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AUTHOR   Meadow, Robert G.; Jackson-Beeck, Marilyn
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ABSTRACT

         Since voters rarely have access to a candidate's
unexpurgated statements, they rely on political advertising, film
footage, and media interpretations. Thus, their expectations of
candidates generally reflect selective reporting and
self-aggrandizement. A framework for researching the degree of
understanding reached between politicians and the public may be seen
through the use of the coorientation model used in interpersonal
research. A content analysis was prepared from transcripts of the
first of the series of presidential debates in both 1960 and 1976,
classified in terms of topics, issues, and other categories relevant
to a candidate's political philosophy. A profile of each candidate's
philosophy was prepared and compared to his revealed position.
Postelection disillusionment was found to be proportional to the
degree of variance between these positions. Such research in
conjunction with measures of public perceptions should enable
political communication researchers to understand performance in
office and subsequent support demonstrated for elected leaders.
(References and tabulated analysis data are included.) (DF)

Candidate Political Philosophy:

Revelations in the 1960 and 1976 Debates[*]

Robert G. Meadow

Marilyn Jackson-Beeck,

Annenberg School of Communications

University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, Pa.

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Candidate Political Philosophy: Revelations in the 1960 and 1976 Debates

From numerous studies in communications and political science we now
know much about voting behavior and mass media performance during presidential
election campaigns. But research efforts concentrating on voter information
or mass media's campaign coverage miss an important aspect of the matter--
the candidates. As a result, inadvertently, we know little that is concrete
or predictable about candidates and leaders.

Without a crystal ball, no one can predict candidates' performance in office.
But through political communication research, we can advance our knowledge
to the point that politicians' behavior need not be witnessed in total surprise.
We should be able to peer behind the mask worn in public, develop better under-
standing of politicians, and predict with greater accuracy politicians' behaviors.

'The potential value of this knowledge extends not only to political re-
searchers; it touches as well on popular support, a matter of concern to
candidates and constituents. We know that politicians often revise campaign
rhetoric and attempt to change images (e.g., the "New Nixon" in 1968). Mean-
time, politicians' fundamental political philosophies remain unchanged. Public
opinion researchers, for example, have noted repeated trends and cycles in
presidential popularity (cf. Stimson, 1975) noting that much dissolution
of support for presidents in non-crisis situations stems from impatience with
the rate of promised change. But popular support may decline also as a function
of leaders' perceived failure to fulfill promises (spoken and unspoken). Con-
stituents in other words may become disappointed because of their own under-
standable failure to judge candidates accurately. Constituents so rarely have
access to candidates' unexpurgated statements, relying for needs on political
advertising, film footage, and media interpretations of issue positions, that

their expectations of candidates generally are constructed on the basis of selective reporting or self-aggrandizement.

There were, however, two elections promising voters escape from the typical pattern of media dependency-- the 1960 and 1976 elections, when there were televised debates between presidential candidates. In these elections, voters had the opportunity to see and hear the candidates directly present themselves and their issue positions in response to questions posed by journalists. Through the debates, there was a possibility of accurate, relatively spontaneous transmission of candidate philosophies, in turn providing the possibility of accurate expectations and ultimately less voter disheartenment and loss of support for politicians after post-election honeymoons.

While we would not argue that the very basis of representative democracy--popular control of policy through elected officials -- is threatened by voters' inability to be fully cognizant of leaders' political philosophies, this question warrants careful empirical examination. This can be accomplished by reference to the coorientation model (cf. McLeod and Chaffee, 1972) used in interpersonal communication research. Primarily concerned with individual's evaluations of objects and preceptions of others' evaluations of the same objects, the standard coorientation model can be revised slightly to provide a framework for discussing the understandings reached (or not) between politicians and the public. With regard to candidates and the public, such a revised coorientation model appears as Figure 1.

(FIGURE I HERE)

If voters are issue oriented, winning politicians are likely to be those with accurate perceptions of constituents' positions (line D-A) and who tailor their stands accordingly (E-A). The most satisfied constituents are likely to

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be those in agreement with candidates' true positions (A-B). However, as indicated earlier, true positions are masked, purposively and fettered by the nature of media coverage, so voters rarely know "B" as determined by politicians' long-standing political philosophy. Instead, even the most informed voters rely on candidates' revealed political positions, at best achieving "accuracy" along the C-E line.

So long as there is little difference between politicians'revealed position ("E") and true position ("B"), the public's post-election disillusionment is likely to be small. But if the gap is great, disillusionment or decline in support is likely to be great (barring the chance that politicians agree perfectly with the public's position). Thus, as a coorientation problem, one question is how to narrow the "accuracy" gap defined by the triangular area CBE. First, however, comes the empirical question: How to access politicians' true political position?

In our analysis, presidential debates provide appropriate data for accessing politicians' political philosophies, as we broaden the limits traditionally placed upon content analysis as a methodological tool (Jackson-Beeck and Meadow, 1977). At one level, content data from presidential debates provide a basis for objectively quantifying and analyzing characteristics of "manifest" candidate statements. Then at a higher level, content data can be used to construct a mosaic of candidates' views of the significant factors in the political system, based objectively on the number and type of references to groups, economic actors, and political actors. Furthermore, candidate philosohies may be revealed by proposed types of solutions to current problems; events viewed as significant; regions of the country to which policies are oriented; and time orientations.

Method

For content analysis of the first 1976 presidential debate, first it was necessary to create a complete, accurate transcript (Jackson-Beeck and Meadow, 1978). This was prepared by the authors from studio quality videotapes, annotating the New York Times "verbatim" transcript of the debate (which excluded vocalized pauses, errors of fluency and included several errors and omissions). The 1960 debate transcript was prepared by Clevenger et al. (1962) from professional quality audio tapes and a newspaper transcription. The analysis is limited to only the first debate in each series. Each limited to questions on domestic issues, the formats were similar except for the length (sixty minutes in 1960 and ninety minutes in 1976), and the inclusion of opening statements in 1960.

Both debates 1960 and 1976 were coded by a coder pair using major topics within each speaker turn as the unit of analysis. A total of thirteen topics roughly paralleling cabinet functions formed the basis for unitization, plus two categories covering debate formalities. Multiple units could be housed within individual speaker turns; further, within units, up to ten subjects (i.e., substantive concerns) were coded. A total of thirteen basic topics were investigated: government, transportation and communication; housing; urban problems; health; education; social welfare; economics; foreign affairs; defense; resources; law; and science. "Subjects" encompassed stated concerns such as federal spending; inflation; unemployment; size and scope of federal government; and so on. By definition, each speaker turn in the debates housed at least one topic, but the number of subjects coded varied.

Following classification of the debates in terms of topics and subjects, other debate content relevant to candidate philosophy was analyzed, including explicit references to political officials; occupational, ethnic, and nationality groups; economic actors; dates; times; events; and branches of government.

Reliability tests, performed up to six months after the original coding, revealed satisfactory levels in the 90 percent range based on Holsti's (1969) percentage of agreement formulae.

Results

Earlier it was argued that candidates' issue positions are revealed superficially and often are read from prepared texts. In debate, the situation is less rehearsed. In Table 1 we present the number of topics raised in debate by the candidates in 1960 and 1976. In both debates about half of all major topics related to government and public officials, and one fifth (1960) to one third (1976) dealt with economics. At the same time, the rise and fall of issues over time is apparent. For example, in 1960, security, defense and foreign affairs, and social services were major topics. These were of lesser concern in 1976.

(TABLE I HERE)

While the data in Table 1 may be indicative of broad issue concerns Table 2 and 3 provide more specific information about the candidates' views.

(TABLES 2 and 3 HERE)

Although most time was spent on domestic government as an issue in 1960 and 1976 (cf. Table 1), the issue was discussed in many more dimensions by candidates in 1960. Nearly one-fourth of Nixon's governmental subjects (24%) relate to concrete government action --- either congressional or executive. In contrast, Kennedy demonstrates less concern with action (3%), concentrating instead on abstract topics concerning the nature of the political system and justice within that system. Nixon's concerns and his underlying conception of the political system, in other words, seems to be with political processes of

subsystems (such as the executive branch or Congress) while Kennedy is oriented more to the status of the larger political system.

Differences between candidates in 1976 are not so clear cut as in 1960, but the popular Tweedledum-Tweedledee analogy does not fit. Carter appears more action-oriented than Ford (25% vs 15%) and more leadership oriented than Ford (25% vs 15%), reflecting greater concern with the processes or "nuts and bolts" of government machinery. Ford for his part, tends to deal with the scope and structure of government.

In Table 3, all candidates' discussions of economics are seen to cluster around specific aspects of policy, as regarding unemployment and inflation. But differences exist between candidates. For Kennedy, economic issues stand independent of government action. No government action, system or leadership subjects accompany Kennedy's economic discussions. To some extent, this implies a belief that economic problems can be solved technically without regard to the political processes necessary to deliver the answer. Nixon apparently does not share this view, for fully 35% of the subjects he raises are political, reflecting on leadership qualifications and partisan issues, generally regarding the role of government in economic policies. For the 1976 candidates, differences are present; but again to a lesser extent than in 1960. Carter, the Democrat, reveals a greater linkage of economics to political questions than does Ford. Interestingly, across all candidates, with the exception of Nixon's concern with unemployment, no candidate suggests an economic policy relying exclusively on one or two concerns.

Beyond looking at major topics and subjects discussed by candidates. we examined their comments relevant to political participation (Table 4). Although groups are

(TABLE 4 HERE)

not mentioned as political actors out of proportion to the length of the

debates in 1960 and 1976, one thing is clear: the Democratic candidates reveal

a greater concern for groups than the two Republican candidates. Kennedy and

Carter, whose concern for various groups (and for courting their votes) was

popularized during the campaigns, mentioned political groups as much or more

often than their Republican opponents in every category except economic actors.

Thus it appears that Kennedy and Carter are oriented more toward multi-faceted,

pluralistic political coalitions or groupings, while Ford and Nixon are oriented

more toward strong economic actors or institutions sharing or resolving social

problems.

Table 5 presents specific political actors named in debate by the four

candidates. Overall, Kennedy demonstrates most concern with a variety of political

actors (n=40).

(TABLE 5 HERE)

The other candidates name about the same number of political actors (26 to 27),

but branches of government in which these actors serve differs, suggesting

further differences in candidates' construction of political reality. Notably,

none of the candidates is much concerned about the "people" as political

actors. In particular, the data at this point do not support Carter's alleged

populism. Of interest too, is the extent to which the candidates' perceptions

of actors in government seem to reflect their experiences. Kennedy refers to

the executive and legislative branches with nearly equal frequency. Despite

his aspirations to an executive position, he discusses Congress, the source

his experiences and his qualifications for leadership. Nixon, however, as a

member of the executive branch, refers to that branch in nearly two-thirds of

his specific references to political actors and twice as often as he refers

to the legislative branch over which he partially presided as Vice-President.

Both Kennedy and Nixon, having served in both the House and Senate, generally distinguish between those branches while making statements about Congress. Carter, with no federal legislative experience, refers more generally to Congress. Ford, as a former House minority leader, and in conjunction with service as Vice-President and President, often discusses the House and Senate jointly. Further, despite the fact that he had been President for over two years, he mentions Congress in nearly two-thirds of his references to political actors.

With respect to Table 5, two items warrant special mention. First, the infrequency of mentioning the Supreme Court is striking. Given wide criticism of activist courts for the past few decades and an increasing scope of decisions in both the Warren and Burger Courts, more comments on the Court might have been expected. The candidates, through failure (with one exception) to discuss the Court perhaps reveal their belief in the independence of the judiciary as a third branch of government. As a final note, the Democratic candidates demonstrate a greater concern with state and local government. Despite popular conceptions of Republicans as more favorable to state and local control and decentralized government, neither Ford nor Nixon mentioned states and localities as much as Kennedy and Carter.

(TABLE 6 HERE)

Furthermore (Table 6) Kennedy and Carter make more references to places and regions than Nixon and Ford. Specific cities, states, and regions are fit less often into the topics discussed by the Republicans than by the Democrats who reflect a tendency to humanize the political system. In particular, Ford shows a very parochial view, while Carter (despite his oft-cited lack of experience in foreign affairs) more often refers to regions of the world. Recalling that both the first 1960 and 1976 debates were limited to questions on domestic policies, Kennedy and Nixon both saw foreign implications for

domestic politics more often than Carter and Ford.

(TABLE 7 HERE)

The political-historical context to which the candidates refer is summarized in Table 7, where it appears that some candidates are more familiar with George Santayana's remark that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" than are others. Kennedy, for example, makes references to events more than five years in the past more than twice as much as Nixon. No other candidate relies on such historical references, but other patterns emerge to suggest the philosophy through which candidates view events. Carter for example, mentions many specific events (despite his popularly alleged vagueness and waffling) and maintains an overriding concern with war. Watergate, perceived by Ford himself in election post-mortems to be a crucial issue, is mentioned by Carter, but not extensively. Both Ford and Nixon, representing incumbent administrations, refer less often to historical events. Additionally, there is further evidence of concern for the executive branch and its responsibility. Carter refers to previous administrations thirteen times compared to Ford and Nixon's four and none for Kennedy.

Tables 8 and 9 present a listing of the actors and sectors in the economy (as a political issue) mentioned by the candidates, providing further information on candidate philosophy.

(TABLE 8 HERE)

In Table 8, Kennedy is shown to mention economic actors in only five topics, suggesting an orientation toward political solutions to economic problems. However, his references apply across private and public institutions and individuals. Nixon, who mentions economic sectors twice as often as Kennedy, seems more attuned to the public sector as an economic actor.

Carter's populism is combined with an apparent interest in the private sector. He nevers mentions the public sector alone, and in eleven of thirteen topics referencing economic actors, individuals are referred to specifically. Ford, although he mentions economic actors in more topics than any other candidate, distributes his references across all sectors.

(TABLE 9 HERE)

In Table 9, catergorizing economic actors mentioned by candidates, few specifics are attached to Kennedy's economics. Again Nixon and Ford demonstrate an orientation toward government. Carter once more shows a populist orientation, with over 42 per cent of his references to people as economic actors, compared with 16 per cent for Nixon and 31 per cent for Ford. Moreover, and again in contrast to the criticism of Carter as being uncertain and vague, he mentions seven different private sector actors for a total of twenty   s, compared to three actors for Ford, for a total of eight times.

Some Speculative Conclusions

Partisanship may be declining among voters nowadays for a number of reasons, but one of the more interesting suggestions is that wide use of television news "secularized" politics and made it non-partisan (Robinson, 1977). Our data suggest to some extent that party differences still exist, and that debates underscore these differences. While no two candidates have the same specific political philosophies, the Democratic candidates do have a greater concern for groups, for diverse regions of the country, for the lessons of history, and for social change than the Republican candidates, both of whom expressed more concern for the limits of federal power, the capability of private economic institutions for social change, and less government activism.

On the basis of only four candidates' statements, of course, the data do not achieve significance in a statistical sense, but they are suggestive and tentative evidence of meaningful differences among politicians and between political parties. Differences between politicans from the same party still existing, we ask: What is each candidate's political philosophy according to analysis of debate discussion? And, what do the data suggest about performance in office?

For Kennedy, the data suggest an abstract, conceptual approach to governing, tempered with an understanding of the pluralistic nature of the system, which would lead to predictions of an active yet practical presidency, offering new initiatives. Nixon's statements reveal a more "political" approach to governing, with specific concern for political processes within government, possibly at the expense of outside group participation. Forecasts of a Nixon presidency, at least in 1960, would suggest few bold initiatives, and a tendency to propose programs likely to pass Congress. Were we to predict how each would govern, therefore, we would suggest that Kennedy would be more likely to offer broad programs(e.g., a New Frontier?) while Nixon would direct his attention to specifics, within a status quo framework.

Carter's philosophical underpinnings are those of a manager, for the data demonstrate a concern for leadership and executive control, suggesting that groups are best served through executive leadership. Predictions might be for confrontation between the President and Congress, and for so much managerial concern that policy initiatives would suffer. Ford's view of the system seems to be limited in terms of activity. He implies that Congress should be at the core of policy. Thus a less dynamic and somewhat stagnant presidency would be predicted.

These prognostications, of course, are after the fact. Neither do they offer specific guidelines as to how a candidate once elected, would act on

any given problem. But they do suggest how candidates view the political system and political issues, as well as candidates' personal qualities and candidates' beliefs.

Candidate philosophy of course is only one of many components voters may use in developing their perceptions of candidates. Survey researchers, political scientists, and communication researchers are considering other aspects of candidates to help answer crucial questions in democratic government. In time, by (1) further developing measures of candidates including issues stands, image, and philosophy, and (2) combining these measures with measures of public perceptions, political communication researchers may progress further toward understanding performance in office and consequent support for elected leaders.

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Public   Politician

| (True) Political Position ←—Agreement→ (True) Political Position |

A   B

Congruency   Agreement / Accuracy / Accuracy

Accuracy

"Accuracy"

Publicly Revealed Political
Position
E

Perceptions of Candidates'   Perceptions of Constituents'
Political Position   Political Position
C   D
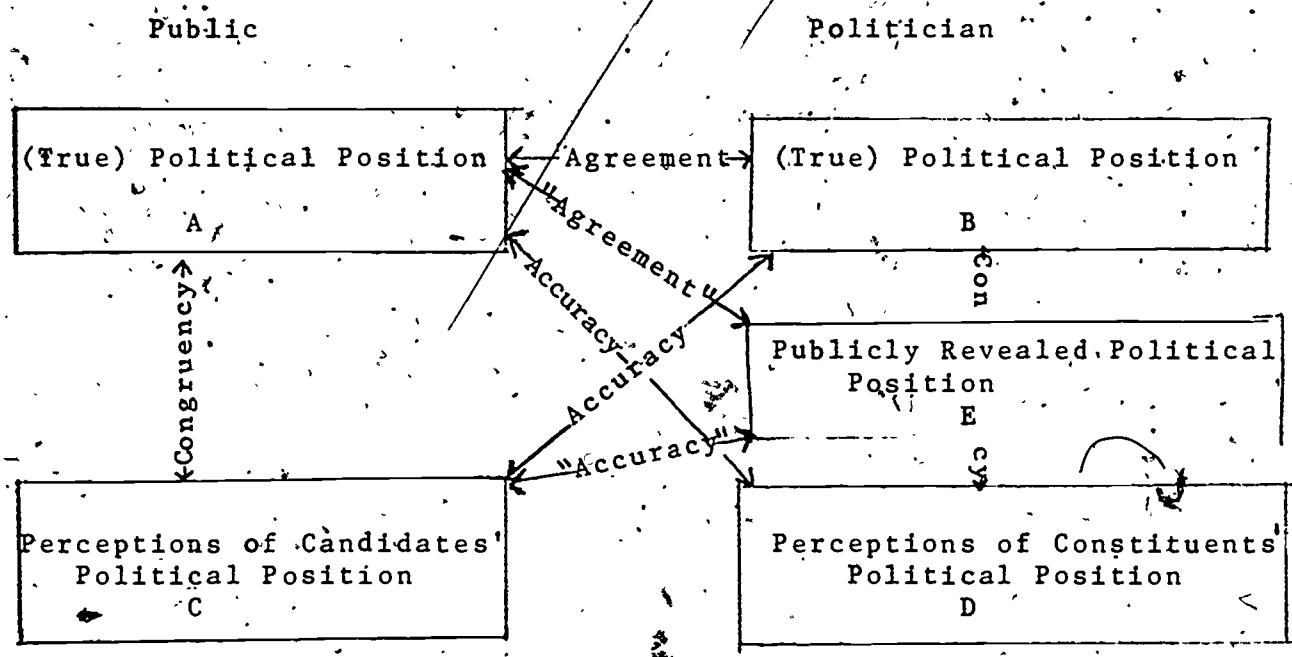
Figure 1. Revised coorientation model describing under-
standings between public and politicians

TABLE 1. TOPICS RAISED BY CANDIDATES IN DEBATE

	1960		1976	
	n	%	n	%
Nature of government	11	11	16	11
Public officials	33	31	56	40
Inflation	6	6	8	6
Unemployment	0	0	12	9
National economy	14	14	28	20
Social services	23	22	8	6
Civil rights and liberties	0	0	0	0
Justice	3	3	3	2
Energy	3	3	7	5
Security	5	5	0	0
Defense	3	3	0	0
Conduct of foreign affairs	3	3	0	0
TOTAL	104	101%*	138	99%

*Rounding error

Table 2.   SUBJECTS MENTIONED BY CANDIDATES IN REGARD TO DOMESTIC
GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS.

	Kennedy		Nixon		Carter		Ford	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Action								
Congress			2	8	1	6	2	10
Executive	1	3	4	16	3	19	1	5
System								
Preservation	2	6	1	4	1	6		
Legal rights	3	9					2	10
Gov't morality	1	3						
Leadership								
Partisanship	6	18	3	10	2	13	3	15
Qualifications	5	15	2	8	2	13		
Scope								
Gov't size	2	6	2	8			2	10
Gov't structure					1	6	2	10
Output								
Programs	2	6	5	20			2	10
Quality	3	9	1	4				
Resources								
Energy			1	4	1	6		
Conservation	1	3						
Economics								
Unemployment					2	13	2	10
GNP, Growth	1	3	1	4	1	6		
Taxes							1	5
System	1	3					1	5
Inflation	2	6	1	4	1	6		
Fed. spending			1	4	1	6	2	10
Foreign								
Security	1	3	1	4				
Defenses	2	6						
Total	33	99%*	25	98%*	16	100%	20	100%

*Rounding error

TABLE 3. SUBJECTS MENTIONED BY CANDIDATES IN REGARD TO
ECONOMICS

	Kennedy		Nixon		Carter		Ford	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Action								
Executive			1	5	2	9		
System								
Legal rights					1	5		
Leadership								
Partisanship			2	10	2	9		
Qualifications			2	10				
Scope								
Gov't size			2	10	3	14	4	24
Output								
Programs	1	11	1	5			1	6
Quality	1	11						
Economics								
Unemployment	1	11	5	25	1	5	1	6
GNP, Growth	1	11			4	18	2	12
Taxes	2	22	1	5	2	9		
System	1	11	2	10	3	14	3	18
Inflation	1	11	2	10	4	18	5	29
Fed. Spending	1	11	1	5			1	6
Foreign								
Security			1	5				
Total	9	99%*	20	100%	22	101%	17	101%*

*Rounding error

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TABLE 4. NUMBER OF TOPICS IN WHICH PEOPLE AND GROUPS
          ARE MENTIONED

	Kennedy	Nixon	Carter	Ford
U.S. Presidents	7	3	10	2
Foreign Leaders	2	1	0	0
Foreign Groups	3	3	0	0
Ideological Groups	7	4	4	4
Occupational Groups	10	10	17	12
Nationality Groups	2	0	6	4
Social Goups	7	6	13	8
Economic Actors	5	10	13	15
Political Actors	17	10	15	14
Total # of topics	18	17	24	23

TABLE 5. POLITICAL ACTORS MENTIONED

	Kennedy	Nixon	Carter	Ford
EXECUTIVE				
Non-specific	2	2	2	2
President, Admin.	9	9	4	2
Exec. Agencies	7	5	5	3
Subtotal	18	16	11	7
LEGISLATIVE				
Congress	4	1	6	13
Senate	7	3	1	1
House	5	3	1	1
Subtotal	16	7	8	15
JUDICIAL				
Supreme Court	0	0	1	0
NON-FEDERAL				
State and Local Gov't	3	0	3	1
The People	3	4	3	2
	6	4	6	3
Total	40	27	26	25

TABLE 6. NUMBER OF TOPICS IN WHICH PLACES MENTIONED

	Kennedy	Nixon	Carter	Ford
U.S. Cities and States	11	9	14	11
Regions of U.S.	4	1	3	1
Foreign Cities	5	5	1	1
Foreign Regions	3	2	4	1
Total	23	17	22	14

TABLE 7. EVENTS NAMED BY CANDIDATES

	Kennedy	Nixon	Carter	Ford
HISTORICAL EVENTS				
1860 Election	2			
Recession of 1954	1			
Recession of 1958	1	1		
Experience of the 1920's	1			
World War II	1			
Depression			3	1
Watergate			2	
Vietnam War			5	1
Civil War			1	
Cambodia Invasion			1	
Energy Crisis of 1973			1	
Bicentennial				1
LEADERSHIP EVENTS				
Truman Administration		2		
Eisenhower Administration		2		
Kennedy Administration			1	
Johnson Administration			1	
Nixon Administration			2	
Ford Administration			7	1
Democratic Administrations				1
Republican Administrations			2	2
Total	6	5	26	7

TABLE 8. SPECIFIC ECONOMIC ACTORS MENTIONED WITHIN TOPICS

	Kennedy	Nixon	Carter	Ford
Private Institutions	1	1	2	3
Public Institutions	2	6		4
Individuals	1	1	5	2
Private and Public	1			1
Public and Individual		1		2
Private and Individual			3	
Private, Public, Indiv.		1	3	3
Number of Topics in Which Economic Actors Mentioned	5	10	13	15

TABLE 9. ECONOMIC SECTORS MENTIONED BY CANDIDATES

	Kennedy	Nixon	Carter	Ford
Government				
Federal	2	7	2	10
State and Local	1	4	0	0
Special Interests	0	0	1	0
	3	11	3	10
Sectors				
Agriculture	2	1	2	0
Labor	1	0	3	1
Industry	0	0	3	2
Manufacturing	1	0	1	0
Small Business	0	0	1	0
Finance, Corps.	0	1	8	5
Construction	0	0	2	0
	4	2	20	8
People				
Individuals	0	1	2	0
Low Income	0	2	5	0
Middle Income	0	0	3	1
High Income	0	0	4	0
Taxpayers	0	0	3	7
Consumers	0	2	0	0
	0	5	17	8
Total	7	18	40	26