

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN TELEVISED PRE-ELECTION DEBATES IN POLAND AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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## **Abstract**

This paper combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies to study the persuasive strategies employed by candidates taking part in televised pre-election debates in Poland and the United States between 1995 and 2016. First, the authors identify the key strategies and calculate the frequency with which they are used by individual candidates. This allows for numerical comparisons between politicians in the two polities, as well as between winners and losers, and candidates of the right and the left politically. These statistical results led the authors to look more closely at the individual styles of two contrasting debaters. We conclude that the rhetorical landscape of political communication does not differ greatly between the two countries; although the data suggest noticeable differences in the approach of political parties and between individuals.

**Keywords:** Persuasion, political communication, political dialogue, rhetoric, debates.

## **1. Introduction**

The research presented in this paper investigates differences in the political communication strategies of candidates running for the highest government office, the presidency and premiership, in the United States of America and Poland. The aim is to identify and compare typical argument strategies found in the persuasive speeches of American and Polish politicians directed at the public during election campaigns. The analysis is performed on material from televised election debates, a type of pre-election communication which has a particular importance: not only through the responses of those who watch the broadcast, but also because the impact of candidates in these debates is measured in opinion polls, the results of which are widely publicised and reach those who did not experience the performances at first hand. No other type of communication used

in the campaign has the same persuasive potential, or ability to focus the electorate, as a debate (Kraus, 2000; Minow and Lamay, 2008; Schroeder, 2000).

Election discourse is characterised by intensive attempts at persuasion, aimed at attracting supporters. Politicians address themselves to the audience with persuasion and encouragements, and the electorate address themselves to politicians, positively or negatively by voting for that candidate or an opponent. This type of political discourse we suggest, then, aims to achieve a specific response. The analysis below shows what means are used to achieve that aim, and how the work of convincing and motivating voters differs between American and Polish politicians.

### **1.1. Election debates**

The origins of pre-election televised debates lie in the United States, where the first, historic, debate between Nixon and Kennedy took place in 1960. After an hiatus of several years, debates were resumed in 1976 and have continued up to the present. Their influence on debates in other countries has been great: even when the organisation of debates in other countries differs from the American model, research shows a good deal of similarity remains (Benoit and Henson, 2011; Benoit and Klyukovski, 2006; Benoit and Sheaffer, 2006; Benoit and Wen, 2007; Jalilifar and Alavi-Nia, 2012). Research on debates has been carried out using a variety of methodologies (argumentational, deliberative, and functional analyses) and from the perspective of various disciplines (political marketing, media communication, sociology, linguistics, and rhetoric). As long ago as 2004, Diana Carlin and Mitchell McKinney counted more than 800 articles, chapters, and books on the topic (McKinney and Carlin, 2004: 204).

Such debates are currently held in 84 different countries around the world (Debates International, 2018) including some of those which score poorly on the Democracy Index and have authoritarian governments (Budzyńska-Daca, 2016). It is worth investigating, therefore, what manner of dialogue with citizens they contain.

Stephen Coleman has presented four main arguments for the value of debates to democracy and political communication.

1. Television debates are the best way to attract large numbers of people, particularly those who are less interested in following the campaign, and for whom the debate may be the only source of knowledge about the candidates.
2. Debates have an educational influence on the electorate, giving them information, and stimulating further pursuit of information on the parties and candidates.
3. Debates provide equal chance for candidates to reach a wide audience, and give candidates with lower support in opinion polls a chance to appear on prime-time television.

4. Debates allow the voters to assess candidates when under stress. (Coleman, 1997: 9).

It should be noted, however, that alongside those enthusiasts who consider the televised debates to be amongst the most important events of the campaign, there are also sceptics. While the first group argue that, in terms of providing information, debates have great advantages over other forms of communication (they are longer than advertising spots which allows a deeper presentation of elements of the programme; they illustrate the differences between the candidates, both in terms of policy and personality; candidates behave more naturally than in carefully prepared, pre-recorded election broadcasts (Benoit and Henson, 2007: 36–48; Faas and Maier, 2004: 56; Faas and Maier 2011: 75–91)), the sceptics question their influence at the ballot box, and refer to the 'myth' of the first American debate, between Kennedy and Nixon, and its impact on the vote (Meadow, 1983: 36). They emphasise that due to the short time allowed for answers, the debating candidates can only address serious political issues in a brief manner, presenting general positions already well-known throughout the campaign (Bitzer and Rueter, 1980; Meadow, 1983). A key role is played by journalists assessing the course of the debate and spin doctors interpreting its outcome. This element of the debate involves so-called post-debate strategies (Friedenberg, 1997: 84). The post-debate period, in which campaign teams employ a multiplicity of persuasion strategies to convince voters that their candidate won, is now, in the era of social media, perhaps as important as the debate itself.

## **1.2. Corpus and Rhetorical approach**

The perception of the debate as a phenomenon of democracy, serving the democratic process is important for researchers, and political commentators observing the events from a distance, but for politicians they are simply a tool for communication with voters, in order to gain support. In this paper we are interested in the perspective of the politicians, and the strategies they employ in their dialogue with the electorate.

The corpus of texts identified for analysis in this research covers the last 20 years of presidential campaigns in Poland and the United States (see appendix A for a full list). The analysed material allows conclusions to be reached on the nature, differences and similarities, of strategies of political dialogue in the two polities. For this reason, those fragments of the debates in which candidates address themselves directly to the electorate, the closing statements, have been chosen.

The structure of debates can be clearly divided into the following, proceeding in order:

1. Introduction by the moderator.
2. Main debate – (depending on the format: questions to candidates, exchange of arguments, timed speeches).
3. Summarising closing statements, directed to voters. (Our focus)
4. Ending of debate by the moderator.

Closing statements are the final act persuading the electorate to commit to one side. This makes them a particularly important part of a particularly important event in the election campaign, and an element to which we would expect candidates to dedicate their utmost attention and most skilful rhetoric.

In assessing that rhetoric we follow the classical Aristotelian (1926: 1,2) division of argumentation, considering the three basic elements of the persuasion process as speaker, speech, and audience. This allows us to analyse the performance of candidates as they attempt to address each of those elements in their dialogue with the electorate, a dialogue in which the response they seek is a performative one: voting. The three tasks facing the candidates, then, correspond to the three pillars of persuasion: ethos, logos and pathos. They are:

1. Building credibility (ethos)
2. Presenting the matter of the address (logos)
3. Moving the audience to action (pathos)

All three elements require the attention of the speaker; they all contribute to the overall performance, and it is not easy to divide them cleanly from one another. The ability of the speaker to perform tasks 2 and 3 well is dependent on the ability to perform task 1 and build sufficient ethos to be listened to; while work put into achieving tasks 1 and 2 will go to waste if the speaker cannot move the audience enough to motivate their actually voting in the ballot.

It is also true that persuasion carried out in natural language inevitably takes on a figurative form which may never be truly neutral. Since even the most logical argument must be put into words in order to be persuasive, its expression will necessarily also contain elements affecting the realms of ethos and pathos. ‘For although it may seem that proof is infinitesimally affected by the figures employed, none the less those same figures lend credibility to our arguments and steal their way secretly into the minds of the judges’ (Quintilian, 1922: 9,1 19).

Since figurative expressions form the building blocks of argumentation, it is not possible to separate out the strands of the three impulses of ethos, logos and pathos in persuasive discourse and it is for this reason that while we categorise the rhetorical tropes and figures of speech as mainly affecting one of the three spheres, they are understood, potentially, to have simultaneous effects within the others.

## **2. Method**

The similarities in the basic format of Polish and American televised election debates made them prime candidates for the conducting of an analysis and

comparison of the communication strategies favoured by politicians standing for election in those two polities. The first step was to determine exactly what materials would form the basis of that analysis. Since the full text of each debate is of considerable length and it is the purpose of this study to cover a range of different candidates across a reasonably extended timescale in considerable detail, it was decided to focus solely on the closing statements in each debate. This approach has the advantage of both limiting the amount of text to a manageable size and removing from consideration the question of who is being addressed, the voters or the opponent. Closing statements in both the USA and Poland are directed to the camera, with interruptions not allowed (though occasionally occurring in Poland). They are a chance for the candidate to appeal to the audience in a style of communication unaffected by the strategies of the opponent or the probing of the moderator.

The first free, post-Communist presidential election in Poland took place in 1990, but without televised debates between candidates. The first available material, therefore, comes from the 1995 race. As a consequence, although American debates have been organised for far longer, the first material from the USA which is considered is from the 1996 election, in order to keep the data sets as closely related as possible. All debates in which final addresses featured have been taken into consideration, up to and including the 2015 campaigns in Poland and the 2016 Trump vs Clinton race in the USA. During this time there were a number of agreed debate formats which did not feature final statements, and in Poland in 2000 the sitting president was re-elected in the first round of voting, meaning that no head-to-head debates were held. In order to better balance the number of addresses reviewed, debates between candidates for the position of Prime Minister of Poland have also been included, where the format was comparable. This gave a total of 13 Polish debates, so 26 performances, and 12 American ones, so 24 addresses. A full list of the relevant debates detailing participants and date of transmission is given in appendix A.

The research reported upon in this paper employs a mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The section below describes how a statistical analysis was carried out, and the subsequent section details the close textual analysis of selected fragments.

The two authors involved in the analysis are both experienced teachers and researchers in rhetoric and argumentation, and both speakers of English and Polish, with one native speaker of each language. Polish examples given in English have been translated by the authors.

The first stage of the research involved the identification of a range of rhetorical devices used by the candidates in their speeches and the recording of how often and by whom they were used. This would allow a statistical comparison between politicians from the two countries, from different parties, across time, or according to any other division.

Step one was for the two researchers to read through all the texts and note down the devices they came across. The two lists were then compared and discussed.

Devices which appeared to have only occurred once or twice were eliminated and others were divided or agglomerated. The final agreed list consisted of 26 rhetorical devices and communication strategies. The items on this list were then categorised as most pertaining to logos, ethos, or pathos. This sub-division was not without difficulty since certain strategies might be considered to have an effect on two of those spheres, as discussed above, but ultimately the following categorisation was accepted.

**Table 1.** Communication strategies.

	No.	Device	Example
Logos	1	Make promises	'I'll never give a veto' – Kerry 2
	2	Stress need for change	'America needs a new direction' – McCain 1
	3	Emphasise importance of election	'This election is important' – Dole 1.
	4	Cite policies	'I want anti-ballistic missiles' – Bush 1
Ethos	5	List aspirations	'I want to reduce ...' – Gore 2
	6	Suggest opponent lacks qualities	'sense, not fanaticism' – Kopacz 1
	7	Insult opponent	'band of hooligans' – Wałęsa 1
	8	Warn against opponent	'if the President were to be re-elected...' – Romney 1
	9	Cite their own qualities	'I've kept that promise' – Obama 2
	10	Stress differences between them	'we have our differences' – Dole 2
Pathos	11	Antithesis	'I'm not talking about leaving, I'm talking about winning' – Kerry 3
	12	Praise the audience/nation	'We are the greatest country on the face of the earth' – Dole 1
	13	Appeal to authority	'like Franklin Roosevelt' – Kerry 1
	14	Appeal for help/action	'I hope you will help me' – Clinton 1
	15	Appeal to fear	'powerful forces against you' – Gore 1
	16	Call for unity	'let's come together' – Bush 1
	17	Appeal to emotion	'speak to the hopes and aspirations of the future' – Bush 2
	18	Use anecdotes	'a woman named Winifred Skinner' – Gore 1
	19	Give examples	'a company in Minnesota' – Obama 2
	20	Identify with voters	'somebody who grew up living in a basement apartment' – Dole 2
	21	Moral justification	'I have kept the faith with our country' – Gore 3
	22	Address the audience	'ladies and gentlemen' – Clinton 1
	23	Metaphors	'calm the waters of the troubled world' – Kerry 1
	24	Repetition	'not a nation, not a country, not an institution' – Kerry 2
	25	Name audience	'young people of America' – Dole 1
	26	Direct appeal for votes	'I'm asking for your vote' – Bush 2

Many of these devices are self-explanatory, such as 23 (metaphors) or 24 (repetition), but others require a few words of explanation. The differences among 1 (make promises), 4 (cite policies) and 5 (list aspirations) are not always obvious, but there were felt to be relevant distinctions between promising to improve something (1) and giving an actual policy proposal (4) which would achieve that end, and between statements of what a candidate would do if elected (1 and 4) and descriptions of the nation that the candidate would like to see (5), especially as this last device speaks more to the ethos of the speaker, what sort of person that candidate wants to be seen as, than to any definite commitment to action.

Once these 26 devices had been agreed upon, all the texts were analysed by the two researchers and instances of the use of each strategy noted. Multiple uses by the same candidate in one speech were not counted. This analysis was then tabulated and a comparison made between the two assessments. The texts were re-assessed by each researcher in the light of the second opinion and any remaining discrepancies were discussed until agreement was reached, with the native speaker of the language in question given the final say.

The final set of data was then used to create the tables of overall statistics and comparison presented in the results section below.

While the statistical results are presented below in section 3, section 4 contains a close analysis of chosen fragments of the debates looking at the use of strategies by individuals who stand out in some way statistically from the other debaters. The data presented in the tables below highlighted certain aspects of the addresses which merited a closer examination; the choice of which speakers and which fragments to analyse, therefore, was motivated by the statistical description of the corpus.

### **3. Results and Comparison**

The data for the speeches were categorised and compared in three ways: Poland vs USA, Winners vs Losers, and Right vs Left. This obviously allows for analysis of combinations of categories, such as American Right vs American Left, or Polish Winners vs Polish Losers. Winners and losers refers to the result of the election following the broadcast, not the perceived result of the debate. One Polish debate, in a three way race, was between two losing parties.

The top five strategies were registered in 25 or more performances:

**Table 2.** Most Popular Strategies

Strategy	USA	Poland	Total
22. Addressing the audience	6	23	29
24. Repetition	14	15	29
5. List aspirations	14	13	27
1. Making promises	16	10	26
17. Appeal to emotion	13	12	25

The difference in frequency in the employment of the strategy ‘addressing the audience’, or *apostrophe*, between the Polish and American speakers is, at least in part, a result of the different systems of address in the two languages (Kerbat-Orecchioni, 1992, 2014). In Polish, the forms ‘Szanowni Państwo’ (literally: Respected Ladies and Gentlemen) and ‘Proszę Państwa’ (a polite form of address where literal translation is of little use) are used very frequently in media communication (Kostro and Wróblewska-Pawlak, 2016: 165-166) with the latter also being a common feature of everyday speech. Modern speakers of English clearly do not pepper their conversation with the equivalent ‘dear sir’, however, the phrase ‘ladies and gentlemen’ is in current use - Bill Clinton employs it twice - and the decision of others not to do so must be considered a deliberate choice. Similarly, John Kerry’s use of the address ‘my fellow Americans’ follows an established part of the political tradition of the USA; in his inaugural address John F. Kennedy employed both ‘my fellow Americans’ and ‘my fellow citizens’, as well as the all-encompassing ‘fellow citizens of the world’; while Barack Obama began his own first inauguration speech with the words, ‘My fellow citizens’ and appealed twice to ‘my fellow Americans’ in his second<sup>1</sup>. The lack of these examples in the debate corpus would suggest, therefore, that such phrases are considered a part of formal speech-making and that the final address of the televised debate is not treated as such an occasion.

The other most popular strategies are evenly distributed between the two countries. Repetition is a very widespread and simple rhetorical device, and the prevalence of promises and aspirations in an election campaign is hardly surprising.

By subtracting the Polish total from the US total and ignoring the sign of the result, the strategies which show the greatest difference between the two sets of data can be identified. Only five categories showed a magnitude of difference of more than 6. They were:

<sup>1</sup> Texts of all the inaugural presidential addresses can be found at:  
[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Portal:Inaugural\\_Speeches\\_by\\_United\\_States\\_Presidents](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Portal:Inaugural_Speeches_by_United_States_Presidents)



**Table 3.** Differences between the countries

Strategy	USA	Poland	Difference
21. Addressing the audience	6	23	17
16. Call for unity	6	16	10
12. Praise the audience/nation	15	6	9
7. Insult their opponent	0	9	9
6. Suggest opponents lack qualities	2	10	8

The first of these differences has been mentioned above, and the others are quite readily explained. The use of strategy 16 by Polish candidates may reflect a perception of the country as being fractured politically, while the Americans apparently believe the country is best united in praise of itself.

The call for unity is often a response by one candidate to the attempts of another to divide the electorate. The characteristic is repeated in a remarkably similar way in a number of the Polish debates:

1995. Lech Wałęsa: patriotism or a return to Communism / Aleksander Kwaśniewski: There is one Poland

2005. Lech Kaczyński: A Poland of solidarity or of Liberalism / Donald Tusk: There is one Poland

2015. Bronisław Komorowski: two visions of Poland / Andrzej Duda: There is one Poland

2015. Ewa Kopacz: healthy good-sense or fanaticism / Beata Szydło: together

Praising the audience is an element of political rhetoric not found in the early Polish debates, but employed increasingly in recent years, a fact which may reflect the development of rhetorical awareness among Polish politicians. In American debates this is a highly important *topos* and praise often carries great emotional and stylistic amplification. (See Romney's torch, section 4.)

The two remaining strategies in the table, insulting an opponent, and suggesting an opponent lacks certain abilities are of an eristic nature, designed to damage the ethos of that opponent. In the American debates these tactics are not used, possibly as a result of a culture of respect for opposing candidates, or possibly because they are seen as counter-productive with voters. Indeed, there are a number of instances of candidates speaking positively of their opponents, something which does not happen in the Polish debates. The two instances of strategy 6, however, in the US come from participants in more recent debates, Romney and, unsurprisingly, Trump, and might reflect a change in mood as candidates become more distanced from each other ideologically. Table 4 below shows that even the more respectful warnings about opponents tend to be the domain of losing candidates.

Another difference worth noting between the two sets of debates is in the use of *exemplum*, listed as no. 19, use of examples and no. 18, use of anecdotes. This

distinction was designed to separate reference to what might be called solid facts, events in the world which might be checked by the audience, and more personal anecdotal stories of encounters with voters which are not open to independent verification. In the Polish debates these strategies appeared 6 times (2 anecdotes, 4 examples), compared to 13 times in the American debates (5 anecdotes, 8 examples). Examples provide both evidence for claims and clarification of them, and are chosen to evoke the desired associations and reach the widest possible section of the audience. Anecdotes can be used both to bring issues closer to voters and to make candidates seem more connected with the electorate, as they tend to feature the problems of 'ordinary' people.

It is worth noting, however, that the differences in frequency for most strategies were small, suggesting that the general pattern of rhetorical frameworks is not so different between the polities.

The same technique is used below to illustrate the differences in strategy use between the winners and losers of the subsequent elections, but the negative signs are kept. Six strategies registered a difference of 5 or more occurrences.

**Table 4.** Comparison of winners and losers

Strategy	Winners	Losers	Difference
12. Praise the audience/nation	15	6	9
5. List aspirations	17	10	7
9. Cite their own qualities	8	14	-6
1. Make promises	16	10	6
8. Warn against opponents	4	9	-5
26. Direct appeal for votes	6	11	-5

Clearly, praising the electorate makes a good impression, and listing promises and aspirations (citing actual policies also had a positive balance) are expected from candidates in an election. The strategies which had the worst record might give some cause for optimism: boastful candidates and those who were negative about opponents were more likely to be losers, as were those who made a direct appeal for votes. This final category is all the more remarkable as 5 of the 6 instances where the strategy was used by a successful candidate came from one man, twice-winner George W. Bush. This meant that in the US the overall balance was even, but in Poland, the strategy was strongly linked to failure.

The division into candidates of the right and of the left politically is simple in the US and very difficult in Poland. Since all of the American candidates were either Republicans (right) or Democrats (left), each debate can be easily categorised in this way, and the main differences between the strategies employed can be found in the table below. It is understood, of course, that some candidates are much closer to the centre than others, and that, on many issues, the ideological differences between the two main American parties are not great.

Across the 24 American candidates, only three strategies showed a difference in use of more than 3 instances between the two parties.

**Table 5.** Comparison of Right and Left - USA

Strategy	Right (Republican)	Left (Democrat)	Difference
15. Appeal to fear	8	2	6
26. Direct appeal for votes	8	2	6
14. Appeal for help/action	3	8	5

In Poland, however, the political scene is more fractured and changeable, and, thus, more complicated. The first debate takes place between Aleksander Kwaśniewski, a former communist government minister (1985-9), and Lech Wałęsa, freedom-fighter and hero of the anti-communist resistance, but the ideological clear water between the candidates begins to narrow rapidly after that. Kwaśniewski's reformed socialist party, SLD, has been in opposition since 2005 and currently has no representatives in parliament. He is the only 'leftist' to feature in this analysis. All the other debates are between members of two parties which emerged from the right of Polish politics, after the collapse of Wałęsa's Solidarity movement as an electoral force. The table below, therefore, does not include data from that first debate and refers only to those candidates from Civic Platform, (PO - Platforma Obywatelska), a more socially liberal, business friendly, and pro-EU party; and Law and Justice, (PiS - Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), a more conservative, nationalistic, and religious one.

The results of this analysis are fascinating, and show markedly different approaches being used. Despite the smaller number of analysed performances, just 20, as many as 7 categories showed differences in use of 4 or more instances, with a number of strategies not being used at all by one of the parties.

**Table 6.** Comparison between PO and PiS

Strategy	PO (liberal)	PiS (conservative)	Difference
17. Appeal to emotion	1	8	7
26. Direct appeal for votes	6	0	6
3. Emphasise importance of election	5	0	5
2. Stress need for change	1	5	4
8. Warn against opponents	4	0	4
15. Appeal to fear	4	0	0
21. Moral justification	0	4	4

The differences here are stark and seem to confirm the assumption that Polish political parties have traditionally been further apart in spirit and policy than American ones. The more conservative PiS party, with strong links to the Catholic Church, presents its programme as morally justified, employing strategy 21. It

also makes a direct appeal to the emotions of voters, through the frequent use of strategy 17. It is part of the complexity of the Polish political scene that it is the conservative party who use strategy 2, and call for change. This is because one of the foundations of their political movement is the belief that the post-communist settlement in Poland was profoundly unfair and corrupt: in this way they can be both socially conservative and anti-establishment at the same time.

PO, on the other hand, by the use of strategies 26, 3, 8 and 15 show how they consider their opponents to be a danger to the progress they believe the country is making, and want voters to understand that they must not allow any disruption to that progress to happen. In this way the more socially 'progressive' party becomes the champion of the status quo.

The final section of this analysis looks at the overall use of strategies and how they are divided into logos, ethos and pathos, which shows little difference between the two countries with the Poles using 233 strategies in 26 performances (av. 8.96) compared to the Americans' 211 in 24 (av. 8.79). Several candidates reached a total in one performance of 15, with current Polish president Andrzej Duda standing out by reaching that number in both his debates. This was topped, however, by the recently removed Polish prime minister (2015-2017), Beata Szydło, who managed to employ 16 strategies in her one debate. Former Polish president Lech Kaczyński was clearly the most reluctant user of the listed strategies, employing only 11 across his three debates, less than half the average. The differences in style of certain individuals are discussed in greater depth in section 4 below.

The breakdown into the three rhetorical categories is given in the table below. It must be remembered here that there were many more strategies included in pathos than in either logos or ethos, and that a number of them might easily have been assigned differently, with the distinctions not always clear-cut.

**Table 7.** Breakdown of strategy use into logos, ethos, and pathos.

Rhetorical Category	United States	Poland
Logos	41 (18%)	33 (14%)
Ethos	48 (22%)	58 (24%)
Pathos	134 (60%)	149 (62%)

The figures in this table show the number of times strategies from a particular group were recorded, with the percentage that number represents of the total number used. The table makes clear that there are no significant differences between the overall rhetorical approaches of candidates in the two polities, with the breakdown revealing very similar percentages. The scores for individual performances obviously show wide variations, but are based on too little data to be the basis for any conclusions. Most of the possible comparisons of groups reveal an even distribution in usage, but there are three possibly interesting differences: Republicans in the US employed ethos strategies 29 times (24%),

compared to the Democrats' 19 (18%), and in Poland, ethos was evoked 34 (27%) times by losers and only 24 (21%) by winners, while in the US, pathos was more popular with winners, reaching 63% of strategies used, than losers, with 57%. These rather small differences, however, probably do no more than confirm the lack of any significant advantage to leaning more heavily on one type of rhetorical strategy than others.

#### **4. Individual rhetorical strategies**

It was noted above that the sample size for each candidate is too small for the statistics to allow us to make any meaningful quantitative statements about the approach of individuals, but a qualitative textual analysis can reveal some interesting patterns. This section begins with some general remarks on style and then considers the language of two candidates in detail, comparing and contrasting their approach. Since nuances of style may suffer badly in translation, the candidates chosen for this closer analysis are both from the United States, but in other respects have been selected to contrast with each other.

One problem with applying the statistical methods detailed above to individuals is that the lengths of the addresses are not consistent, and some candidates feature several times, others just once. Another is that the tables include only instances of those strategies which the researchers were looking for and it is possible that other, less common, strategies were being applied by speakers with lower scores. However, the gulf between the most recent (2015) Polish candidates, Szydło (15), Duda (15, 15), Komorowski (11, 14) and Kopacz (14), and Lech Kaczyński (4, 2, 5) ten years before is striking and may reflect a change of style in Polish political communication or may have been linked to the atmosphere and circumstances of the 2015 elections. Kaczyński's addresses were slightly shorter, but his style stands out and can be likened to that of a job candidate at interview (Budzyńska-Daca, 2015) as he lists his experience in responsible government positions and assures the voters of his readiness to step into the role of president. There are few flourishes: just one metaphor and some emotional language when listing the current ills of the state, and no mention of his opponent. If this approach was designed to make Kaczyński look like a straightforward, no-nonsense character, it worked, as he was elected to the presidency, though died in an accident before having the chance to stand for re-election.

There is an interesting difference along party lines in the styles of the 2015 Polish candidates. Although the four listed above all had very heavy use of strategies, Kopacz and Komorowski of PO, the incumbents as prime minister and president, both have an equal balance of ethos and pathos, against the overall trend in favour of pathos, with some concentration on criticism of their opponents. Szydło and Duda, of PiS, on the other hand, registered the highest scores for pathos, in what looks like a deliberate attempt to 'move' the electorate emotionally. Whether this marks a real change in the communication strategies of

Polish politicians or merely reflected the fact that the ruling party had little to offer but fear of change and the opposition a programme based on an appeal to the heart rather than the head, only future elections will show.

What this suggests is that the style of communication employed may be a result of the character, or at least the political persona, of the candidate, it may be a necessary corollary of the party's ideology or programme, or it may be a response to the electoral reality the speaker experiences.

In the American debates, the most frequent users of strategies were Bill Clinton (9, 14) and Mitt Romney (9, 15). Clinton shows a clear interest in connecting with the audience, with as many as 9 strategies from pathos employed, while Romney has a more balanced 6 from pathos and 5 from ethos. Since these two have contrasting backgrounds and fortunes, a winning Democrat and a losing Republican, and both provide a lot of material, they make good candidates for closer inspection.

When looking at the texts of the debate, there are a number of aspects in which the two speakers differ which are visible at first glance. Some of these are explained by the difference in their positions: Clinton is standing for re-election, Romney is attempting to unseat the incumbent, Barack Obama; but others appear to reflect a real difference in their approach to communication. Their positions, as president and challenger, explain their differing assessment of the status quo – remembering that they are not talking about the same period – as Clinton is, naturally, far more positive about the preceding four years than Romney.

Clinton makes the claim 'I'm proud of the fact that America is stronger and more prosperous and more secure than we were four years ago. And I'm glad we're going in the right direction', in contrast to Romney's 'I'm concerned about the direction America has been taking over the last four years'. While this is understandable, Romney then allows himself to get very involved with who his opponent is and what he might do. In both performances, Romney refers to 'the President' four times, and also mentions Obama by name once. It is highly questionable whether putting so much attention onto one's opponent, and reinforcing in the minds of the audience that he is the president, is a wise communication strategy. What is more, since he can hardly praise Obama's record, this leads Romney into a lot of negative territory. He blames the incumbent for 'incomes going down and prices going up', 'chronic unemployment', and 'dramatic cuts to our military' which are 'devastating', while expecting 'to see health premiums go up by some \$2,500 per family' and America with '\$20 trillion in debt heading towards [a situation like] Greece.'

To balance this rather frightening scenario, and perhaps realizing that his attacks did not create the best impression, Romney does try hard to strike a brighter note in the second debate, saying 'I'm optimistic', 'I'm excited', and making the vague claim that: 'This nation is the hope of the Earth'. These words sit alongside more discussion of President Obama, however, and the overall

impression is very much that the election is a chance to dismiss Obama, not an opportunity to install Romney.

In contrast, Clinton only refers to his adversary, Bob Dole, once: 'One thing I would like to say is I agree with what Senator Dole said. It's a remarkable thing in a country like ours, a man who grew up in Russell, Kansas, and one who was born to a widowed mother in Hope, Arkansas, could wind up running for president.' This comment, as well as striking a friendly, conciliatory note, is a direct reference to the myth of the American Dream: anyone from anywhere can get to the top in this country. Everything else he says, however, is very much about Bill Clinton. In the first debate he boasts of what he has done, and in the second talks of what he is still going to do.

While a challenger is always obliged to criticise the status quo and call for change, he must also fight against the inertia of the electorate who already know and accept as president the incumbent. In this context, Romney's focusing on Obama looks like an error, and Clinton is wise to keep himself centre-stage.

The briefest glance at the typescript reveals that Romney has a love of statistics. As well as the figures quoted above in his warnings of the effect of another Obama presidency, he notes 'We've had 43 straight months with unemployment above 8 percent' and promises to 'help create 12 million new jobs.' He also suggests Obama plans 'a \$716 billion cut to Medicare [affecting] 4 million people', and mentions the '20 million people out of work'. As well as being powerful in themselves, the use of statistics suggests preparation, competence and a businesslike approach. There is a danger, however, that some voters may not relate well to very large numbers, and others may be sceptical of their significance.

Again, Clinton has a different approach. He does mention in his plans '100,000 police', but everything he says in praise of his own record is put in emotional, human terms, not numbers. We have: 'The auto worker in Toledo who was unemployed when I was elected and now has a great job', and also: 'All the people I've met who used to be on welfare who are now working and raising their children', not to mention 'the man who grabbed me by the shoulder once with tears in his eyes and said his daughter was dying of cancer and he thanked me for giving him a chance to spend some time with her without losing his job because of the Family and Medical Leave Act.' In short, he concentrates on 'the people whose lives I have seen affected by what does or doesn't happen in this country', not macro-economic indices.

Clinton twice repeats the phrase 'I've done my best', encouraging the audience to see him as just a man, who can't be expected to do everything for everyone. He mentions 'the people I grew up with and went to school with and who I stay in touch with and who never let me forget how what we do in Washington affects all of you out there in America', reinforcing both the message that politics is about impacts on people, and the fact that he is still just one of the guys, that he has not lost his humanity walking the corridors of power. This last consideration might also account for his use of 'ladies and gentlemen' and 'folks' to address the voters.

There are two techniques common to both men which are also worth mentioning. Firstly, they both stress the choice before the electorate. Clinton says: 'This election is about two different visions,' and Romney, in both debates: 'there are two very different paths'. Whether 'vision' is a more inspiring word than 'path' is a matter for debate, but there is a clear difference in how the men follow up their focus on this dichotomy. Clinton uses his statement to lead into his grand metaphor, the bridge to the future: 'Would we be better off, as I believe, working together to give each other the tools we need to make the most of our God-given potential, or are we better off saying, you're on your own? Would we be better off building that bridge to the future together so we can all walk across it or saying you can get across yourself?' Clinton may be raising strawmen here – his opponent never says 'you're on your own' – but, put like that, the choice is a clear one. Romney, on the other hand, on both occasions concentrates immediately on the Obama path and the terrible consequences of following it. So where Clinton opens up division in order to close it at once with the promise of a cooperative, shared future, Romney seeks to widen the gap by portraying his opponent as dangerously incompetent.

The second common element is the use, already mentioned in the case of Clinton, of one grand metaphor by both candidates. Clinton's bridge appears in both debates and represents not only the pathway to a better future, but also a cooperative enterprise undertaken for the good of all: 'we can build that bridge to the 21st Century, big enough and strong enough for all of us to walk across, and I hope you will help me build it'; and bridges, unlike paths, may carry one safely across a dangerous abyss. The combination of these elements, combined with the familiarity of the object, makes it a powerful metaphor.

Romney has instead a torch, but lights it only in the second debate. Of the previous generation he says: 'They've held a torch for the world to see -- the torch of freedom and hope and opportunity. Now, it's our turn to take that torch.' While the metaphor of a torch bringing light where there was darkness, and representing hope in the midst of despair, could be an effective one, it has little impact for two reasons: firstly, Romney only mentions it in this line, he does not build upon it or make it a recurring theme as Clinton does, and, secondly, unlike the bridge which has a defined destination on the other side, it isn't clear for whom this torch is burning – it seems to be no more than a vague reference to America's traditional self-perception as a 'city on a hill' setting an example to other nations, yet it comes straight after a passage describing how 'Washington is broken', and no reference is made to world affairs at all.

The degree to which the success of Clinton and the failure of Romney can be attributed to their style of communication with voters is something well outside the scope of this paper. What can be said for certain is that the two men show, in very few words, very different approaches. Clinton seeks to be positive, focused on his record, and interested in people, and he uses rhetorical techniques cleverly to achieve his goals. Romney relies on attacks on his opponent, giving more



reasons to vote against Obama than for Romney, and the frequent use of statistics. His use of antithesis and metaphor is less effective than Clinton's, as he is unable to build these devices into a coherent rhetorical structure.

## 5. Conclusion

The study recorded in this paper is as much analytic as it is investigative. The corpus of material from televised pre-election debates in the USA and Poland has been subjected to both a thorough statistical description as well as a partial textual analysis. As authors, we recognise a certain limitation in the inevitably subjective nature of some of this and in the relatively small samples of speech of each individual, despite the total of 50 speeches in the corpus. Any conclusions drawn are, naturally, subject to these limitations. There are, however, several points on which we can be reasonably bold.

Firstly, the wider rhetorical landscape of political communication does not differ greatly between the two countries. The vast majority of strategies were used more or less equally in both and the division into the categories of logos, ethos and pathos was near identical.

Secondly, the data do suggest some differences in approach between political parties, particularly in Poland. This is an area which requires further and deeper investigation.

Thirdly, the study of individuals, although based on short fragments, did show up noticeable differences, both quantitative and qualitative, among the speakers. Any suggestion that all politicians sound the same has found no support here.

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## Appendix A – A list of the debates in the corpus used in this study.

### The United States of America

Transcripts of American debates from 1960 to 2012 are available in full at <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=debate-transcripts>

The transcript of the 2016 debate featured was taken from the Washington Post (Blake, 2016)

The debates featuring closing statements and fitting the timeframe were:

1996	October, 6	Clinton, W (1) – Dole (1)
	October, 11	Clinton, W (2) – Dole (2)
2000	October, 3	Bush (1) – Gore (1)
	October, 11	Bush (2) – Gore (2)
	October, 17	Bush (3) – Gore (3)
2004	September, 30	Bush (4) – Kerry (1)
	October, 8	Bush (5) – Kerry (2)
	October, 13	Bush (6) – Kerry (3)
2008	October, 15	McCain (1) – Obama (1)
2012	October, 3	Obama (2) – Romney (1)
	October, 22	Obama (3) – Romney (2)
2016	October, 19	Clinton, H (1) – Trump (1)*

\* The Clinton – Trump debates were not supposed to feature final statements, but in the last of them, the mediator, Chris Wallace, asked for a final, apparently unprepared, summary.

#### The Republic of Poland

Transcripts of the Polish debates from 1995-2010 were taken from Budzyńska - Daca, 2015. The debates from 2015 were transcribed by the authors.

1995	November, 12	Wałęsa (1) – Kwaśniewski (1)
	November, 15	Wałęsa (2) – Kwaśniewski (2)
2005	October, 6	Kaczyński, L (1) – Tusk (1)
	October, 20	Kaczyński, L (2) – Tusk (2)
	October, 21	Kaczyński, L (3) – Tusk (3)
2007	October, 1	Kwaśniewski (3) – Kaczyński, J (1)
	October, 12	Kaczyński, J (2) – Tusk (4)
	October, 15	Kwaśniewski (4) – Tusk (5)
2010	June, 27	Komorowski (1) – Kaczyński, J (3)
	June, 30	Komorowski (2) – Kaczyński, J (4)
2015	May, 17	Komorowski (3) – Duda (1)
	May, 19	Komorowski (4) – Duda (2)
	October, 19	Szydło (1) – Kopacz (1)