforcement of rules may stifle the naturally evolving discussion, and with it the ability of candidates to confront each other, that entertains and informs. Likewise, the media covering these events can in the aftermath frame post-debate perceptions of winners, losers, and the ignored. Ultimately, this coverage can influence outcomes beyond what was perceived as resonant moments by those watching (Lukito et al. 2021) by condensing single debates, even campaigns, into defining moments (see chapters 6 and 7)

Moderators Matter

Moderators asking difficult questions concerning the knowledge held by the candidates matters—especially for a political system that relies upon the rule of law. Rick Perry's inability to remember the three Federal agencies he proposed defunding made him the target of mockery and effectively ended his presidential dreams; he later held the position of Secretary of Energy in the Trump administration, a department he had claimed was unnecessary during this debate. He ultimately appreciated its role when he became its leader, punctuating his lack of insight during his presidential campaign.

While behind-the-scenes maneuvering concerning who would moderate specific debates have long been the case (Farah 2004; Minow & LaMay 2008; Schroeder 2016), this is largely invisible to the general public. Now, with less-experienced candidates who are not as invested in the system, public attacks on the moderators themselves has become a favored strategy. As pointed out in chapter 6, Donald Trump's attack on Megyn Kelly for asking about the rather public accusations about the sexual harassment and sexual assault allegations following him, as well as his general misogynistic behavior, provided him the opportunity to not only seed a defining moment that lived on in the press, but also avoided affording other candidates attention from a competitive exchange. In a similar manner, Trump canceling out from the January 28, 2016, Republican Party primary debate on FOX News can be seen as retribution for this initial debate, but also can be seen as a way of avoiding scrutiny by the one media outlet trusted by Republicans generally.

Possibly because of the humbling nature presented by moderator questions, which have been referred to as "gotcha questions," the debate moderators themselves have become a source of much public contention. Because moderators not only play the important role of enforcing rules but also asking difficult questions, and then following up on them, they have increasingly been seen as politically motivated (Richman 2022). By being seen as taking "too active" a role in the debates, moderators have been moved to the forefront of the conversation, arguably supplanting the candidates themselves.

Network Coverage Matters

Candidates competing for speaking time are concurrently contending for camera time—to be seen is to be noticed and treated as a legitimate and visible contender—and with multiple candidates onstage it is easy to get lost in the crowd. The research reported on in chapters 4 and 5 show that front-runners receive more speaking time. Perhaps as important, this speaking time carries with it precious camera time that can reflect and affect electoral results (Grabe & Bucy 2009; Messaris 1998; Nagel et al. 2012). Showing

up proportionately more in multicandidate camera shots is often a harbinger of candidate irrelevance and their dropping out. Furthermore, experimental research suggests that camera shots of the candidates in close proximity to the face increases viewer anxiety (Mutz 2007; Mutz 2015). This accentuation of intense conflict is definitely the case when two candidates are shown in split screen (Gong & Bucy 2015, 2016; Stewart & Hall 2016). Combined, these factors may be seen as reinforcing the status quo even in wide-open elections by reinforcing visibility.

CONCLUSIONS

Our overstuffed presidential primary debates are much like fast food; sometimes more isn't better. Indeed, if there is one lesson to learn from our past electoral cycles, sometimes the best options don't rise to the forefront, and we choose something familiar, not necessarily better. To better reflect the realities of governing—which are so very different from campaigning—we need to consider changing how we choose our leaders.

How we choose our leaders matters, especially when we ignore what leadership is supposed to accomplish. If leadership is equated with visibility and the name recognition that comes with it (see chapter 7), and selection is based upon this, then entertainers without the tangible and important skills of negotiation, collaboration, and creativity for problem solution will receive undue preference based upon their communication and motivation skills. As Barbara Sinclair's work regarding the US Senate from over three decades ago has shown, the allure of media can overwhelm the skills needed for successful public service. Sinclair showed the norms that allow for work to be accomplished in a large representative body, such as apprenticeship, legislative work, specialization, courtesy, reciprocity, and institutional patriotism, broke down (Sinclair 1986) while noting that, among other reasons: "Factors such as party decline and the increased importance of the national media, especially TV, disrupted a relatively stable, bounded and predictable policy making system, one characterized by a limited number of significant actors and relatively fixed lines of conflict" (904). This erosion in civility current with decreased professional competence has been seen not only at the national level, but also in state legislatures (Lovrich et al. 2021) and would suggest the need for representative democracies to emphasize competence and trustworthiness over dominance in leader selection.

Presidential debates are based upon the conceit that the best way to choose leaders is by parsing and comparing the policy positions held by the candidates. While this information is important and may be used to ascertain competence, the belief in this "rational voter" that collects information,

compares options across multiple metrics, then rank orders preferences before choosing has long since been discredited. However, the institutions based upon this remain, and in the form of debates threatens a functioning republic. In a world defined by twenty-four-hour news cycles and virtually incessant social media feedback, the ninety-minute snapshots of candidates while competing for dominance of attention over the other candidates may be seen as outdated, or at least in need of transformation. With reality shows being curated for dramatic effect, this approach might not necessarily be an immediate option—although they might provide insights into how unfiltered coverage might provide us more insightful glimpses into the intelligence, character, and personality of our presidential candidate. Likewise, there are numerous other live broadcast formats that may provide a unique, entertaining, and educational approach that ultimately lets the audience decide with more reliable information who their leader should be.

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