

# Presidential Debate Analysis Proposal

By Michael Wermert, Tres James, Jordan Neely, Isaac Stone, Winston Boyd

## I. Objective

The objective for this project is to use digital archaeological techniques to analyze previous United States presidential campaign debate transcripts. The purpose of the analysis is to determine if any debate factors (use of certain words, referencing certain issues, personal attacks, etc.) correlate with the outcome of the following election as well as the general public's perception of who won the debate.

## II. Motivation

The United States Presidential Debates began in 1960. The first two presidential candidates to debate were John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Many historians claim that Kennedy's strong performance in the debate was one of the main reasons that he would go on to win the presidency. In our project, we want to analyze the language that is used by the candidates in the debates and see if certain words or phrases can correlate with better debate performance.

## III. Discussion of Data Sources

We will be retrieving the transcripts for the presidential debates from <https://debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/>. This website provides us with all of the transcripts from the televised presidential debates throughout history. We will be retrieving election results from <https://www.archives.gov/electoral-college/1960>. This website will give us the electoral college results for all of the presidential elections that we will be examining. We also hope to find other opinion poll sources that allow us to answer our research questions (i.e. Which candidate did you think performed better?).

We will be using the python libraries for graphing and data analysis that we go over throughout the class to generate our conclusions. Some specific examples are numpy and matplotlib.

There are several different analyses that the team would like to perform.

1. Did candidates who won the election use different words more often than their opponents?
2. Did candidates who won the election talk about particular issues more than their opponents?
3. Do candidates who are widely considered to have "won" a debate use certain language?

4. Are candidates who talk about certain issues more likely to win key battleground states?
5. Determine if interruptions positively or negatively affect performance?
6. Ad Hominem/ Personal Attacks
  - a. How much do debates affect polling numbers (before and after)?
7. Who won the election vs won debates

## IV. Expected Outcome

Our expected outcome is that we will be able to answer these questions confidently with the data analysis that we will pursue. We want to confidently paint a picture of whether or not debates have a meaningful impact on the election and what kind of rhetoric is produced by winning candidates. We also expect to see how and in what ways the rhetoric has changed over time.

## V. Team Member Roles

Michael Wermert - Project Manager, Analysis for the Elections in 1960, 1976, 1980

Tres James - Analysis for Elections 1984, 1988, 1992

Jordan Neely - Analysis for Elections 1996, 2000

Isaac Stone - Analysis for Elections 2004, 2008

Winston Boyd - Analysis for Elections 2012, 2016

## VI. Time-line of Milestones

### Sprint 1

- Set up guidelines for Analysis - i.e. charts, graphs, information want to be gathered, etc.
- Get data processing set up using python libraries

### Sprint 2

- Have the complete analysis done by then
- Collectively collaborate piecing analyses together.
- Write up the progress report with team members.

### Sprint 3

- Have finished the project's main purpose.
- Fix any bugs/mishaps we come across.
- Standardize the information to be processed in the final product.

### Sprint 4

- Extrapolate on the project if need be.
- Finalizing the final report
- Complete whatever is left for the final presentation.