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# Presidential Debates Through the Posterity Lens: A Content Analysis of Policy Frames in U.S. Presidential Debates From 1960-2012

Beatrice N. Epwene

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PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES THROUGH THE POSTERITY LENS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS  
OF POLICY FRAMES IN U.S. PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES FROM 1960-2012

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Presidential Debates Through the Posterity Lens: A Content Analysis of Policy Frames in U.S. Presidential Debates From 1960-2012

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This dissertation content-analyzed a sample of presidential debate transcripts from 1960-2012, to examine and measure the extent to which policy discussions and candidates' stances during debates reflect the aspirations of posterity. A fundamental American socio-cultural frame asserts that people desire that succeeding generations live better lives than their forebears. Though researchers agree that present day decisions and policies will have perhaps greater consequences on posterity than even on present times, the analysis in this dissertation indicated apathy in engaging in long-term policy stances, because they appear to interfere with candidates' short-term political interests.

As a consequence, even though the analysis indicated intensely negative sentiments in discussions of issues relating to posterity, candidates seemed oblivious of how their decisions could impact future lives and how future people will evaluate policies discussed and enacted today. Candidates seemed to make no conscious nor firm commitments to safeguarding posterity interests on the debate stage.

The analysis also revealed that thematic frames, such as the environment and education, identified to be of utmost importance in securing prosperity for posterity, only received marginal treatment within the sampled corpus and featured less in policy discussions. Thus, though the

United States is ever marching forward to becoming “a fairer union,” the governing elite do not consciously extend that fairness to generations ahead in time.

This dissertation found that that there are few enduring commitments to long-term future policies in the policy arena today. Thus, future people could be imperiled as matters deemed crucial to their well-being are marginalized in public discourse. These findings should be particularly troubling to futurists, considering that the sampled debates span close to a half century of policy discussions. The findings also indicated that futurists must redouble their efforts and seek allies in high places in the political realm, if the socio-cultural frame of preparing for posterity is to become a reality.

The study outlined seminal communication concepts upheld through the research, especially as it contributes in furthering understanding of media effects and understanding presidential debates as a policy discussion forum. It discussed some limitations and suggested trajectories for future research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children.” (Proverbs 13:22)

“A statesman thinks of the next generation, a politician of the next election. A politician who is also a statesman arranges for the next elections to be held in the next generation.”

(Aharon Shemi, As a Wise Man Once Said, as quoted in *Why Posterity Matters*)

First, Glory to God for leading me through, yet, another giant life step. Secondly, thanks to my parents Mr. Z.N. Epwene and Mrs. Betty Epwene for their love and tireless sacrifices in all things. Thanks for giving my brothers and sisters a home where we were allowed to flourish in love and curiosity about the world. Thanks to my sisters and brothers for all their encouragement and support. To my brother, Epwene Emmanuel Epwene and my nephews, this is dedicated to you. May this work inspire the children as they each begin their journey in quest of knowledge.

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May Posterity be on the minds of all those in positions of power and decision-making throughout time.

To God be Glory! BE, October, 2017

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

In a recent Sunday morning show on CNN, Fareed Zakaria, asked the following thought-provoking question:

The United States has a Secretary of Defense to fight its wars, a Secretary of State to negotiate peace, a Treasury Secretary to oversee the economy. What about a Secretary of the Future? Someone whose sole job was to ponder the horizon and prepare the nation for the long-term. To dream big, just like the innovators in Silicon Valley. (2015)

Then in a ten-episode series titled *10 Ways to Save the Economy* on The Fox News cable channel, Bret Baier discussed a number of policy concerns he believed needed to be revised and implemented for the betterment of the United States as a society. At the end of his exposé he concluded thus, “it is only future generations who will know the outcome of today’s decisions” (Baier, 2011). Similarly, in a series of episodes for his television show *Hannity*, Fox news host Sean Hannity has on numerous occasions articulated policy statements and proposals geared towards securing a better and more prosperous America, and he has come up with a list of “conservative solutions...to reverse the overwhelming American decline” (Hannity, 2014). His proposals include, a “penny plan” to balance the budget, passing a balanced budget amendment to curb deficit spending, placing a limit on the government’s ability to over tax, turning to the energy sector in order to fix America’s economy, placing term limits on members of the House and the Senate, and an overhaul of the immigration, education, and health care systems.

Furthermore, advocates, watchdog groups and activists have lamented the appalling state of affairs in the United States and the bleakness of the future outlook of the country if something

is not done urgently policy-wise to reverse the course of the current trajectory. *Saving America's Future*, a congressional watchdog group, has articulated a set of core policy areas (See Table 3, page 73), which it believes must absolutely be addressed, if economic, social, and political conditions are ever going to improve as to the direction of the United States (Abshire et al., 2009). The core policy areas they have identified include stabilizing the economy, correcting the deteriorating fiscal condition, reforming the health care system, strengthening the educational system, modernizing national and homeland security, restoring strategic leadership, reinvesting in innovation, addressing energy dependence and the environment, investing in infrastructure, and reinforcing the United States military.

Meanwhile, *Contract from America*, an initiative that grew out of the TEA Party Movement, has also called for an examination of some core policy areas that need attention in order to address what its members believe are areas of concern within American society. Some of its proposals include rejecting Cap & Trade, demanding a balanced budget, protecting the Constitution, instituting fundamental tax reform, calling for the exercise of fiscal responsibility and limited government, and the implementation of a comprehensive energy policy ([contractfromamerica.org](http://contractfromamerica.org)).

Politicians too, especially candidates running for the presidency of the United States, have variously alluded to the catastrophe that will befall the country, if the trajectory of the nation is not reversed through sensible, adequate, and long-term policies, as defined and articulated by those candidates in their political manifestos, party platforms, and on the nationally, televised, presidential debate stage (Nixon, 1960; Dukakis, 1988; Bush, 1988; Obama, 2008; McCain, 2008).

All these individuals, journalists, politicians, advocates, and groups, regardless of party affiliation or political bent, have variously lamented the falling standards of the national economy, the crisis in global and international relations, immigration issues, the debt crisis, balanced budget issues, energy concerns, and several other areas, and are predicting dire consequences for the United States if policy changes are not immediately implemented.

These pronouncements in the media and political arenas are not surprising to a keen student of political communication as a review of transcripts of presidential debates since the 1960s, and a survey of the media landscape from the same period to today, indicates that concern for the plight of future generations has come to occupy center stage in public rhetoric. Turn on the TV, find a spot on the radio dial, spread out the latest pages of any newspaper, or click your way through Internet news sites; discussions abound of an impending catastrophe (Abshire et al., 2009) that may befall not just “present people,” whom De-Shalit (1995) defines as “people living now,” but predict worse conditions for “future people,” whom Mulgan (2009) defines as “those who are to come into being,” if policies being proposed, crafted, and implemented today are not seriously reengineered.

Such rhetoric in the public sphere, predicated on igniting discussions and debates about the importance of investing and focusing on securing America’s long-term future, could lead a researcher to surmise that framing policy issues regarding posterity would enjoy saliency and substantive framing on the national stage during key moments such as primetime, televised U.S. presidential debates (Entman, 1993; Hanggli & Kriesi, 2010; Kuypers, 2010; Laver, 2001). Such a hunch exists for a researcher, because a substantive American cultural frame holds that people wish and prepare that children live better lives than their parents (Abshire et al., 2009; De-Shalit, 1995; Wolfe, 2008), and, the American public is socially and culturally groomed to collectively

understand this as the right thing to do, morally and ethically (Abshire et al., 2009; De-Shalit, 1995; Mulgan, 2009). Yet, though all policy proposals usually reflect the future, presidential debate proposals tend to reflect short-term futures (periods of one to five years, Smoker & Groff, n.d.) as opposed to long-term future (periods between twenty to fifty years and beyond, Smoker & Groff, n.d.). A number of researchers (Gopel, 2011; Graham, 2010) believe this to be so because politicians are usually more concerned with having successful terms in office (short term goals), more than they are concerned with the longevity and sustainability of goals and policies for the longer term.

Thus, more often than not, issues regarding posterity (long-term future) are incidental and peripheral rather than central to current policy undertakings. Mulgan (2009) asserts that “despite its obvious importance, intergenerational ethics has not loomed large in traditional moral philosophy” (p.1). There is evidence that policy makers frequently discount the future in deciding matters of crucial, but long-term importance (Abshire et al., 2009; De-Shalit, 1995; Graham, 2010; Wolfe, 2008). As Mulgan (2009) puts it, “unless something goes drastically wrong in the next few centuries, most of those who will live are yet to be born” (p.1). Therefore, as a matter of fairness and justice to those who are still to come into being, and as the ethics of otherness advocates, policy proposals should reflect longer time frames than is currently the case.

The central argument of this dissertation is the contention that presidential candidates will make policy proposals with a focus on short-term futures, as opposed to a focus on long-term futures. The element of Time in policy analysis thus becomes a very important variable in this research and needs to be highlighted and emphasized for clearer comprehension.



## **The centrality of the time element in this dissertation**

An enduring political and sociological question in the American consciousness is encased in the famous question posed by Ronald Reagan in 1980 during a presidential election debate against then incumbent, Jimmy Carter, and echoed by presidential candidate Al Gore in his 2000 debate against George W. Bush, “Are you better off than you were ...? Is America as respected throughout the world as it was...? Do you feel that our security is as safe, that we're as strong as we were...?” (Reagan, 1980). This enduring question introduces the important element of time in both the formulation and execution of policy, and also highlights the importance of time in the analysis, evaluation and endurance of policy stances of political candidates and their respective party platforms. It symbolizes the necessity of long-term thinking in policy considerations. Projecting this question into the future realm amidst the foregoing discussion on the state of affairs in the country, this dissertation recasts the same question thusly, “will America’s future be better than America’s past?” That is the question this dissertation seeks to answer, via an analysis of policy positions of various presidential candidates, via the corpus of presidential debates.

A closer look at the corpus of American presidential debates from 1960 to 2012 indicates that though concern for making the future better has been rife within presidential debates, political discourse, and media circles, the vision and focus of policies proposed within this time period have always been short-term in outlook rather than long-term, and the impact of those short-term policy decisions on long-term futures has not been seriously considered. As a case in point, in discussing issues concerning social security in 1988, George H. Bush said:

I am going to keep that social security trust fund sound and keep our commitment to the elderly and maybe down the line, maybe when you get two decades or one into the next

century, you're going to have to take another look at it, but not now. We do not have to do it. (p. 24)

This illustrates the interest most candidates have to answer the burning questions of the moment, while pushing everything else as unimportant to think about in the short-term, to be dealt with at some future point by "others," in the long-term.

The dissertation postulates that more policy positions will be articulated for the short-term than for the long-term. Zakaria (2015) highlights the tendency to focus on short-term futures in the policy realm and remarked that:

...we spend most of our time, money, and energy in the United States, especially in Washington, on the short-term. I like the idea of a person whose job it would be to force us all to think about the long-term. (2015)

Meanwhile Presson (in Zakaria, 2016) emphasizes not just the need to focus on long-term thinking, but highlights the need to concretely designate a role to that effect. She places the responsibility squarely on governments and the ruling elites and remarks that:

Government should have someone focused on long-term thinking, who is not consumed by the crisis of the week. Such a person should work in tandem with the business community, academics, unions, and others to achieve the best possible outcomes for present and future generations, through adequate and socially responsible policies. (2015)

The dissertation will thus analyze thematic and policy frames via the time frame element. Graham (2010) theorizes that though crafted in current times, policies are future-regarding propositions. Politicians are key toward mapping the future, via the policies and institutions they enact (Ekeli, 2009; Graham, 2009). Meanwhile, the-media's role in advancing the agenda of politicians is integral and important to the general understanding and perspective that the public

has of the issues of the day (Miller & Krosnick, 2000). Gore (2000) described the press as “the keepers of the scorecards.” Hence, the role of political communication towards creating both the vision and the substance of a positive future is crucial, prompting this research.

### **The centrality of “the ethics of otherness” in this dissertation**

To explicate the rationale underpinning this dissertation, it is important to espouse the “ethics of otherness,” or the idea of “living for the other.” Narveson (1996) states that “parents generally desire for their children to be happy and are willing to sacrifice to secure this happiness” (p. 38) Mulgan (2009), echoing sentimental contractarians, reinforces this point saying, “as a matter of fact, people care about their descendants (p. 32).” Aguis (2006) adds, “The next generation has always represented hope, continuity and progress. Each generation has taken pride in leaving an inheritance which the next generation could use to advance society” (p. 1). De-Shalit (1995) refers to this phenomenon as “the chain of love” (p. 31). This concept of ensuring that future people be better off than even present people could provide a powerful frame of influence as to how public policy should be shaped.

Morality, distributive and intergenerational justice dictate that one generation is not morally superior to the other by virtue of their temporal existence (De-Shalit, 1995; Graham, 2010; Mulgan, 2009). Guenther (2011) refers to this same thought of ensuring fairness to future generations as “the ethics of otherness,” and writes that:

It is one thing to affirm one's infinite responsibility for the Other, and quite another thing to make good on that responsibility in specific contexts, especially in a political landscape ...unless we can distinguish rigorously between otherness as a sign of political exclusion and otherness as a source of ethical command... (195)

Some scholars (Goodin, 2007; Read, 2011; Wolfe, 2008) submit that the issue of adopting future-just causes in present times to secure a more prosperous future for posterity is arguably a constitutional obligation for the governing elite. According to these scholars, politicians are constitutionally bound to integrate future-just policies in present-day deliberations (Goodin, 2007; Read, 2011; Wolfe, 2008). They argue as an example that the preamble of the U.S. Constitution, calls for the joy, welfare, and the pursuit of happiness for “ourselves and our posterity” (Jordan, 2013, p. 31). These scholars hold that posterity is implied in the provisions of the constitution and are a part of the public implied in the preamble (Goodin, 2007; Read, 2011). However, close scrutiny of the policy landscape via the corpus of presidential debate transcripts could provide more adequate insight as to the degree to which that is the case or not.

**Variables and frames.** The position of the various presidential candidates as well as their election party platforms are examined as core policy positions, and serve as the variables for analysis of the various debates analyzed in this dissertation, (Table 4, page 73) compared against the element of time. This is so because during televised debates, the political and media elite have the country’s attention, and at that time, candidates can frame any issue they consider of utmost importance. Frames of reference about how present day policies will devastate the lives and livelihood of future generations abound in current public discourse (Abshire et al., 2009; Ekel, 2009; Read, 2011; Zakaria, 2016; Hannity, 2014). These frames usually come in the form of bleak metaphors and clichés such as “kicking the can down the road,” “sacking the future,” “passing the buck,” “robbing the future blind,” “raiding the piggy bank,” and “mortgaging tomorrow,” among several others. These are not uncommon references to be heard from politicians, pundits and media practitioners alike. A concern during the 1980 Regan-Carter debate for instance was about the decline of American cities, the continual rise in crime, strained

race relations, the fall in the quality of public education, persistence of abnormal poverty and a decline in public services (p. 14) leading to the conclusion that “the signs seem to point toward a deterioration” especially in urban conditions.

Several researchers have noted that frames, especially political and media frames, are cultural products of the society in which they exist (Hanggli & Kriesi, 2010; Nisbet, 2010; Reese, 2010; Van Gorp, 2010). Thus, the debt crisis and the balanced budget debates in Congress, wranglings about environmental issues, immigration questions, terrorism and counter terrorism debates, the collapse and instability of financial markets, the pension crisis, issues in the health care industry, nuclear meltdowns, energy debates and several catastrophic events including Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, lend credence to the fact that much is left to be desired in the area of foresighting, preparing and planning adequately for the future (Ekeli, 2009; Goodin, 2007; Millennium Project, n.d.; Wolfe, 2008). Along these lines of framing the concerns within the debates, the next section encapsulates the most poignant elements raised in the corpus analyzed, and explains the development of the thematic matrix and the code book adapted for analyzing the debates, thus, revealing the overall framework of the research project.

**Core policy issues, the development of the thematic matrix and code book.** Policy issues identified in the debates constitute the elements which make up the thematic categories (variables) developed in the code book used in the analysis of the debates in this dissertation. They have been crystalized under the following themes: Peace and international affairs, economic matters, politics, environmental issues, education, health care issues, and social issues. These central issues identified in the debate corpus, and highlighted in the synopsis and the words of the candidates themselves, are the variables for coding used in the analysis of the debates (see Appendix A, page 122).

On the economic front, policy issues have included issues of taxation, the debt crisis, America's dependence on foreign oil and the search for sustainable alternatives, improving international trade and opening up new markets to America's advantage, a balanced trade policy, increasing employment opportunities for Americans, and the development of American talent and ingenuity through creativity and innovation, especially with the advent of the technological revolution. These issues have been of topmost importance in candidates' economic proposals through the debates and they provide the source of coding and analysis of economic variables within the analyzed debates.

In the peace and international affairs realm, concerns in recent years have had to do with military matters, including the expansion or contraction of America's military, the procurement of new and more sophisticated weaponry, war and conflict intervention in various parts of the world, as well as issues concerning terrorism and new threats including cyber threats and cyber warfare. Candidates have also emphasized the need to establish more robust diplomatic relations with other nations so as to achieve mutual development and peace through diplomacy and the strength of the United States. This thematic category yields one of the strongest frameworks studied and analyzed in this dissertation.

On the home front in politics, issues of freedom, democracy and the pursuit of human rights, gay rights, civil rights and all other constitutionally guaranteed liberties, including gun policies and the Second Amendment have been issues of concern. Heated discussions have surrounded the expansion or limitation of the size of government and the decentralization of power to the states especially when it comes to issues of health care, education and the provision of social services and tax issues. Discussions have also included issues on constitutional matters including the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court, and how to deal with ethical and

leadership matters and corruption by public officials. How political authority is bestowed upon individuals and how decisions are made in the halls of government have been hotly debated issues.

Environmental issues, climate change, and energy matters have also been of great concern. All candidates discussed the need to reduce our dependence on foreign energy sources, especially on foreign oil. Proposals for building new nuclear plants, increasing storage capacity and the safety of nuclear power, using wind, tide, solar power sources and natural gas, the development of flex-fuel and hybrid cars, clean-coal technology, expanding domestic gas production and increasing off shore drilling will all be key in expanding domestic energy production. These discussions have been buttressed by the understanding and explanation that energy dependence could harm our national security, and that it is in the interest of America's future to become energy independent. Obama (2008) captured this sentiment when he said:

This is the most important issue that our future economy is going to face, dependence on foreign oil. But nothing is more important than us no longer borrowing \$700 billion or more from China and sending it to Saudi Arabia. It is mortgaging our children's future. I have identified this as one of my top priorities. (p. 28)

Environmental issues also come into play here as issues about natural resource consumption, use, depletion, and management are also discussed in the public sphere. Discussions about the environment also include climate change, pollution reduction, global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer, and, regulations by the Environmental Protection Agency, including CAP and Trade. Environmental matters also look at issues covering preparation attempts to avert devastating natural disasters on the American people, such as those caused by hurricanes.

As far as education is concerned, schools and the revamping of America's education system has been the main goal. Regulations and innovations in teaching and learning have been areas of concern as well as discussions about who should be in charge of rules for schools and education. Candidates have variously debated what should be states' responsibilities and what should be the responsibility of the federal government in the education sphere. Within the debates analyzed, education represents the single most invoked category when it comes to issues concerning the youths and posterity.

In the area of social and welfare reforms, issues of concern have been about social justice, prisons, social security and pension benefits including unemployment compensation, and the general fabric and values of American society. Issues surrounding rights for everyone including gays and minorities, race relations, multiculturalism, poverty eradication, resource management and distribution, minority care, immigration, abortion, gun control, as well as care for veterans and military families, have been areas of top concern. This category also encapsulates the attitudes of present people and their commitment to "the other," an ethic fundamental to this study and to our responsibility to posterity.

Health care has been an area of much debate in the public arena too. Policies and regulations have always been discussed to give the American people the best chance of having good and affordable health care, and for the modernization of America's health care system. These days, issues of health have also come to include preparation for bio threats, syndromic attacks and chemical warfare.

Candidates for the presidency of the United States are considered powerful voices in society. They could sway the country, and even the world, with their positions on issues. Therefore, if a candidate chooses to highlight an issue on the debate stage that issue could easily



enter the mainstream of public conversation, bringing attention and prominence to a particular topic. This phenomenon could be explained by the agenda-setting, priming, and framing theories of mass communication. According to Presson (as cited in Zakaria, 2015), championing the cause of future people should be the task of politicians, media practitioners, and researchers, to keep the public informed by persistently presenting future-positive frames and holding politicians accountable when they do not meet the mark with regard to the commitment and responsibility to posterity.

**Parallel global examples.** Situating the United States within the larger global context, it is noteworthy that other countries, civil bodies, and nonprofit organizations around the world have also identified and expressed similar concerns about the plight of posterity (UN Futures Matrix, p. 74). These governments, civil bodies, non-profit organizations, and individuals in other countries recognize the pressing need for future-just legislation, policies, and deliberations, and have begun to address the concern. The United Nations formed the World Commission on Environment and Development (UN-WCED) and the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, bodies charged with reviewing progress made to foster sustainability in global environmental affairs, as well as in socio-economic development (UN-WCED).

Policy makers in countries such as Finland, Israel, Britain, Germany, and other EU countries have at various times in parliament assigned legislative seats to Future Representatives, F-Reps, Proxies, or Guardians, charged with drafting legislation to ensure that the needs of posterity are considered in various policies and legislative agendas being considered and implemented today (Ekeli, 2009; Gopel, 2011; Read, 2011). Hungary, for instance, has appointed an ombudsperson for future generations (Read, 2011; Javor & Racz, 2006), and Sweden recently appointed a “Minister of the Future,” whose mission is to promote long-term thinking throughout

the government and who is charged with ensuring that governmental policies align with issues of sustainability and fairness to future generations (Zakaria, 2016). These nations, governments, non-profits, individuals, and groups, target national constitutions and institutions as the place where changes should be effected (Ekeli 2005, 2007, 2009; Tremmel, 2006).

## **Problem Statement**

This dissertation contends that there is a disconnect between the culturally relevant frame of stewardship to posterity and the reality of pursuing short-term political goals and economic growth concerns (Gopel, 2011). The study identifies a three-pronged problem in incorporating future-just policies in today's policy landscape. Firstly, future-just policies, defined by Ekeli (2009) as "enlightened and future-oriented decisions that take the interest and needs of future generations into account" (p. 451), are given less attention than concern for present day issues during presidential debates. Though politicians and journalists, including presidential candidates, profess that future-just policies are vitally important, they do not make a deliberate effort to frame such policies during debates (Gosseries, 2008). This is problematic as studies in media effects show that no issue enters the marketplace of ideas without first being introduced on the political and media agendas, framed adequately, and audiences sufficiently primed. Only when agenda-setting, priming and, framing occur, does an issue become substantive enough for citizens to care about and vote for or against that issue during elections (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Ekeli, 2009; Miller & Krosnick, 2000; Schefuele, 1999; Shoemaker, 1991). Presidential debates are key media moments when advocating for a sustainable future could actually gain national attention and momentum.

Secondly, there is the dilemma of balancing short-term needs with long-term propositions. Although politicians on both sides of the aisle agree on the salience in addressing

future concerns (Entman, 1993; Hanggli & Kriesi, 2010; Laver, 2001; Weber, 1999), they tend to be preoccupied with everyday needs and with resolving short-term problems. As such, long-term solutions are relegated to the background, compounding problems for posterity. Some scholars argue that attempts at seeking long-term solutions are usually trumped by short-term concerns (Ekeli, 2009; Gopel, 2011; Wolfe, 2008). Thus, the literature on future studies clearly acknowledges the contradiction and the dilemma inherent in satisfying short-term needs while pursuing long-term goals (De-Shalit, 1995; Ekeli, 2009; Graham, 2010; Mulgan, 2009; Read, 2011).

The third prong to the problem is that of political representation and enfranchisement. Present people make decisions which will affect future people, yet future people are currently not present to defend and speak for themselves or vote in current elections. Politicians have not found a way to enfranchise future people in today's decision-making process. Graham (2010) points out that "modern societies have wide-ranging impacts...on people living today...but they will have far reaching effects on tomorrow's populations" (p. 150). Ekeli (2009), reiterates that thought, writing that:

Despite the fact that voters and their elected representatives have the power to make decisions that can seriously impact the living conditions of future people, succeeding generations do not have the opportunity to influence the present political decision-making processes. (p. 440)

Wolfe (2008) amplifies the point by adding that "future generations do not vote for present day politicians who make the decisions even though the decisions require a calculated tradeoff among different generations" (p. 1901). Presidential candidates represent the powers that shape decision-making and presidential debates exemplify a forum for policy discussion.

U.S. presidential debates, therefore, provide an appropriate milieu to investigate the commitment to posterity from a policy point of view.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study summons framing theory as the lens through which presidential debate frames will be analyzed to uncover the presence or absence of future-just policies in proposals and discussions during debates (Creswell, 2003). Framing enables a messenger to package a message with an eye on influencing the listener towards particular dispositions of reality. The framing concept provides communicators a method for shaping messages so as to persuade listeners towards certain assumptions, beliefs, and understandings about a topic. The communicator attempts to activate specific schemas in receivers' minds (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010). In conducting framing analysis, researchers seek to deconstruct frames for meaning as intended by the sender. Politicians are cognizant of the power of framing thus, they employ the framing concept in designing messages for public consumption (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010). Nowhere in the present political landscape is the concept of framing more obvious than during televised U.S. presidential debates.

D'Angelo & Kuypers (2010) write that news framing research is "burgeoning," and they describe the framing concept as "a powerful tool for shaping and changing the public agenda." Ryan & Gamson (2006) theorize that "a frame is a thought organizer, highlighting certain events and facts as important and rendering others invisible" (p. 13). Entman (1993) further states that:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and to make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.  
(p. 52)

Political actors carefully select language that will influence the activation of specific schemas within listeners' minds. By so doing, politicians get their point of view into the national debate through the framing and reframing process in news production by journalists. This creates the groundswell and adequate momentum needed for issues to enter the substantive debate discussion arena. An insight into how future-just causes have been framed through the years in the United States appropriately warrants a framing analysis of U.S. presidential debate transcripts; such is the task of this content analysis study.

### **Significance of the Study to the Field of Communication**

This study is significant to the field of communication as it attempts to explain communication phenomena in the future studies area. The field of communication has been described variously as a "linking discipline" (Singletary, 1993) and a "borrowing discipline" (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010). It is the field responsible for conscientizing, mobilizing and disseminating new ideas, and the field responsible for provoking discussion (Rogers, 2003). According to Mueller (1995), "communication has become so central that it can no longer be contained by any one field or discipline" (459). Despite these functional roles, the field of communication and media studies has been more or less absent in the area of future studies. Thus, this study in political and mass communication is an attempt to fill that gap. The study follows in the cross-fertilizing footsteps of other disciplines, since communication is central to the work of many other fields of study (Carlsson, 2007; Nisbet, 2010; Singletary, 1993).

Also, mass communication scholars have decried stagnation in research in the field over time (Budd & Donohew, 1967; Carlsson, 2007; Mueller, 1995; Napoli & Gillis, 2006; Noam, 1993; Singletary, 1993). They point out that research in mass communication tends to center around the same themes and topics. McChesney (2009), Napoli & Gillis (2006), and Noam

(1993) extensively discuss the importance of shaping communication research and media studies to play a more central role in policy-making. These scholars call on researchers to introduce research that could lead to policy changes and not write papers only for academic purposes. They suggest scholars should move towards providing evidence-based research (Noam, 1993) that could influence policies in Washington and elsewhere in order for communication scholars to effectively contribute to nation-building and effective change. Mueller (1995) notes that “the closer we get to ideas which have directly shaped public policy, the more communication scholarship recedes from the picture” (p. 459). He adds that “the almost unnoticeable role played by academic departments of communication in this process is disturbing, as there is an apparent lack of a distinctive intellectual contribution regularly drawn upon by other academic fields or by policy makers” (p. 459). This dissertation is an attempt to answer that challenge and fill that void in mass and political communication research.

The dissertation also contributes to the advancement of the political and mass communication fields as it serves to evaluate the veracity of bedrock theories such as the framing and saliency theories (Creswell, 2003). Through framing theory, this dissertation evaluates whether the United States lives up to the challenge of “enfranchising all affected interests” (De-Shalit, 1995; Ekeli, 2009; Goodin, 2007; Javor & Racz, 2006; Read, 2011) by investigating the saliency attributed to a discussion of future-just policies in presidential debates.

### **Purpose of the Study and the Grand Research Question**

The purpose of this dissertation was to evaluate whether future-just policies were centrally framed during presidential debates. The central question the study sought to answer was whether in presenting their electoral manifestos and policy agendas during debates, presidential candidates saw through the lens of future generations. The study investigated the extent to which

presidential candidates considered the interests of posterity in their campaign manifestos, especially as they were presented during presidential debates. Did candidates weigh the effects of policies on the lives, welfare and livelihood of future generations? The context of study was presidential debates and the contents for analysis were presidential debate transcripts.

Without probing the causes, courses, and solutions to seeking long-term solutions to present day problems, the future of the United States, both as a prosperous and powerful nation could be seriously at stake and the potential for other nations to overtake America's standing globally could be in serious jeopardy (Abshire et al, 2009). Even more importantly, the lives of ordinary American citizens could be imperiled in the long-run if the future is consistently discounted in present times. Therefore, this study in policy analysis and media dissemination of the central idea of implementing future-just causes is crucial. The study anticipated that answers to the research questions will offer an opportunity to draw valid conclusions and make sensible proposals to the impasse regarding posterity, if proposals from this study could be adopted in policy-making. Such an adoption would fulfill the main purpose of studies in media effects as "problem resolution" (Entman, 1993; D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010).

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were a few limitations to the study. First of all, because the study was exploratory, it did not evaluate the full extent of the effects of future just-causes enunciated in presidential debates on final election votes. Ideally, it would have been interesting to examine how future-just issues framed in presidential debates play out in terms of votes cast after each election. Such a study would have led to definitive conclusions whether future frames raised in presidential debates by candidates and echoed in the media actually do correlate with election outcomes. Such findings would serve as further proof of framing and media effects, and further buttress the

veracity of these media theories. However, the current study still offers a glimpse into those critical first steps in the media effects process, which begin with agenda setting, framing and priming, and also enabled the researcher to investigate the veracity of the saliency theory.

Similarly, this dissertation was not able to conclude whether future-just policies framed in debates by candidates were followed-through and implemented by the time a candidate took office as president of the United States. A pre and post comparative analysis of the policy agendas of various presidents and their eras will be needed to verify such influences. That angle of analysis was beyond the scope of this dissertation. Such an angle would need more time, resources and labor than a dissertation time frame and resources allows. However, this could be an area for further research from this study.

The fact that third party candidates were not represented in the debates analyzed in this study is another limitation. Third party candidates have rarely made it to the final debates, not often scoring points high enough in public polls to be included. This criterion set by the Commission for Presidential Debates has been difficult for third party candidates to fulfill. It is likely that frames of interest examined in this study could have been liberally located in the policy agenda of third party candidates. This is because most third party candidates are usually future-oriented policy proponents, on the vanguard of future causes, much more than candidates from the two dominant parties (Republican and Democratic). Frames identified from third party candidates would most likely have been dramatically different from how members of the two dominant parties frame future-just policies. The inclusion of third party candidate transcripts would have been a refreshing insight and could have provided more interesting findings to the research questions. Despite these limitations, the study is still robust and interesting enough to answer all the research questions posited.



## Definition of Terms

As a consequence of the newness in studies in the futures area, there are usually multiple terms which denote the same idea in the literature. In the definition of terms section below, cluster terms which denote or refer to the same or similar concepts have been grouped for clarity of definitions and explanation of usage throughout this dissertation. Hence the following definitions of terms and clusters:

**Generations, present people and future people.** De-Shalit (1995), defines a generation as “a set of people who are of more or less the same age and who live at the same period in history, usually regarded as having a span of thirty years” (p. 141). The “present generation” or “present people” within this study is defined as contemporary people, the present population and people living now (Mulgan, 2009; De-Shalit, 1995). Judge (2002) takes another angle to the term. He implores readers to consider “generations” in more than just calendar time. He says generations proceed according to a very different rhythm than calendar time. To him perspectives are shaped by a different awareness of time (p. 16).

De-Shalit (1995) defines future generations, or future people as those who will live after contemporary people are dead. To Ekeli (2009) “future people” refers to “succeeding generations,” those who are not yet born. Mulgan (2009) describes future generations as “those still to come into being” and as “people who will come into existence.” To Saugstad (1994) they are “those who will live tomorrow.” Inayatullah & Leggett (2002) call them “pre-emmanent people,” while Gopel (2011) refers to future people as the “most excluded of the excluded” from democratic representation.

This distinction between present people and future people is important as it introduces the source of conflict and dilemma in this study. The study deals with “the unequal circumstances

thesis” (Mulgan, 2009) or the “asymmetry of power distribution” (De-Shalit, 1995; Inayatullah & Leggett, 2002) between generations and most strikingly, it deals with the asymmetry of power distribution between present people and future people. Inayatullah & Leggett (2002) do not even see a reason to make distinctions among generations as these introduce the conflict that we face today. From their perspective, looking at humanity as one continuous evolution will alert present people to the need to be judicious in our approach to all people regardless of time frame.

**Future-just, future-focused, future-oriented causes; sustainability and stewardship.**

Ekeli (2009) defines future just-causes as “enlightened and future-oriented decisions that take the interest and needs of future generations into account” (p. 451). In this study, the principles of sustainability or sustainable development, stewardship and future-just causes are at times used interchangeably to refer to our commitment to protect and provide for the welfare of future generations. Saugstad (1994) defines stewardship as “the moral duty not to impose upon future generations hardship,” while Rangel (2005) explains the term stewardship as “care about our descendants.”

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) generally referred to as the “Brundtland Commission,” defines sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (www.un-documents.net, n.d.). Inayatullah (2003) sees sustainability as “using resources in a way that they are allowed to regenerate fully, giving future generations access to the same resources we enjoy today. In essence, it means passing on the world in the same state that we inherited it.”

Thompson and The Australian Parliament (2003) define sustainability in the fiscal realm as “requiring that the present generation not impose budgetary burdens on future generations” (p.

1). De-Shalit (1995) pushes the definition of sustainability beyond the usual areas of the environment and fiscal realms. His definition is broader:

Sustainability includes a package of objects that we leave to future people rather than to this or that single commodity i.e. we leave to future generations a package of natural resources, achievements in arts, science and technology, knowledge, values, financial resources, and so forth on the assumption that they will want this package. (130)

Inayatullah (2003) captures the reason why it is important for us to focus on sustainability issues, because, he says, it is a concept which is currently “valued but not prioritized.”

**The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) and the standard coding frame.** The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) and The Standard Coding frame seek to analyze “key central statements” which provide an indication of party positions and emphasis in various election programs from around the world. The CMP establishes standard coding frames for estimating policy positions of political parties and candidate stances on electoral issues. The objective is to analyze election programs for themes or frames that are seen as indicators of emphasis and positions that political parties place on issues that are considered salient to the voters (Laver, 2001; Budge, 2001 and Volkens, 2001). The CMP enunciates the saliency theory, a concept which underpins this study.

**Saliency and the Saliency Theory.** Saliency is an important concept in politics and political communication. Humphreys & Garry (2000) posit that “political scientists agree that saliency matters” (p.1). They explain:

Any study that aims to understand the wheeling and dealing that takes place within and between political coalitions in any institutional environment has to take account not just

of what people think about different issue areas, but by how much they care about them (p 2).

They therefore define salience as “the relative importance of different policy areas”. They continue, explaining that:

To understand how political actors get their way in elections or in committees, one has to take account of where those actors stand, but also take account of what issues have been made into important issues and what issues have been marginalized or avoided outright (p. 1).

Laver (2001) emphasizes that “parties compete with each other in terms of the salience of particular issues in the policy package that they put to voters” (p. 72), and salience is measured and operationalized in terms of the relative emphasis given to an issue in party manifestos. According to Laver (2001), “the saliency theory implies that the most important aspect of a document is the degree of emphasis placed on certain broad policy areas, rather than each party’s support for or opposition to a specific policy within these areas.” That means, “Parties compete by emphasizing policy areas they believe give them electoral advantages and by glossing over or ignoring those areas that they deem to help their rivals” (McDonald & Mendes, 2001).

**Issue frame dominance.** The above definitions and explanation of salience and the saliency theory introduce the concept of “issue frame dominance,” which refers to the amount of time, type of language, and frequency of reference that a candidate spends to evoke, discuss and sustain interest in a particular topic, theme or frame in a discussion. Issue frame dominance is important to judge saliency (Laver, 2001). Humphreys and Garry (2000) comment that “Politicians may do well by attempting to change the relative salience of different issues” (p. 2).

Thus, candidates who are serious about issues relevant to posterity will articulate and emphasize future-just legislations and policy issues in their election campaign debates.

### **Organization of the Study**

This introductory chapter contextualizes the study and provides reasons for its seriousness, purpose, and importance. It gives an overview of the debate corpus under study and introduces the sources of the variables subsequently analyzed in the dissertation and also provides a definition of terms used. The rest of the dissertation is broken down into four chapters. Chapter Three describes and discusses the methodology used in the study while Chapter Four offers an analysis of the research questions, talks about the tests conducted and discusses the results. Chapter Five highlights the significant findings, makes possible policy suggestions, points to future research trajectories engendered from the studies, and offers concluding thoughts about the research project. However, the next chapter starts off with a literature review, covering the history and significance of presidential debates in the election process in the United States and also discusses the various views on future studies as found in current literature. It then summarizes each debate analyzed, to familiarize the reader with the highpoints made in each exchange.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **The History, Tradition and Rationale of Presidential Debates in the United States**

Televised presidential debates as we know them today began in 1960 with the Kennedy-Nixon debates (Wells, 1999; Stiegler & Leidman, 2011). Since their inception, debates have become a significant part of the presidential electoral process in the United States. The first Kennedy-Nixon debate of September 26, 1960 was a momentous event and has become a seminal point in American presidential elections and debate history. It was the first time candidates running for president could be seen and heard on television debating the issues ahead of a national election.

Martel (1983) describes presidential debates as the “cornerstone of electoral campaigns” and captures their significance, asserting that:

Since the Kennedy-Nixon debates, presidential debates have evolved to become the most significant political process innovation for presidential candidates ... and the most useful political campaign innovation for the electorate in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century since the Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858.

Debates serve as a forum in which candidates articulate their positions and stances straight to the American people; they are the culminating event in electoral campaigns and the election process. Americans await and watch televised presidential debates with keen interest and according to Trouw (2005), they are the most widely watched campaign event in election years. Trent & Friedenberg (1995) comment that debates attract audiences larger than any other activity during a typical campaign, while Wells (1999) states that “the audience sizes for

presidential debates speak to the significance of this forum in the political process.” Trouw (2005) also notes that debates serve as the arena in which many political phenomena converge.

Wells (1999) discusses the myriad functions of presidential debates. To him, debates stimulate interest in the candidates and in issues surrounding the elections (Wells, 1999). They constitute a time when those seeking the highest office of the land put forward their manifestos to the electorate to seek votes and win support for their candidacy. During debates, candidates strive to showcase themselves in the best possible light without the benefit of campaign handlers and media spin masters (Wells, 1999). To Trouw, (2005), debates serve as a neutral source for reliable information, present the most “unbiased” type of political content and provide a direct link between politician and public because debates are not edited by third parties.

Presidential debates level the playing field for candidates, affording candidates an equal opportunity to speak for themselves and articulate their beliefs and positions on a variety of issues. Candidates make their case directly to the electorate. Trouw (2005) captures this fact, explaining that debates allow all candidates to address questions posed to them at the same time, and under the same circumstances. Debates also receive some of the closest attention of all election year campaign events. They have the potential to connect with more people and offer the best chance for the electorate to have a near one-on-one with the candidates as they answer questions and present their ideas for the present and the future of the country and the world (Trouw, 2005).

Neustadt (1991) maintains that the presidency of the United States carries with it power and status, and debates are watched not just in the United States but are seen and commented upon around the world. As the website for The Commission On Presidential Debates indicates, presidential debate transcripts are translated into multiple foreign languages (debates.org). Thus,

ideas, principles, and philosophies presented as part of a candidate's platform have the potential to receive enormous attention in the media and in national and international news coverage.

Jamieson & Birdsell (1988) remark that debates serve to increase candidates' responsibilities for their words and actions. Viewers expect that concrete actions will follow claims and promises made during debates when a candidate finally becomes president. According to Trouw (2005), "television vastly changed how modern presidential candidates must angle their campaign...information that previously could be passed on only through the articles of newspaper writers, suddenly becomes available to the public straight from the candidates' mouths."

Miller & Krosnick (2000) surmise that if a presidential candidate frames an issue as important during a debate, the media and the voters will also define and value that issue as important. In like manner, this dissertation adopted the premise that if candidates were concerned with the welfare of future generations, and if they believed the concerns were dire enough, then it was expected that this fact will come across substantively and highlighted in such an important forum as presidential debates and not just casually referenced in the discussion of issues.

Gopel (2011) maintains that during debates candidates give a sense of how they will integrate various aspects of their presidency and assess the long term effects of their policies from an integrated perspective. This study expected concern for the future to be central points or main frames in the debates. Were that the case, then talks about climate change, environmental concerns, the economy and debt crisis, pension plans, jobs and youth unemployment, energy conservation, sustainable development, international cooperation, and a host of other variables that would affect future people would be central in the debates. These are the variables this research project was interested in studying within the debate corpus. The study especially



expected that during debates, policy analysis would highlight what the costs may be if future-just policies were not considered (Gosseries, 2008; Mulgan, 2009; Tremmel, 2006).

Gosseries (2008) laments that while invoking concerns about future generations in campaign rhetoric, media, and in political speech is generally perceived as noble, references to posterity is too often opportunistically abused by politicians. Conversely, he viscerally castigates what he describes as “single issue candidates” who tend to hammer on “one issue agendas” in their political campaigns and debate manifestos. He holds that there should be diversity in issues presented and warns that those issues should not only be limited to “green topics.” In other words, debates should promote and advance “a package of objects” (Mulgan, 2009) that present generations should seek to pass on to posterity.

Debates, therefore, offer a rich context to investigate candidates’ commitment to future generations. Thus, this dissertation analyzed debates to estimate whether the nature and level of commitment to posterity displayed during presidential debates was consistent with the saliency of the issue (Laver, 2001) and the amount of rhetoric normally heard in mainstream media and political circuits (see also Nisbet, 2010). Budd & Donohew (1967) state that an examination of content, or, a content analysis reveals the primary focus of the producer of that content. A content analysis of presidential debates in this study revealed whether or not issues framed in debates were for short-term solutions, or whether candidates incorporated posterity in the search for solutions. In other words, this study evaluated whether policies were framed through a posterity-oriented lens.

### **Debates in the Study**

Presidential debates that have been held in the last fifty years have taken various formats. Some have had a central theme announced ahead of time or at the opening of the debate, whereas

others have been open in terms of subject matter, themes, and nature of questions asked. Some were moderated by a single journalist or a panel of journalists asking varied questions, while others have followed town hall formats where members of the public had the opportunity to ask questions directly to the candidates in the hall, or through write-ins and via social or other media. Each debate sought to elicit from candidates their vision, both short and long-term, for the future of the country. To present a comprehensive picture and understanding of each debate analyzed in this study, a brief synopsis of the main arguments and core concerns of each debate follows in this section of the literature review.

**The first Kennedy-Nixon 1960 debate.** This debate held in Cleveland saw a panel of journalists pose a total of ten major questions to the candidates for the presidency of the United States, John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. The subject matter and main theme of the debate was supposed to be about domestic and internal American issues. However, the debate quickly turned to international and foreign affairs, and America's leadership in the world, especially relating to the battle with Khrushchev of Russia, as well as to issues involving threats posed by Communist China against the United States and its allies, such as Taiwan and the islands in the South China Sea.

Economic matters that affected the country at the time were next on deck. The main discussion concerning the economy was how to reduce the national debt and the interest spent on servicing the national debt. Other crucial points on the economy during the debate included improving and increasing the steel mill production capacity in order for the economy and country to be more competitive in the world, and the payment of subsidies to farmers in the face of low prices for agricultural goods.

In the education domain, issues regarding the appalling state of schools, disgracefully low salaries for teachers and the fact that the state of America's education system, at the time, could become a "national disaster" and a "national disgrace," were concerns. The candidates sparred over how much influence the federal government should have over schools. Nixon (1960) argued against the federal government paying teachers' salaries but argued to return education to the states, in order to avoid the over-policing and nationalizing of America's schools. Kennedy (1960) also supported federal aid for education, and agreed that school construction, financing, and salaries for teachers should be a matter for the states (p. 14).

On the social front, the candidates discussed matters concerning social security for seniors including medical care. Kennedy described medical care for seniors as "the fight that's been going on for twenty-five years." He also hammered on the development of social services to meet the needs of the poor and discussed expanding welfare programs, including a comprehensive minimum hourly-wage bill. Discussions also dealt with leadership qualities of an American president as well as how much experience was needed for one to be an effective leader for the country. Questions about working together among parties in congress and the senate, in order to find solutions to problems for the country's benefit, were also raised and discussed.

**The third Kennedy-Nixon debate.** Overseen by a panel of journalists, 13 questions were asked and answered during this debate. There was no single main theme for this debate and reporters were free to ask questions on any topic and any subject they chose. International affairs once again emerged on the defense of Quemoy and Mastus Islands, as well as the crisis in Berlin. Kennedy discussed America's role and leadership in the world and said the United States had, and will keep, her contractual obligation to protect the security of Western Europe, and meet the commitment to protect the freedom of West Berlin, per the Potsdam agreement. The journalists

also asked the candidates to explain their positions on the use of nuclear weapons, should conventional weapons-use fail in the China crisis. There were also questions on building American military capacity, especially in the face of nuclear disarmament.

In economic matters, the candidates discussed a reduction of the national debt and renegotiating the interest rate. Kennedy faulted Eisenhower's administration for the high interest rate on the debt at the time. The candidates also bandied about trade balance and other economic matters including the power of unions to call for national emergency strikes, and the cost of agricultural subsidies. The discussion then turned to issues related to the cost of the various policy proposals on both the Republican and Democratic Party platforms.

**The second Carter-Ford debate.** This debate was held in Cleveland and moderated by Pauline Frederick of NPR. The subject was foreign and defense issues. A panel of journalists was on hand to question the candidates. Pertinent issues fiercely debated had to do with relief for the Vietnam war, military drafts, arms control negotiations with Russia, talks about opening relations with China, and disentanglement in the Middle East. Next, the discussions turned to the leadership character of the country and the vision of the future. Carter (1976) expressed concern that "our country is not strong anymore, is not respected any more, we can only be strong overseas if we are strong at home." He hammered home the fact that the country should refrain from fighting unnecessary and unprovoked wars. He said our country has become "the arms merchant of the whole world. We have tried to buy success from our enemies at the same time we excluded from the process the normal friendship of our allies" (p. 2), adding that we are shipping about "ten to twelve billion dollars worth of arms overseas to countries that quite often use these weapons to fight each other" (p. 14). He was also concerned about the "secrecy" in the conduct of government and public business. He called for the inclusion of the American people

in the decision-making process in Washington. He also argued forcefully for a reduction in defense spending and in the defense budget.

Ford (1976) argued for renegotiating “friendlier terms with Russia than go back to the cold war status.” He discussed the mutual cap on the ballistic missile launchers agreed upon with Russia, and the terms of The SALT I agreement in Helsinki. He then cited a lists of issues which he considered successes of his last two years as president, including the success in eradicating communism in Portugal, weakening the Soviet Union in the Middle East, Egypt and Syria, helping to establish self-determination, and the preservation of human dignity and minority rights in Southern Africa.

**The second Bush-Dukakis debate.** During this debate, a panel of journalists questioned candidates Bush and Dukakis. There was no particular theme and no restrictions on the questions that were asked. Immediately, controversy erupted over social issues especially as concerned rape, abortion and the death penalty. American family values, and other issues such as crime, drugs and the killing of police officers were also addressed. Matters about keeping the promises made to seniors and the elderly to make social security available to the aging population, as well as issues of health and Medicare/Medicaid were also discussed. Bush (1988) promised to keep his commitment to the elderly as Dukakis (1988) described the health insurance arrangements at the time as “catastrophic” and argued that the cost of prescription drug coverage for seniors was exorbitant. He proposed a welfare reform bill which included the provision of day care for children of low income families.

Also at issue during that debate was concern for the economy, employment issues and the fierce competition America had begun facing from emerging economies such as China and BRIC countries. These new global challenges prompted George Bush to remark that, “we are moving

into a new competitive age.” In discussing the economy, the deficit and the defense budget, Dukakis intimated that fixing the economy must and will be a matter “over the long haul” and he suggested cutting back resources from the military and moving those resources to important domestic priorities (Dukakis, 1988). He also laid out his revenue enforcement plan, “a realistic plan to handle the deficit, tightening tax collection, investing in economic growth, bringing down interest rates and cutting weapons systems.” In discussing taxation issues, Bush reiterated his claim of imposing “no new taxes” and his proposal for a “flexible freeze” on spending in order to shore up the economy and promote economic expansion.

Bush and Dukakis also once again bantered about world peace and America’s leadership role in international peace, the need for arms control agreements in the nuclear age, and debated the dangerous weapons ban, because as Bush put it, “world peace is important,” and adds that:

...The United States will continue to lead for peace. See I don’t believe any other country can pick up the mantle [*sic*]. I don’t think that we can turn over these kinds of decision of the collective defense to the United Nations or anything else. We are going to have to make choices. (p. 20)

He was also in favor of a comprehensive test ban treaty negotiated with Russia to bring down the level of conventional forces in Europe.

The most serious discussion yet in the debate corpus about the environment came in an exchange between the moderator Werner and (George H. Walker) Bush. Werner challenged the vice president on his claims of being an environmentalist in light of voting against regulations to protect the environment. It was the first time that environmental matters came to national attention as an issue of serious concern for the nation and for posterity in the debate corpus under study. On legal and constitutional matters, discussions turned to criteria for appointment of

judges to the Supreme Court, who would be men and women with integrity and loyalty, and who understood and could interpret The Constitution without legislating from the bench with specific ideological agendas.

**The third Gore-Bush debate.** The format of this debate was different from those already seen above. Instead of a panel of journalists or a single journalist asking questions of the candidates, this time one journalist served as moderator. Questions for the candidates came from uncommitted voters identified by the Gallup organization. The debate was overwhelmingly dominated by questions about health care, health insurance and big pharma issues, and the need to return health decisions to patients and physicians instead of the pharmaceutical and insurance companies. Bush (2000) also proposed the promotion of interstate commerce, allowing small businesses to shop for insurance across jurisdictional lines, in order for health insurance to be more affordable for small business owners and their employees. The candidates once more revisited the lingering issue about the solvency of the social security trust fund in order to keep the promises made to seniors, also covering issues about prescription drug coverage and overall healthcare for seniors. The outcome of the discussion between the candidates was their agreement on a proposal for “a patient bill of rights” and the forceful articulation of the need to move towards universal health coverage for every American.

On matters of education, discussions saw Bush unveil his “no child left behind slogan which later grew into a federal program after Bush became president. He concluded “We should make it the number one priority to make our schools the best in the world, all of them,” while Gore (2000) said, “I see a day in the United States where all of our public schools are considered excellent, world class.” Both candidates agreed on holding teachers accountable and getting parents involved in the education of their children. They also discussed the passage of the

Teacher Liability Act whereby teachers would not be sued for upholding reasonable standards of classroom discipline. Also, candidates agreed teachers should earn bonuses if they agreed to teach in areas of greatest need. They also discussed issues on school vouchers and most especially the need to return control of schools to the states.

Economic discussions turned to reducing the size of the federal government and streamlining federal programs for better results. Bush discussed his new initiative on reinventing government. The debate also reverted to the national debt which Gore described as “the third biggest spending item in our budget.” Gore articulated the dire consequences of the practice of “shuffling the debt down to posterity” and the impact that will have on future generations. Agricultural matters and concern for the disappearance of American family farms was the next issue the candidates discussed. Bush described farmers as “the first environmentalists” for whom “every day is earth day if you own land.” He suggested steps to protect farmers, including the expansion of conservation research, sound land management, and a focus on rural economic development and opening up new markets for produce.

Next, the global threat of terrorism reared its head in this debate as Bush discussed Saddam Hussein, whom he called “a threat in the Middle East,” and the need for American leadership in the world to curb issues of growing terroristic threats against America and its allies. He also pointed out the unraveling of international coalitions and the loosening of sanctions on tyrants who could be developing weapons of mass destruction with no international oversight. American leadership in the world again was discussed when Gore (2000) remarked that, “The United States has to be strong in order to make sure that we can help promote peace and security and stability.”



On the social climate in the country and American values, discussions turned to the moral character of the country. Issues about diversity and building an all-inclusive American society in which everyone feels accepted, welcomed, and valued took center stage. The candidates discussed the importance of respecting the rights for all classes of people, including diversity in the workplace and in hiring processes in government and the private sector. To illustrate the point, Gore said:

I believe that our future as a nation depends upon whether or not we can bring down these barriers that have been used to pit group against group and bring our people together...establish respect for differences...embrace the highest common denominator of the American spirit and enforce civil right laws.” (p. 40)

**The third McCain-Obama debate.** Organized by The Commission on Presidential Debates, with Bob Schieffer of CBS as the lone moderator and interrogator, the subject and theme of this debate was domestic policy. Amidst “the worst financial crisis since the great depression” the greed of American corporations was on full display. The collapse of the housing market, the crumbling dollar and the near collapse of global markets came into focus and immediately sparked discussions on how to shore up the economy from imminent collapse. McCain (2008) captured the national sentiment in these words:

Americans are hurting right now and they are angry. They are innocent victims of greed and excess on Wall Street as well as Washington D.C. They are angry and they have every reason to be angry and they want this country to go in a new direction (p. 2).

The candidates put forward various plans and proposals to rescue the economy, including a \$52 billion plan that included new tax cuts on capital gains, tax breaks for seniors, write-offs for stock losses, job creation strategies and new public works projects. Obama (2008) discussed

short and long-term proposals needed, and his exchange on the campaign trail with Joe the plumber a regular citizen, became a flash point for discussions about two differing economic points of view in the country, and between the candidates at the time. Republicans explained the democratic platform as supporting economic warfare, while Democrats saw Republicans as espousing a policy favorable only to a small portion of the American population, the top one percent.

Economic discussions included taxation rates for individuals and companies. Profiteering by various companies, especially oil and energy companies (symbolized by Exxon Mobile), were issues at stake during the debates. Obama argued that large corporations should pay more taxes so that ordinary citizens could afford necessities for their families, while McCain argued that American corporations pay one of the highest corporate tax rates in the world. On the national debt, Obama proposed a “pay-as-you go” system, and, the elimination of inefficient programs while strengthening the necessary ones. He outlined what he called “core economic issues that matter to the American people” such as an efficient tax policy, energy policy, spending priorities, environmental issues, and an efficient health care system. McCain proposed an across-the-board spending freeze with plans to make even more cuts in the budget if he ever became president of the United States. He also hammered on the need to cut defense spending on “sweetheart deals” between aircraft manufacturers and the DOD in order to save billions of dollars in defense spending.

The push for energy independence also came glaring through during this debate. Though it had been a topic of discussion in other debates in the past, the economic recession and the increase in environmental awareness and conservation pushed this issue squarely into the limelight in the third McCain-Obama debate. There were various suggestions and discussions for

the push toward alternative forms of energy and energy independence. Talks about the environment, and specifically about climate change as a new and more pressing issue facing humanity, was forcefully thrust into the limelight during this debate, since it was last mentioned in the Gore-Bush (2000) debates.

Health care also was a hot button issue during the Obama-McCain debates. Obama believed that “If we make investments now so that people have coverage that we are preventing diseases that will save on Medicare and Medicaid in the future” (Obama, 2008). Another issue that became contentious was the threat from terrorists and the fact that McCain’s running mate Sarah Palin accused candidate Obama to have “palled around with terrorists.” This assessment of the debate corpus provides a greater understanding why the variables selected for analysis in the study and which make up the analytical matrix make sense and were essential in the in depth analysis of the debates.

### **Debates as News Events and Sources for Media Frames**

Televised presidential debates are massive media productions watched around the world (debates.org; Trouw, 2005; Wells, 1999). They play out instantly on television, the Internet and on the radio, and newspapers carry in-depth analysis of all debate content and activities. As such, presidential debates are media events. Besides the obvious choreography of the events, debates make for compelling TV with ideological conflicts, personality clashes, and substantive discussions.

Presidential debates are usually themed, and debate organizers announce these themes in the media prior to the debate event. Questions and topics eventually discussed during debates are based around those themes, thus setting the main frames for discussion. Scheufele (1999) holds that themes are main frames which present schemas for message organization. However, in the

course of a debate, discussions become all-encompassing as other themes are woven into the discussion of issues by candidates, moderators, and sometimes by the public. It is therefore not uncommon for issues and topics discussed to morph from one theme to another. These themes that emerge from debates provide substantive independent variables for analysis in this dissertation. These variables are also in line with the findings of the Comparative Manifesto Project as to what constitute recurrent themes and independent variables in global political manifestos (Laver, 2001; Budge, 2001).

According to Scheufele, (1999), “mass media actively set the frames of reference that readers or viewers use to interpret and discuss public events” (p.105). The media’s role in frame selection and frame promotion is crucial to frames becoming established and extant in viewers’ minds. The media select frames from debates, reframe them and introduce new frames in the processes of news presentation, editorials, opinion pieces, feature stories, newsmagazines, and even news documentary analyses. This study looked at how candidates advanced and packaged future-just themes that the media could pick up for eventual propagation through the framing and reframing processes of news production. Politicians are also very aware of the power of media frames. They therefore deliberately choose and select how they package information for mass consumption.

The Millennium Project states that “foresighting activities” tend to rely on high level buy-in and public legitimization. This legitimization can only be achieved through high level publicity, education and information through the media (Millennium Project n.d.). Therefore, if future-just causes are going to receive any public support, the media have a great role to play in order to bring and keep those issues in the limelight (Ekeli, 2009; Nisbet, 2010). Attention paid to an issue by the media is crucial in the education of decision-makers and opinion-shapers on

issues of long-term significance rather than those of short-term populist interest (Ekeli, 2009; Millennium Project n.d.).

Priming also comes into play as audiences are prepped to accept the frames so presented (Miller & Krosnich, 2000). Therefore, how messages are packaged for media delivery is crucial and during debates. Presidential candidates have a chance to package their important messages as they would want to have them echoed by the media, post-debate. These aspects of media significance in frame dissemination speak to the larger issue of media effects where through the agenda-setting process and the echoing and reechoing of salient and valence issues, the media educate and provide perspective for the masses (also McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Scheufele (1999) describes this framing process as “second level agenda setting.” Unlike McCombs and Shaw’s (1972) claim that the media tell us *what to think but not how to think* [emphasis added], Scheufele (1999) asserts that the media tell us both *what to think and how* [emphasis added].

Therefore, if an issue is forcefully presented and emphasized in a debate, it is almost guaranteed to become an echoed and reechoed theme in the framing and reframing process of news production and dissemination, and that issue becomes a frame of reference. Ekeli (2009) describes this phenomenon as “accountability forcing,” where the minority forces the majority to take note of an issue considered salient. Thus, as members of the fourth estate in the United States (Baran & Davis, 2008) and providers of the needed checks and balances for the work and actions of elected officials, the role of the media in advancing salient issues is crucial (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Laver, 2001; Nisbet, 2010; Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010).

## **Constitutional Questions and the Enfranchisement of Posterity**

The Preamble to the United States Constitution (Jordan, 2011) states that:

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America. (p. 31)

Taking their lead from the words enshrined in the Constitution of the United States, several futurists, ethicists and advocates of intergenerational justice are pushing for the enfranchisement of posterity. These scholars have called for a larger role for The Constitution and they contend that because the preamble to the U.S. constitution explicitly references posterity, addressing future-just policies within the present political context is a legitimate, constitutional challenge (Ekeli, 2005; 2007, 2009; Gosseries, 2008; Goodin, 2007; Jacz & Ravi, 2006; Read, 2011; Tremmel, 2006; Wolfe, 2008).

Therefore, though questions and skeptics exist as to what commitment present people have towards future people (De-Shalit, 1995; Ekeli, 2007, 2009; Gosseries, 2008; Mulgan, 2010; Read, 2011; Saugstad, 1994; Tremmel, 2006; Wolfe, 2008), researchers hold that The Constitution clearly provides for the protection of the welfare of future people as much as it does the protection of the welfare of present people (Wolfe, 2008; Ekeli, 2007). These researchers, believe that a good place to start in defending the rights of future people is The Constitution. They argue that The Constitution guarantees the rights of all Americans, sequential time notwithstanding. Their argument situates the issue of posterity within constitutional bounds for consideration in present times. Graham (2010) echoes this thought, stating that “on both conceptual and ethical grounds there is a reason to assume future as well as current populations

are included in “the public” that policy makers seek to serve” (p. 150). She points out that the mission of policy is centrally engaged with the future but policies are made in present times (Graham, 2010). She urges researchers on policy issues to extend the concept of the “the public” to include generations located further ahead in time (Graham, 2010; also Goodin, 2007).

Wolfe (2008) equates concern for posterity with the seriousness we place on other rights and freedoms. He argues that “in this respect, concern for posterity resembles basic constitutional commitments such as the right to a trial by a jury or the freedom of speech.” He continues that “politicians have a tendency to do what is expedient rather than what is right, but a constitution ties the country and its leaders to a legal mast” (p. 1902). Thus, if The Constitution provides for the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness “*for us and our posterity*” [emphasis added], there is no reason why policy makers should disinherit posterity of their constitutional rights. Thompson (2003) laments that the portion of the Constitution addressing the need for representation of posterity is being ignored. He describes this situation as “an unfortunate abrogation of our moral responsibilities” (p. 4).

Goodin (2007) and Read (2011) make the case that a democracy calls for an equal voice for everyone in the “demos” and the “demos” is incomplete if some of its members are left out of the decision-making process. Other researchers (Ekeli, 2009; Goodin, 2007; Read, 2011) call for a redefinition of the “demos” in a democracy. They suggest that anyone whose rights would be affected by the elected elite and office holders has a right to be heard and to participate in the decision-making process directly, or at least through their representatives. Ekeli (2009), Read (2011), and Tremmel (2006) argue that though physically absent, members of future societies are recognized as being legislatively present if well-represented. Glenn, Dator & Gordon (2001) make the point that “the future cannot be known but future possibilities and consequences can be

explored and based on such considerations decisions can be made to influence the outcome of events and trends” (p.1).

Ekeli (2009) continues that “against this background there is a need to consider reforms that can add to the overall representativeness of current constitutional democracies by protecting near and ... future generations who cannot gain access to current political decision making processes” (p. 440). De-Shalit (1995) is adamant in his belief in the enfranchisement of posterity, writing that “we have not considered all aspects of ... policies if we do not address the question of the distribution between generations and our obligations to future generations in addition to that of distribution among contemporaries.” Laver (2001) concurs stating that “at all times we must deal with the larger question of how to get political actors to concern themselves with the costs and benefits to posterity and translate these concerns into policy preferences.” According to The Millennium Project (n.d.), “constitutional democracy is founded upon a set of stable institutions which cannot be undone at will once established.”

Kavka & Warren (in Wolfe, 2008) counter the skeptics who doubt that posterity can be adequately represented in present times. They argue that:

Because the choices which democratic societies make now have enormous impact on future generations and because we collectively know this and can make better than random guesses about the long range outcomes of different choices, it is appropriate at this time to raise the question of political representation for future people. (p. 1914)

Ekeli (2009) makes a similar point, saying

From an ethical point of view, one can argue that we should introduce constitutional reforms because present moral agents have a duty to build their prognoses about the future effects of their decisions and actions on the best available knowledge. (p. 453)



These researchers argue for constitutional considerations and representation of posterity because as Read (2011) acknowledges, “Some will not be convinced that it is possible to include future people in any way into our democracy.” He goes on to make “a care-based case for the protection of future generations.” Gosseries (2008), Joidin (2010), and Tremmel (2006) reiterate that the voicelessness of future generations calls for special guarantees for future generations and it is a reason to consider them in present day deliberations.

From this review, it is clear that some scholars and researchers are skeptical and question whether future people have rights at all or whether present people have any responsibilities at all towards future people. Some question the extent to which present people should be responsible for future people and they question how care for posterity could be justified when there are pressing present needs (De-Shalit, 1995; Gosseries, 2008; Mulgan, 2009; Saugstad, 1994). Thompson (2003) captures the prevailing skepticism when he states that some think that if a condition of having a right is being an identifiable individual, then the unborn are not a part of our “social contract” and we are not in relations of mutual exchange with them. He says it is not obvious that community bonds include people who do not yet exist (p. 15-16). Ekeli (2009) also notes this discord. She comments that “Legislators and policy makers disagree not only about the reliability of future harm scenarios but also about what policies will best serve the interests of near and distant future generations” (p. 458). Nisbet (2010), quoting from research by Dunlap & McCright (2008) and Pew (2008), points out that “a majority of Republicans continue to dispute the validity of the science and the urgency of climate change, while also believing that the media have greatly exaggerated the problem” (p. 53). He further notes that “even among Democrats and Independents, a majority of whom say they accept the science and are concerned about global warming, the issue still rates as a second or third tier political priority” (p. 53).

Besides the moralistic and altruistic responses to the questions raised, some scholars find a response and the attribution of responsibility to the present generation directly from the U.S. Constitution. These Constitutional arguments are part of the rationale for this dissertation to study policy stances with regard to posterity in presidential debates. The study adds to the search for solutions in the enfranchisement of future people by proposing that candidates for presidency become advocates and ombudsmen for future generations on the presidential debate stage.

### **Presidential Candidates as Ombudsmen**

Aguis (2006) and other scholars (Ekeli, 2009; Gopel, 2011; Gosseries; 2008; Read, 2011) agree that a "guardian" to alert the world of "the threats to the well-being of future generations would be the most appropriate step in the right direction to safeguard the quality of future life" (p. 27). These people who sit-in for future generations have been referred to variously as "ombudsmen, future reps, f-reps, proxies, guardians and ministers" (Ekeli, 2009; Gopel, 2011; Gosseries, 2008; Wolfe, 2008; Saugstad, 1994; Read, 2011; Zakaria, 2016). Ombudsmen serve to investigate improprieties towards posterity by administrators, act as policy advocates for sustainable development and assess the long-term effects of policies on posterity. Gopel (2011) describes future people as the "most excluded of the excluded" from democratic representation. Ombudsmen act as proxies on behalf of future generations similar to people today who are deemed legally incompetent to advocate for themselves (Ekeli, 2009; Javor, & Racz, 2006; Wolfe, 2008). Ombudsmen bring issues of sustainability to the attention of governments and policy makers and engage in policy-making.

Future studies researchers hold that democratic governance requires that the needs of future generations be reflected in current policies because our relationships extend to coming generations. Future generations, therefore, have a right to participate in today's governance

because present actions and decisions have far-reaching consequences into posterity (De-Shalit, 1995; Ekeli 2009; Graham, 2010; Javor & Ravz, 2006; Saugstad, 1994). Wolfe (2008) argues that all relevant stakeholders, including future generations, should be involved in managing the development process (Wolfe, 2008). Therefore, since future people cannot currently be present, the role of an ombudsman becomes even more warranted. This dissertation argues that a candidate for the office of President of the United States fits the bill of an ombudsman perfectly and that debates are suitable forums to showcase a commitment to future people and their needs by framing issues that are deemed to be relevant to posterity.

The study also holds that the media possess a similar public platform on which they could advance posterity issues as they wield as much power and sway as presidential candidates in influencing the future by acting as spokesmen and ombudsmen. Ekeli (2009) proposes that “The distribution of power to place issues on the formal political voting agenda and the distribution of rights to determine how those issues are to be decided, play an important role in political decision making” (p. 451).

The fact that the media have the ability to frame and reframe issues is an enormous opportunity to advocate for future-just causes. According to Ekeli (2009), “accountability forcing” (p. 452) can “encourage majorities to take seriously the views of minorities who are concerned for the welfare of posterity” (p. 452). He also points out that “future generations cannot themselves influence present political decisions that can have a serious impact on their living conditions” (p. 456), therefore someone needs to be able to represent and protect posterity. This dissertation agrees with this position, and therefore charges presidential candidates and media practitioners to take on the role of ombudsmen. Thus, the blend between politics and communication, the academic arena within which this study is adequately situated.

## **Framing and Frame Analysis**

Framing is a powerful tool for shaping and changing the public agenda. Ryan & Gamson (2006) define a frame as “a thought organizer, highlighting certain events and facts as important and rendering others invisible” (p. 13). Creswell (2003) explains frames as “a theoretical lens” which helps this research to study and analyze how presidential candidates and politicians frame policy issues regarding the future in presidential debates and how these frames translate into media frames used by reporters in writing stories post-debates. Callaghan & Schnell (2001) argue that framing is “the process by which all political players define and give meaning to issues and connect them to a larger political environment” (p. 185). Scheufele (1999) and Scheufele & Scheufele (2010), assert that news frames are generally defined as the main organizing themes of news stories.

Frame analysis has been used in the social sciences to study several different subjects. Most especially, it has been used to study news frames in the political arena (Entman, 1993; Laver, 2001; Scheufele, 1999; De Vreese 2005). According to Entman (1993), framing influences thinking and “illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer of information from a certain location to that consciousness” (p. 51). He further states that “frames define problems and determine what a causal agent is doing, with what costs and benefits” (p. 52). It is definition of problems regarding posterity and the cost and benefits of caring or not caring for posterity that this dissertation sought to explore and analyze. This dissertation falls within the bigger picture of media effects studies as well as political communication studies. It also enabled the researcher to gauge the workings of the framing theory.

According to Reese (2010), “frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (p. 17). They explain that frames are “powerful units of discourse which shape what others think of an issue and also how they understand and discuss the world around them” (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2010). To Entman (2010), “framing is a mechanism used by strategic actors to induce others to behave as the actor wants.” D’Angelo & Kuypers (2010) comment that “sources frame topics to make information interesting and palatable to journalists whom they need to communicate information to wider publics” (p. 1). They continue that “any group wishing to push an agenda, such as a political interest group, frames the relevant issue in a way that advances its cause” (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2010).

According to Scheufele (1999), “the basis of the framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning.” The University of Twente ([twente.nl](http://twente.nl)) explains further that framing is:

The way media and media gatekeepers organize and present the events and issues they cover, and the way audiences interpret what they are provided. They are abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings. Frames influence the perception of the news by the audience, this form of agenda-setting not only tells the audience what to think about, but also how to think about it.

Framing thus challenges scholars to consider both the content of posterity-oriented issues and the context of presentation of those issues in the present day political and media arenas, i.e. how posterity-related issues and policies are both packaged and discussed in present day context.

## **Media and Future Studies: Successes and Failures**

The Millennium Project (n.d.) illustrates that where policy makers and the media work together to include issues about the future in political, socio-economic and cultural developments, successes have been achieved. Key examples include:

The timely decisions made to stem ozone depletion which led to the Montreal Protocol, human rights forecasts by the KGB led to Perestroika, population forecasts led to family planning campaigns, AIDS forecast led to massive research and prevention programs. Future studies research also helped South Africa transition peacefully from apartheid to a representative government and future studies helped Shell plan for the great oil shortage of the 1980s. (p. 1)

These successes were achieved as a result of futurists and media practitioners working together to achieve successes for posterity. Conversely, in cases where warnings from futurists, forecasters and the media have been ignored, the consequences on posterity have been dire. Wolfe (2008) reports that in New Orleans for instance, the Katrina disaster was blamed largely on gross negligence by policy makers and government, both local and national, to act expediently over time to fortify the levees in order to prevent a disaster. Policy makers concentrated on short term fixes rather than long-term solutions and thus the levees could not hold when Katrina occurred. The *Times-Picayune* commented that “no one can say they didn’t see it coming” because several years before the disaster, the paper warned of the great catastrophe that awaited if the government stalled on fortifying the levees. Katrina turned out to be the worst natural disaster in modern times.

In addition, the fear and chaos during the Y2K and “millennium bug” days were all indications of failure to plan for future needs. Bridges and infrastructure collapses in Minneapolis and other places, as well as recent Hurricanes like Sandy, lend credence to the costs

of delays in implementing suggestions from visionaries and forecasters. Former vice president Gore's 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* makes a similar case of the pending catastrophe if future concerns are ignored in present times. In his words, "the present shouts while the future whispers" (Gore, 2006). Even today, the financial crisis that has gripped the globe, the fuel and energy crisis, climate crisis, terrorism and immigration crisis among others, are direct results of continuous and ingrained neglect by past policy makers to factor posterity into decision-making. This examination of historical events proves that ignoring the future in present times has been institutionally ingrained. Over and over, examples abound of how negligence for posterity has led to eventual catastrophe to people living in later times. Crisis prevention experts emphasize the need for "environmental scanning" to predict and prevent crises (Coombs, 2010).

### **Ethics, Morality, Intergenerational and Distributive Justice Questions**

Morality and ethics demand that the interests of future generations be taken into consideration as present day decisions and policies are formulated. Intergenerational and distributive justice demand that present people must be stewards of resources for the betterment of both present and future generations. Researchers have voiced concern for the fact that future generations have no political voice to argue for policies to ensure their conditions and since they lack direct representation, they rely on governments to advocate on their behalf (Ekeli, 2009; Gossier 2008; Graham 2010; Inayatullah & Leggett 2002; Read 2011). This dissertation held that the role of an advocate for posterity could very well be played by a candidate for the presidency of the United States on the debate stage and via the media which perpetuate and propagate frames.

Pearce et al. (as cited in Graham, 2010), advance that the moral equality principle at the heart of the discussion about protecting future people is:

The principle that everyone matters and no one individual is intrinsically superior to, or worth more than another, no matter the time frame in which they live. Moral equality makes intergenerational equity integral to stewardship, imposing obligations on governments to conserve and protect (...) for the benefit of present and future generations. (p. 152)

Pearce and his counterparts believe that policies should be forward-looking and future-oriented. Ethicists, moralists, and intergenerational scholars charge governments to discharge their duties with sustainability principles in mind (De-Shalit, 1995; Gopel, 2011; Graham, 2010; Saugstad, 1994; WCED, 1987). The United Nations states that sustainable development requires governments to discharge their stewardship responsibilities in a way that “meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (*Our Common Future*). But as Trouw (2005) and Graham (2010) lament, it is unfortunate that concentration on immediate risks and short-term benefits meshes with the political discourse of recent decades and with the short electoral cycles in which democratic societies operate. Graham (2010) continues that “policy timelines tend to be compressed and time-limited mandates mean that governments often prefer policy goals capable of achievement within their period in office than to engage in challenges with uncertain outcomes” (p. 159).

Ethicists argue that as we make decisions that will have long-term effects, it is incumbent upon us to include elements of intergenerational justice in current decision-making. Javor & Racz (2006) discuss our ability to influence “the natural life-conditions of coming generations and our ability to redistribute most of the expenses current societies need to function” (p. 6). In



their view, we are shifting an increasing proportion of these expenses on to posterity through financial and social structures. This phenomenon has led to high-level state debts, pension systems and social distributive systems which will be a burden on the future (Javor, & Racz 2006). According to the Brundtland Commission Report, *Our Common Future*, present people borrow capital from future generations with no intention or prospect of repaying “because we can get away with it: future generations do not vote; they have no political or financial power; they cannot challenge our decisions” (*Our Common Future*). For these reasons, ethicists argue, future generations should be taken into consideration in present day policy planning.

In *Why Posterity Matters*, De-Shalit (1995) proposes that we have an obligation towards future people as a matter of intergenerational justice. He contends that because of the technological and other advances in the world today, present generations are using up resources at rates that are unprecedented and creating negative effects on the planet. It has, therefore, become important as an issue of intergenerational justice to consider the needs of future generations as a matter of morals and ethics. Therefore, considerations about future people must feature in various plans of action and decisions being made today.

However, though ethicists and moralists agree about the need to protect posterity there is considerable disagreement as to what ethical strand best encapsulates the needs of posterity. Thus, various scholars evoke most of the major ethical streams to explain and justify this need and their various stances on the issue. Some ethicists argue that utilitarianism is best as it defines the greatest happiness for the greatest number (De-Shalit, 1995). Others say consequentialism or moderate consequentialism (Mulgan, 2009) is best as it calls for the least negative consequences on all those affected by decisions. Contractarians argue that all parties need to be present and be willing participants in order for there to be an enforceable social contract (De-Shalit, 1995;

Mulgan, 2009), while communitarians advocate for the inclusion of everyone (De-Shalit, 1995; Mulgan, 2009; Inayatullah & Leggett, 2002). Others argue for a care-based ethics (Read, 2011). Thus, discussions about intergenerational justice encompass the various philosophical and ethical strands of Rousseau, Kant, Hume, Bentham, Mill, Rawls, and Gauthier among others (see also De-Shalit, 1995; Mulgan, 2009; Saugstad, 1994). This study neither refutes nor endorses any of those myriad arguments but acknowledges the contribution each ethical strand makes to the rational discussion of the topic of our commitment to posterity.

### **The Time Frame Argument**

Similar to the ethical strand question, researchers and scholars who agree about the need to enfranchise posterity and implement future-just policies are conflicted as to what time frame “the future” should address. There is considerable disagreement among scholars about which “future” is being debated (De-Shalit, 1995; Mulgan, 2010; Partridge, 1976; Saugstad, 1994; Thompson, 2003). Thus, the problem of defining the time frame “the future” referred to in this study is currently unresolved in the literature. According to De-Shalit (1995), some scholars say it is impossible to take care of “all future people” and thus we should concern ourselves with just the “immediate future.” Another school of thought argues that “all futures” be included regardless of what time frame people live in. This school is referred to as “the distant future” proponents (Mulgan, 2009). To Inayatullah & Leggett (2002), distinctions among generations in terms of time is unwarranted. From their perspective, humanity is one continuous evolution about whom everyone should act responsibly, ethical, and morally regardless of the time frame of existence.

De-Shalit (1995) and Smoker & Groff (n.d.) offer some guidance on time frames. To De-Shalit, a generation spans at least thirty years, while Groff and Smoker (n.d.) breakdown time

periods to help illumine the time frame discussion. They advance that time frames be considered as “near term future (up to one year), short range future (one to five years), middle range future (between five to twenty years), long range future (between twenty to fifty years) and far future (fifty plus years). This study acknowledges the time frame debate and makes no claim of attempting to resolve that argument in this study. However, the researcher subscribes to the consideration of all futures, but in terms of a reasonable time frame for policy analysis manageable in a study of this nature, the researcher opted for the long range future analysis.

The rationale for selecting the long range timeframe was based on the consideration that near term future (up to one year), short range future (one to five years) and middle range future (between five to twenty years) timeframes, did not provide a time span wide enough for the analysis of the impact of consequential policy decisions on citizens. If the definition of a generation is considered as a set of people who are of more or less the same age, who live in the same period in history and who cover a span of thirty years (De-Shalit, 1995), then these foregoing time frames do not constitute even a single generation for analysis. Adopting these timeframes could lead to anemic conclusions that could be myopic in outlook. Therefore, the study adapted the long range (between twenty and fifty years) as a more robust time frame within which to consider the consequences of policy decisions at least beyond a single generation, but still manageable enough for the scope of this study.

Also, the time span of about half a century (50 years) of policy discussions covered by the debates analyzed (1969-2012), strengthened the resolve for the adoption of the long range time frame. With support from policy history, it could be argued that there is a better possibility today to provide a more succinct and in depth analysis of the consequences of signing the Social Security Act into law by President Roosevelt in 1935 (about 80 years or almost three generations

ago), leading to the establishment of the social security system, along with its consequences on the country as is known today. Similarly, policy analysts could better assess the consequences of the bill establishing Medicare and Medicaid by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 (about 50 years or almost two generations ago). With the benefit of time accorded to the existence of these systems, it is possible to better assess the effects and impact of these policy decisions on the lives of the American people. A long range time frame of about fifty years therefore, seemed reasonable to adopt in the assessment of policies, issues and the consequences of decisions in the public sphere in this study.

### **Literature Review Wrap-up**

The literature review sought to situate this dissertation in a broader scholastic context, presenting arguments by various researchers on the history of presidential debates, evaluating debates as both media as well as political events, and, discussing diverse ethical and philosophical view points on posterity. The chapter also provided a synopsis of each of the debate transcripts analyzed within the corpus for this dissertation. Chapter Three will focus on discussing and describing the research design and the methodology by which the analysis of the debates will be conducted.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

This dissertation followed a mixed method approach to examine transcripts of presidential debates from 1960 to 2012. A mixed method combines qualitative and quantitative aspects of research in a single study and makes use of aspects of both methods in theory selection, project design, sampling, data collection and analysis, and in the interpretation and presentation of results (Berger, 2000; Creswell 2003; Singletary 1993). When used separately, both the quantitative and qualitative methods of research have been found to have inherent shortcomings. Berger (2000) states that “quantitative research often uses sophisticated statistical methods but often deals with relatively trivial matters...that lend themselves to quantification.” Singletary (1993) adds that “Quantitative methods have been insufficiently productive and it is time to look for alternative methods.”

According to Berger (2000), qualitative research often deals with important social, political and economic matters. He adds that there are cases where some variables cannot be quantified but are of great importance to a researcher. As such, he recommends the mixed method approach to bridge the gap between the two methods. Creswell (2003) believes that “the situation today is less about quantitative versus qualitative methods but more about how research practices lie somewhere on a continuum between the two methods” (p. 4). He further explains that “recognizing that all research methods have limitations, researchers felt that biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods in a blended format” (p.15). Singletary (1993) amplifies the same argument stating that the strengths of each method are enhanced in a blended setting while the weaknesses are minimized or eliminated.

## **The Mixed Method Paradigm**

Mertens (cited in Creswell, 2003) advocates for the importance of a theoretical base in mixed methods research. Similarly, Zhang & Wildemuth (2009) also advocate for the use of theory in a “directed content analysis in which initial coding starts with a theory or relevant research findings, then during data analysis the researchers immerse themselves in the data and allow themes to emerge from the data” (p.2). These scholars and their positions informed the use of theory in the methodology for this study. Therefore, the study used theory deductively, bringing framing theory to bear on the debate corpus in verifying the framing and saliency concepts in the analysis phase. The framing theory enabled the researcher to juxtapose the findings on themes and categories in this dissertation against the established Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) and the saliency concept which underpin this research.

Frames in this dissertation were determined a priori and constituted from extant literature on analyzing political texts and election manifestos (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001; D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Laver, 2001; Van Gorp, 2010), and also from a review of the literature on future studies, to ensure that issue-frames determined to be of particular importance to posterity were adequately identified in this dissertation (Abshire et al, 2009; De-Shalit, 1995; Millennium Project, n.d.; Tremmel, 2006). In reading the debate transcripts, the researcher developed an index of relevant themes and categories for analysis. Then the categories and other textual features were given quantitative attributes to determine the presence or absence of the theorized themes in the transcripts, as well as the importance or saliency attributed to them as they related to discussions of matters pertaining to posterity in the debates. The intention was to decipher where presidential candidates and U.S. policies have stood over time, with respect to policy responsibilities to posterity.

## **Why the Mixed Method is Appropriate**

Following the arguments advanced by scholars such as Berger (2000) and Singletary (1993), the importance of the topic under study for this research warranted a mixed method approach. The study not only sought to evaluate the present state of affairs in the United States as presented in presidential debates, but also to evaluate America's preparedness for a prosperous future. The researcher thus considered the subject matter important enough to use the most effective method of analysis in the form of a mixed method study. The study examined how posterity-related policy issues have been discussed, and how the future has been framed throughout American presidential debate history from the earliest days of televised, prime time debates in 1960 to present day, and offered suggestions for improvement. In the analysis of the debates, frames which rang paramount in the debate corpus were noted and evaluated for how they color and present policy issues about the future.

The researcher followed multiple methods to capture both hard and soft data to gain an in-depth understanding of how candidates presented policy issues and discussed their commitment to posterity during presidential debates. Soft data for qualitative analysis was collected following the Critical Framework Analysis method proposed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994), and hard data was collected by giving quantitative attributes to the qualitative features identified in the transcripts (Creswell 2003; GAO, 1996; Holsti 1969; Riffe 2000).

## **Sampling**

This study used a stratified sample to select the debate transcripts. By this method, the researcher initially identified the whole universe of presidential debates. In all, there have been 29 presidential debates between 1960 and 2012. The researcher then selected "open-seat" presidential election debate years from the pool. Open seat election years in this study, were

presidential election years during which there were no incumbents running for re-election, while closed-seat years were election years during which there was an incumbent president. Scholars have noted that incumbents are more likely to be concerned with the defense of their policy stances than with new policy proposals and discussions during debates in closed-seat election years (see Ellis & Dedrick, 1997).

According to Ellis & Dedrick (1997), norms, tradition, and presidential decorum dictated that it was beneath a president to campaign and explain his position to the masses. Jackson, Coolidge, Roosevelt, and a host of other presidents and candidates followed this norm (Ellis and Dedrick, 1997). President Wilson, credited with bequeathing to us the “rhetorical presidency” and “the rhetorical campaign” said that “it is a sort of impropriety for the President to campaign, not because of the dignity of the office, merely, but because, after he has served for four years, the record is there, and he can't change it.” Meanwhile Coolidge (1924) famously defended his administration’s policies, vigorously upheld the principle of religious liberty, and pledged lower taxes and less interference with business before labor leaders and business men, during his re-election stumps (Ellis & Dedrick, 1997). Hence the closed-seat debate years provided a justifiable criterion for eliminating those transcripts in the sampling. Of the 29 debates held between 1960 and 2012, the researcher identified 15 for which there were no incumbents participating. Those transcripts were assigned numbers from 1 to 15 consecutively by year.

Next, the researcher drew a systematic sample from the open-seat election years by choosing every third transcript between 1 and 15, including the first Kennedy-Nixon debate for its historic significance. As a consequence, the final selection for analysis produced 6 transcripts including the following: Debate number 1, 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15, corresponding to the first



Kennedy-Nixon September 26, 1960 debate, the third Kennedy-Nixon October 13, 1960 debate, the second Ford-Carter October 6, 1976 debate, the second Bush-Dukakis October 13, 1988 debate, the third Bush-Gore October 17, 2000 debate, and the third McCain-Obama October 15, 2008 debate.

Creswell (2003) writes that “A mixed method design is useful to capture the best of both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (p. 22). He says “a researcher may want to both generalize the findings to a population and develop a detailed view of the meaning of a phenomenon or concept” (p. 22). Thus, a research study systematizes the selection so results could be generalized to the population. This study was interested in generalizing findings to the population of presidential debates. Hence, the mixed method and the sampling technique used affords it that ability. Ziebland and Mcpherson (2006) also endorse this approach, writing that such a sample provides a “collection of rich material and analytic depth, ensuring that a relatively small number of cases can generate insights that apply well beyond the confines of the study.” Such a sample, in their opinion, will reflect a diversity of experiences not just those that are most frequent.

### **Unit of Analysis**

The data source and sampling units were debate transcripts. Each transcript provided one sample unit while each major question, along with its corresponding secondary and tertiary questions and answers, were considered as a single unit of analysis in identifying issues and thematic categories discussed during debates. Each question and answers within the debate text were assigned numbers for easy identification within the debate corpus and for the purpose of analysis. Each transcript was then read, coded and analyzed in its entirety from the first words of the moderators to the final words uttered in the debate by the candidates or moderators.

The first Kennedy-Nixon 1960 debate presented a de facto starting point for sample selection due to its historic significance in the annals of American presidential election and debate history. That debate was a momentous event as such, excluding it from analysis could not be reasonably justified in a study such as this. For this study, Ford's first term in office was not considered as original as he was simply serving out the remainder of Nixon's second term. Ford, thus, was not considered an incumbent in this study as it could be reasonably argued that the groundwork of the policies he pursued in his first term were laid down and preplanned by President Nixon.

Also, years for which third party candidates participated in the debates were not included in the corpus. Third party candidates have been few and far between and their participation in debates has been too random to be consistent for this study. Third party candidates also rarely make it to the final debates, not often scoring points high enough in public polls to be included in debates. This criterion set by the Commission for Presidential Debates has been difficult for third party candidates to meet. As a result, third party candidates naturally fell outside the sampling method applied in this study.

The researcher also noted that eight vice presidential debates have occurred within the 1960-2012 time period. However, this study was not interested in analyzing vice presidential debates so they were not included in the sample. Another interesting observation from the sampling showed that debates have increased in length with the passage of time, with the shortest being the Kennedy-Nixon debates at 28 pages, and the longest being the first McCain-Obama debate on September 26, 2008 with 56 pages.

## **Research Questions**

Working from theory afforded this dissertation the ability to pose research questions in a mixed study. The central question the study sought to answer was the following: Do presidential candidates see through a posterity lens in crafting and taking policy positions? The question sought to determine whether candidates weigh the effects of policies on the lives, welfare and livelihood of future people. From this grand research question the following specific research questions evolved.

RQ 1: What thematic frames are characteristic of policy issues within presidential debates?

RQ 2: How often do presidential candidates debate policy issues from a future-oriented perspective?

RQ 3: Which policy issues do candidates consider most important in securing a prosperous future for posterity?

## **Rationale for Using Debates**

Presidential debates serve as a forum in which candidates articulate their positions and stances before the American people. They are pivotal events in the electoral process. Martel (1983) describes presidential debates as the “cornerstone of electoral campaigns.” Wells (1999) states that debates stimulate interest in the candidates and in issues surrounding the elections. To Trouw (2005), debates serve as a neutral source for reliable information, present the most unbiased type of political content and provide a direct link between politician and public. During debates, candidates strive to showcase themselves in the best possible light and debates also receive some of the closest attention of all election year campaign events.

Jamieson & Birdsell (1988) remark that debates serve to increase candidates' responsibilities for their words and actions. Miller & Krosnick (2000) surmise that if a presidential candidate frames an issue as important during a debate, the media and voters will also define and value that issue as important. This dissertation therefore adopted the premise that if candidates were concerned with the welfare of future generations, and if they believed those concerns were dire enough, then that fact will come across substantively and be highlighted in the debates.

The study expected concern for the future to be central points or main frames in the debates. So talks about climate change, environmental concerns, the economy and debt crisis, pension plans, jobs and youth unemployment, energy conservation, sustainable development, international cooperation, and a host of other variables as would affect future people would be central in debates. Debates, therefore, offered a rich context to investigate candidates' commitment to future generations. Thus, the study analyzed debates to estimate whether the nature and level of commitment to posterity displayed during presidential debates was consistent with the saliency of the issue (Laver, 2001) and the amount of rhetoric normally heard in mainstream media and political circuits (see also Nisbet, 2010). Budd & Donohew (1967) state that a content analysis reveals the primary focus of the producer of that content. In other words, this study evaluated whether policy proposals were framed through a posterity-oriented lens.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher accessed and downloaded each debate transcript for the selected open-seat years from the online archives of The Commission On Presidential Debates and prepared them. Each transcript was scanned and cleared of all typographical, grammatical, spelling and formatting errors, then reformatted and double-spaced to fit an 8.5 x 11 letter size, standard page,

with a consistent 12 point Times New Roman font. The pages of each transcript were numbered consecutively from page one to the end of the transcript. The total number of pages of data coded was 240, with an average page length of 40 pages per debate transcript. The total number of lines coded was 5,687.

### **Topic Guide, Codebook and Code Sheet**

The researcher prepared a code book (see Appendix A, page 122) for category and thematic definition and for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The code book served as the topic guide for category and thematic identification in the indexing phase of the study, and for quantifying the units of interest in the quantitative phase. The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) supplied the initial base for the topic guide and the codebook. The CMP has 56 broad classification categories of party positions, grouped into seven policy domains, called the standard coding frame (Volgens, 2001). The researcher started out looking for the thematic categories and classifications advanced in the CMP within the debate transcripts and then proceeded to modify the frames as other themes emerged in the familiarization and identification phases of the study, per the Critical Framework Analysis method. Also, frames peculiar to future studies and posterity issues based on current literature in the field (Abshire, 2009; De-Shalit, 2006; Millennium Project, n.d.; Tremmel, 2006), have been accommodated within the study.

Accompanying the debate transcripts and codebook, the researcher also prepared an Excel spreadsheet to capture, tabulate, and calculate data. The spreadsheet was broken down into columns and rows (see Appendix B) and divided according to the main categories and sub categories emerging from analyzing the transcripts in the indexing phase. Careful notations in the form of line by line identification of question numbers, pages, quotations, and other descriptors

were captured along with qualitative attributes so that relevant sections within the debate corpus could be easily identified during the analysis phase. In doing so, the original source of data could be easily retraced for references, cross references, charting, mapping, analysis, and interpretation. The code book and spreadsheet were reviewed for face validity and adequacy by expert faculty.

## **Content Analysis**

In order to adequately analyze the contents of the debate transcripts, both qualitative and quantitative procedures were used as fitting for a mixed method. Qualitative procedures following the Critical Framework Analysis method were first executed then quantitative procedures were applied in the data collection phase.

**Qualitative procedures.** In order to collect qualitative data, the researcher followed the five steps of Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) Critical Framework Analysis method. The steps included the familiarization, identification, indexing, charting and mapping phases. A prepared topic guide following the CMP frame was used. First the researcher read each debate transcript in its entirety to get a general sense of what the transcripts contained in the familiarization phase. Next, the transcripts were reread using line by line analysis for thematic identification. The coder next assigned the lead question and answers of each debate question to a thematic frame category in the indexing phase. Each thematic category and subcategories were given numbers and color coded in the debate corpus. Textual features including rhetorical schemes, critical and semiotic features, grammatical attributes such as verbs, adjectives and superlatives, manifest and latent references, connotations and denotations as well as time attributes were identified and indexed.

Also, in keeping with Ziebland & McPherson's (2006) suggestion, the researcher took both descriptive and reflexive notes in the margins in reading the debates during the

familiarization and identification stages, tracking expected, emergent, and discrepant themes. The charting and mapping phases were executed in the analysis section of the study where quantitative attributes and findings were plotted on charts, graphs, and tables in the analysis and discussion phases of the study.

**Quantitative procedures.** The researcher assigned quantitative values to the qualitative data and features identified in the qualitative phase as described above, following the coding scheme outlined in the code book. Frequencies of thematic categories were calculated and expressed as proportions and percentages. Degree of emphasis and levels of intensity attributed to the discussion of issues were also measured and calculated with Mann Whitney U tests. Chi-square tests helped in the study of time references in the discussion of policy issues to gauge the focus on posterity interests, while Spearman Rho tests studied the correlation among thematic categories. Results obtained enabled the researcher to answer the questions posited and discussed in Chapter Four.

The researcher also, further compared the results obtained from the quantitative phase with the qualitative data, and completed the mapping and charting phases of the Critical Framework Approach began from the qualitative segment (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994; Glenton, Nilsen, & Carlsen 2006). The researcher used the data to plot graphs, comparison charts and tables in the data presentation, discussion, and visualization phases of the study presented in Chapter Four.

### **Coder and Coder Training**

The researcher, experienced in content analysis from coding for similar studies in the past and familiar with the coding rules, coded the transcripts. To avoid coder bias, the researcher pre-coded the third 2003 Bush-Gore debate to be sure the coding rules were perfected before actual

coding began on the material included in this dissertation. She did a coding pretest on the first ten pages of the third Gore-Bush debate transcript. She then revised the indexing and coding strategies and achieved a coding consistency level of 95% in matching the CMP before starting to code the sampled transcripts. The researcher also split coding sessions into small time chunks and took disciplined breaks between sessions to prevent coder fatigue and to ensure that coding was done from a fresh perspective every session. This process ensured consistency and reliability in the coding process.

### **Enhancing Reliability and Validity of the Study**

Careful documentation of the methodology as seen above ensured clarity so future researchers could replicate the study. Constituting the list of thematic frames for this study from established frames in politics, presidential debates literature (Abshire, 2009; Laver, 2001) and futures literature affords the dissertation concurrent validity (De-Shalit, 1995; Tremmel, 2006). Expert faculty reviewed the methodology, the topic guide, and code book for face validity. The researcher has spent considerable time studying the literature, giving her broad knowledge in the subject area. Also, using multiple methods to capture, analyze, and interpret the data affords the study reliability and validity. Using a mixed method approach where results from one section of the study strengthen the findings in the second section affords the study validity. Direct quotations, referencing segments where they have been lifted from the transcripts to back points raised and conclusions drawn also ensure the validity of the findings. The reliability and validity of the study ensure that the results of the study could be generalized to the population of presidential debates transcripts as well as to other studies.



## **Methods Wrap-up**

Chapter Three discussed the mixed methods approach used in the procedure for data recording and set the stage for analysis and discussion in the next chapter. The section covered sample selection and preparation, units of analysis, coding as well as the research questions posited. It also explained the procedures for data capture for both quantitative and qualitative data. The Critical Framework Analysis method powered the collection of qualitative data while hard data attributes were ascribed to textual features for quantitative analysis. The analysis and discussion of the research questions in chapter four and the presentation of findings and interpretations in Chapter Five will further illuminate the research project.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### **Introduction**

The analysis in this study quantified and ranked thematic categories and policy issues in presidential debates and determined the share of discussions candidates attributed to posterity concerns. It also determined the policy issues that candidates discussed as important to posterity, and measured the intensity, or degree of emphasis, candidates attached to those discussions. The researcher followed the methodology discussed in Chapter Three and combined both quantitative and qualitative aspects as warranted within a mixed study. A mixed methods study allows for the integration of the two types of data at any stage in the research process. The integration could be in the data collection, analysis or interpretation phases, or some combination of these (Creswell, 2003, Ziebland & Mcpherson, 2006).

In this dissertation, quantitative analyses preceded qualitative reinforcement in data analysis. The qualitative segment drew from the Critical Framework Analysis method proposed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994), and was instructive in elucidating candidates' views. Referencing clichés, allusions, quips, emphasis, repetition and direct quotes from the debates, candidates' views regarding posterity were revealed. The retention of the rich context of the debates and candidates' voices on issues discussed helped the researcher draw valid lessons and conclusions about the concern for posterity exhibited in policy discussions. Each research question examined in the study is analyzed and discussed below.

## **RQ 1: Analysis**

What thematic frames are characteristic of policy issues within presidential debates?

The first research question sought to catalog thematic frames characteristic of U.S. presidential debates. The study created an index of themes based on the suggestions of the Comparative Manifesto Project (Laver, 2000), The United Nations Global Futures Matrix, and other literature concerned with future studies (Abshire, 2009, De-Shalit, 1995, Thompson, 2003). The researcher developed a code book and then set out to track, code, and count the themes as they presented within the debates. Tables 1, 2, and 3 show themes culled from the above sources while Table 4 shows eight broad thematic categories adapted for this study, which directly reflect the established themes. This approach of working from empirical research is in line with the deductive method (Creswell, 2003). The full matrix of thematic categories and subcategories can be found in appendix 1.

Table 1

*The CMP Matrix of Themes in Political Manifestos*

External Relations	Freedom & Democracy	Political System	Economy	Welfare/Quality of Life	Fabric of Society	Social Groups
Foreign Relations	Freedom & Human Rights	Decentralization	Free Enterprise	Environmental Protection	National Way of Life	Labor
Imperialism	Democracy	Centralization	Incentives	Culture	Traditional Morality	Agriculture
Military	Constitutionalism	Government & Admin. Efficiency	Market Regulation	Social Justice	Law & Order	Middle Class Professionals
Peace		Political Corruption	Economic Planning	Welfare	Social Harmony	Minority Groups
Internationalism		Political Authority	Corporations	Education	Multi-culturalism	Non-Economic Demographic Groups
Integration			Protectionism			
			Technology/Infrastructure			

Table 2

*The United Nations Global Futures Matrix*

Sustainable Development	Clean Water	Population and Resources	Democratization	Global Foresight & Decision making
Global Convergence of IT	Rich-Poor gap	Health Issues	Education	Peace and Conflict
Status of Women	Transnational Organized Crime	Energy	Science and Technology	Global Ethics

Table 3

*Saving America's Future Thematic Matrix*

Stabilize the economy	Deteriorating fiscal condition	Reform healthcare system	Strengthen educational system	Modernize national & homeland security
Restore strategic leadership	Reinvest in innovation	Address energy dependence & the environment	Invest in infrastructure	Reinforce the US military

Table 4

*Broad Themes Identified in U.S. Presidential Debates*

Peace	Economy	Social Issues	Education
Politics	Science and Technology	Environment	Health Care

From the above matrix, the researcher coded the transcripts, tracking and recording category counts on the code sheet (see Appendix B). Each instance of frame mention within a moderated question was counted. The results of the frequency counts for themes by candidates, debate year, and debate number produced the following results tabulated on Table 5 (see legend in Appendix C)

Table 5

*Thematic Distribution by Candidate, Question and Debate Year*

Themes Debate/Yr.	Peace	Politics	Economy	Sc/Tech	Social	Environ- ment	Educa- tion	Health
1-KN-1960	2	6	9	0	0	0	2	0
3-KN-1960	12	4	10	0	0	0	0	0
2-CF-1976	19	7	3	0	0	0	0	0
2-BD-1988	5	11	12	0	13	3	0	0
3-GB-2000	4	2	8	0	12	0	4	6
3-MO-2008	0	6	14	0	1	4	0	2
Totals/181	42	36	56	0	26	7	6	8

From the above summary, frequency counts and proportions attributed to the discussion of various policy frames and thematic categories were computed and analyzed per debate and per thematic category. The results obtained are charted on the frequency Table 6 and show the thematic frames most frequently found in presidential debates and policy discussions, as well as their rankings within the debate corpus.

Table 6

*Frequency Distribution Table Showing Themes and Rankings. N=181*

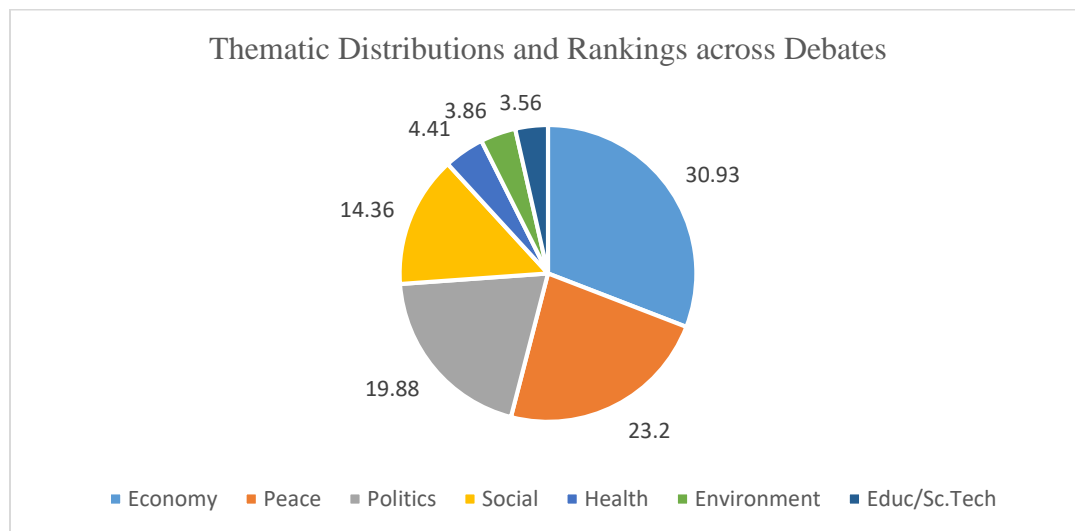
Thematic Frame	Frequency	% Frequency	Thematic Ranks
Economy	56	30.93%	1
Peace	42	23.20%	2
Politics	36	19.88%	3
Social	26	14.36%	4
Health	8	4.41%	5
Environment	7	3.86%	6
Edu/Sc.Tech.	6	3.56%	7

## **RQ 1: Discussion**

Looking at the thematic distribution by candidates, debate number, and debate year (Table 5) revealed that four thematic categories: Health, Education, Social Issues and the Environment, were sometimes completely absent as major questions during several of the debates sampled. Only three thematic categories: The Economy, Peace, and Politics, were consistently mentioned as main questions in every debate. This indicates that these three themes were seen as paramount concerns to the country in every election cycle. According to the

saliency theory, frequency of mention of a word, phrase, theme, or concept within a communicative context is an indication of the saliency or importance of that theme, frame, or concept within that context (Laver, 2001; Volkens, 2001; Humphreys & Garry, 2000). In terms of the frequency distribution rankings (Table 6), The Economy emerged as the most frequently occurring theme (mode) across all debates and across all years.

In examining policy proposals as they specifically related to posterity, the analysis showed (Tables 10 and 11) that the economy still ranked first. Of topics discussed on posterity-related issues, 40% of the discussions and proposals were in relation to the economy, followed by the peace and international relations category at about 30%. These two categories occupied 70% of the discussions related to posterity, while the other 5 categories only took up about 30% of the discussions as far as future time references were concerned.



*Figure 1.* Graphical representation of thematic distributions and rankings across debates.

Using the Critical Framework Analysis method to examine the rhetoric proved interesting and instructive. The qualitative analysis also confirmed that the economy did not only consistently rank as the most discussed category, but the category which evoked the harshest rhetoric as candidates conveyed their dissatisfaction about economic matters. Discussing the debt

crisis, taxation, budget issues, energy expenses, and overall “limitless” government spending, (see code book Appendix A, page 122), several candidates on both sides of the political aisle resorted to painting extreme word pictures using various rhetorical devices to hammer home their disapproval of the dire state of the economy.

In castigating the federal government for wasteful spending, candidates resorted to superlatives and the strongest word choices to make the point. They constantly referred to the government as “The Big Spender” and used several other expressions to illustrate the size and extent of wasteful spending. Kennedy (1960) called the government “big government,” while Obama (2008) talked of curbing our “profligate ways.” George Bush (1988) said, we need to “discipline both the Executive branch and the Congressional branch,” while Dukakis (1988) called on the president to go to the White House to work with Congress “seriously” to balance the budget “which is billions and billions of dollars in red ink.”

Another technique used was emphasis through repetition and word play. Kennedy (1960) registered his dissatisfaction with the state of the nation, but most especially with the state of its economy, by repeating and emphasizing the phrase “I am not satisfied...” several times preceding several points he raised. He added, “I don’t believe in big government but in effective government.” Obama (2008) wanted to “eliminate programs that don’t work and make those that work, work better,” while George Bush (2000) said “the American working man and woman is not taxed too little, the federal government continues to spend too much.” These emphases, puns and repetitions as well as choosing stronger nouns, verbs and the superlative forms of adjectives, were effective in painting the bleak picture of the economic situation as the candidates saw it.

Candidates also evoked imagery to make their point. McCain (2008) wanted to cut all the “pork” out of “pork-barrel bills,” and borrowed from the medical field when he talked of going



to Washington with “a scalpel” to incise economic matters with “surgical precision.” Michael Dukakis (1988) talked about presidents using “hot checks” to create an illusion of prosperity and persistently referred to the federal government’s “credit card mentality.” These images hammer home the phenomenon of present consumption for future payment, highlighting the burden being heaped on posterity by people today. Dukakis (1988) captured the fear and bleakness of the future economic outlook as he commented, “I am worried about the next generation whether we can ever turn this economic situation around. Let’s set as goal a steady, gradual, reduction of the deficit. It requires tough choices on spending and strong economic growth.” Obama (2008) reiterated the same point this way, “We have been living beyond our means. We’re gonna have to make some adjustments. We are mortgaging our children’s future borrowing money from China to send to Saudi Arabia” and McCain (2008) added, “we are sending billions of dollars to countries that don’t like us.” The rhetoric thus intensified candidates’ view of the ramifications of economic misappropriations on present times but also on future generations.

## **RQ 2: Analysis**

How often do presidential candidates debate policy issues from a future-oriented perspective?

This study postulated at the outset that presidential candidates will frame more policy issues to meet present day circumstances than they would frame policy issues to address future concerns. Candidates will be more focused on short-term goals than long term pursuits, and this need will color their discussion of policy issues. The study further assumed that future concerns and references will be used just as taglines and closing remarks to bolster candidates’ positions for arguments made. Therefore, the task of RQ 2 was to determine how much of the thematic and policy discussions were reflective of the aspirations and positions favorable to posterity.

The study therefore looked at the distribution of policy issues and themes across all

debates in terms of future and non-future discussions. Time references were coded as 1 for past, 2 for present, and 3 for future. The researcher then conducted a one-sample chi square test (goodness of fit test) as seen and explained by Table 7 below.

Table 7

*A One-sample Chi Square Test Showing Past/Present References Are More Common Than Future References in Debate Policy Proposals*

Frequencies	Observed N	Expected N	Observed %	Expected %
Past/Present	106	90.5	59%	50%
Future	75	90.5	41%	50%
Total	181	181	100%	100%
Chi Square	5.309			
Df	1			

The results from the analysis showed that, considering policy proposals in relation to time references for those proposals, the proportion of past and present (or non-future) time references and mentions in connection with issues discussed was higher (59%) and the proportion of future time mentions and references in connection with issues discussed (41%) was lower than would be expected by chance ( $\chi^2 = (1, N = 181) = 5.31, p < 0.05$ ). Essentially, the results showed that past/present mentions (59%) were about 1.4 times more likely to be made than future mentions (41%) and that the likelihood of making future mentions differed from the likelihood of making past/present mentions across the presidential debate corpus in the discussion of policy issues and thematic frames.

Another supposition of this study was that there will be an increase in future references post-2000 as a consequence of increased awareness of the plight of posterity as highlighted in media and political rhetoric. Following that rationale, and to further investigate whether time was indeed a factor in the discussion and presentation of policy issues, the researcher split the debate

corpus into two and looked at the thematic frames from a pre-2000 and post-2000 angle. The study sought to determine whether or not there was a relationship between the time period in which the debate took place (pre-2000 vs. post-2000) and the temporal focus of the discussion of policy issues (past/present vs. future). The researcher thus conducted a 2x2 chi square test of independence as shown in Table 8.

The analysis produced a non-significant chi square statistic ( $\chi^2 = (1, N = 181) = 0.12, p > 0.05$ ), suggesting that the time period in which the references were made and the temporal focus of the references were independent of each other. When all thematic references ( $n = 181$ ) were considered together, 41.4% ( $n = 75$ ) were focused on future references. When future references were compared according to when the reference was made, 42.4% ( $n = 50$ ) of all references made before 2000 ( $n = 118$ ) were focused on the future versus 39.7% ( $n = 25$ ) of all references made since 2000 ( $n = 63$ ). That is to say when all future references from the debates sampled prior to 2000 were combined and tested and all future references from the debates sampled post-2000 were combined and tested, there was no relationship between time period and the temporal focus of the references. About the same proportions of future and past/present references were made in the sampled debates pre-2000 and post 2000.

Table 8

*A Two-sample Chi Square Test Showing No Difference in Proportion of Past/Present Versus Future References in Pre-2000 Versus Post-2000 Debates*

		Future_Present					
			Past/Present	Future	Total		
Pre/Post 2000	Pre 2000	Count	68	50	118		
		Expected Count	69.1	48.9%	118.0		
		% within Pre_Post-2k	57.6%	42.4%	100.0%		
		% within Future_Pres	64.2%	66.7%	65.2%		
		% of Total	37.6%	27.6%	65.2%		
		Count	38	25	63		
	Post 2000	Expected Count	36.9	26.1	63.0		
		% within Pre_Post 2k	60.3%	39.7%	100.0%		
		% within Fut_Present	35.8%	33.3%	34.8%		
		% of Total	21.0%	13.8%	34.8%		
		Total		Count	106	75	181
		Expected Count	106.6	75.0	181.0		
% within Pre-Post_2k	58.5	41.4	100.0				
% within Fut_present	100.0	100.0	100.0				
% of Total	58.6	41.4	100.0				
Chi Square		.123					
Df		1					

## RQ 2: Discussion

The assumption that candidates will most likely be present-oriented in their time references in terms of their policy positions was supported by the Chi –square calculations. The results amplified the supposition that candidates discussed policies more for the short term, to resolve present day concerns than they did with posterity in mind. To further buttress this

argument, the researcher found that of the 75 references made to posterity frames, 52% of them were made as latent references and 48% were made as manifest references. That means references to posterity were mostly implied or could only be read between the lines, as opposed to being directly and overtly addressed and discussed.

Furthermore, a qualitative examination of the time frames revealed that it was mostly in the expression of short-term proposals that candidates interjected vague, futuristic, euphemisms in their discussions which gave the appearance of long range planning as revealed in the analysis. Discussions regarding the future were usually only brought up in oblique, anecdotal terms without actual commitment in policy proposals to directly address posterity concerns. Terms and expressions such as the following were meant to convey a long term view within the debates, for instance “the national interest,” “restore the strength of our country,” “vision for the country,” “American prestige,” “the driver of the economy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” “invest in the American people,” “invest in our young people,” and “debt to our kids.” Or as McCain (2008) said, “we have to have a new direction for this country,” and Obama (2008) added that, “our kids have to have their best future.” These are all admissions that the future is bleak if things do not change, but the future is only obliquely implied. The assumption, therefore, that future references were not central was supported.

### **RQ 3: Analysis**

Which policy issues do candidates consider most important in securing a prosperous future for posterity?

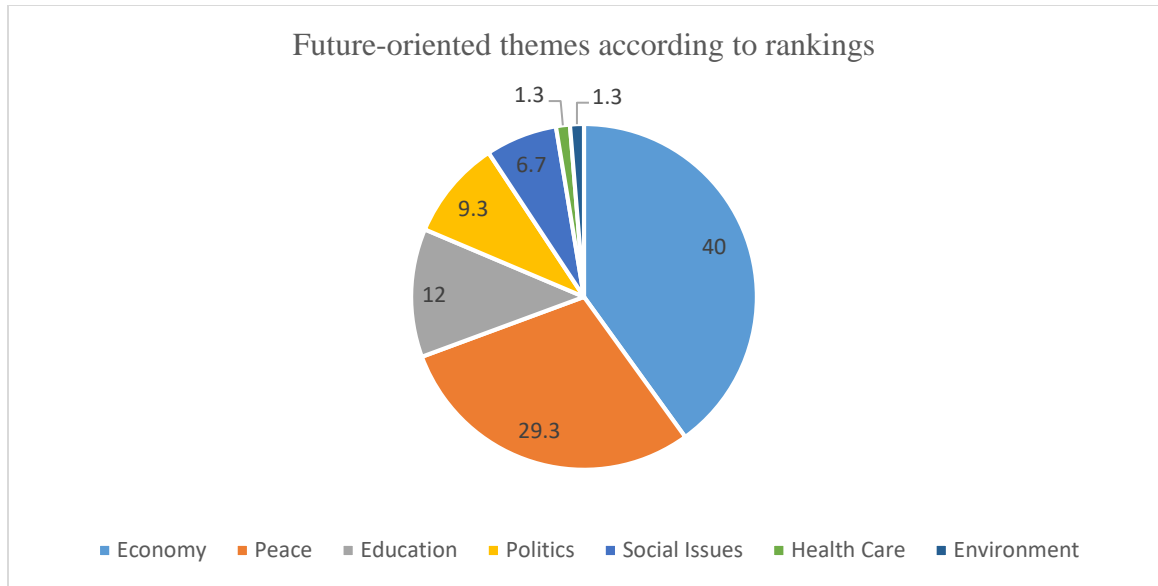
With support from the literature (Ekeli, 2005, 2007 & 2009), this study assumed that certain thematic frames (economy, education, and environment) will be more intensely emphasized when it comes to discussing policy issues pertaining to the future. The study argued that

frequency of mentions and degree of emphasis (measured as intensity) will indicate the level of importance and saliency candidates attribute to issues. Thus, in order to answer RQ 3, the degree of intensity attached to future policy frame discussions was captured with tenor markers on an intensity scale. The scale measured the extent to which candidates emphasized policy issues within the future time frame. The researcher first arranged the themes referring to future policy discussions according to their rankings as seen on the frequency Table 9.

Table 9

*Thematic Rankings Within the Future Time Frame*

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Economy	30	40.0
Peace	22	29.3
Education	9	12.0
Politics	7	9.3
Social Issues	5	6.7
Health Care	1	1.3
Environment	1	1.3
Total	75	100.0



*Figure 2.* Pie chart showing thematic rankings within the future time frame.

The researcher next considered only categories with readings large enough to produce meaningful results from statistical tests. This led to an examination of the Economy and Peace categories. The researcher then calculated for intensity of discussion for the Economy and Peace thematic categories, comparing mean intensity scores for future-oriented themes in the debate corpus.

Table 10

*Showing Mean Intensity Scores for Future-Oriented Themes*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
TenorIn	75	2.67	1.308
Future themes (Econ/Peace)	52	2.1538	.99773

Because of the relatively small counts of future mentions across the themes and the lack of normality of the intensity ratings within each theme, the researcher conducted a Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 11

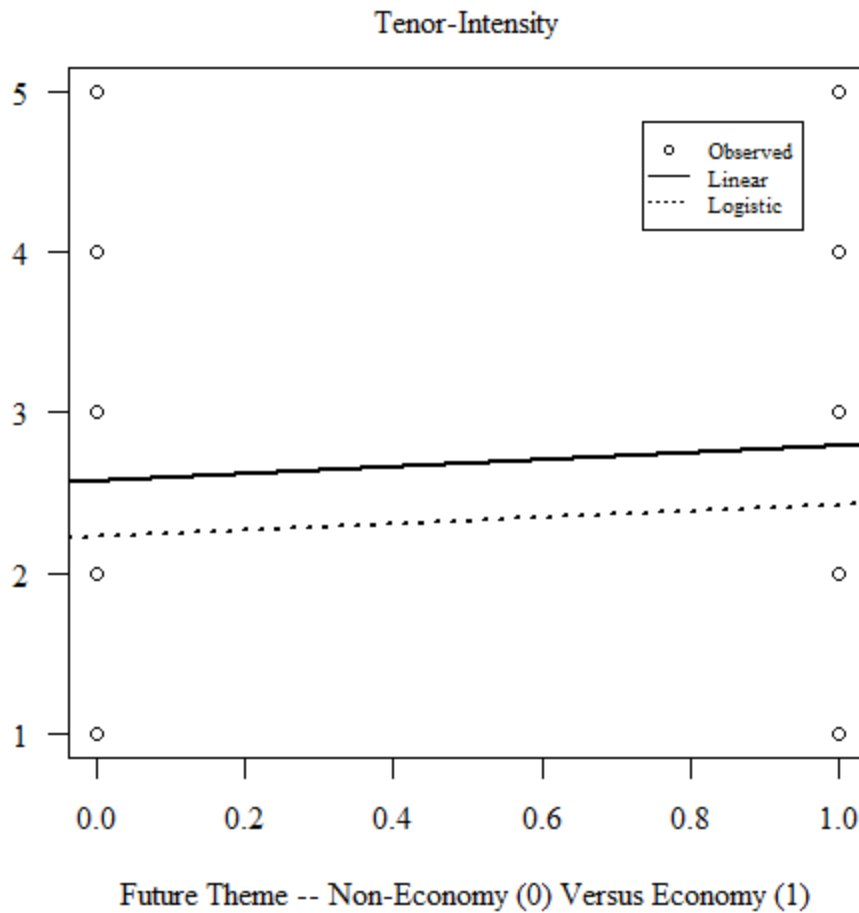
*Showing a Mann Whitney U Test Calculation*

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
TenorIn	Peace	22	22.68	499.00
	Economy	30	29.30	879.00
	Total	52		
			Mann-Whitney U	246.000
			Z	-1.610

The analysis compared the intensity ratings across two themes: Economy and Peace, and it resulted in a non-significant finding ( $U = 246.0$ ,  $N_1 = 22$ ,  $N_2 = 30$ ,  $p > .05$ , two-tailed), showing that there was no meaningful difference in intensity ratings based on the thematic content of the mentions and discussions of policy issues regarding posterity.

To determine the nature and the extent of the relationship between theme and intensity of future-based comments, candidate mentions across all future non-economy mentions were coded as zero and all future economy mentions were coded as one. Next, in order to account for non-normality of intensity rating in each of the groups, a Spearman's rank correlation was conducted including theme and intensity rating as the variables. The results of the analysis showed a non-significant relationship ( $r_s = 0.079$ ,  $N = 75$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , two-tailed), which suggested that future-based Economy mentions tended to be no more or less intense than, and of about the same valence (on average) than future-based, non-economy mentions. The correlation was not statistically significant, showing there was no relationship between theme type and intensity of comments made.





*Figure 3.* Showing the correlation between Tenor-Intensity and Future Non-Economy-Economy theme.

Similarly, to determine the nature and the extent of the relationship between theme and intensity of future-based comments with regard to the peace theme, references across all future non-peace mentions were coded as zero and all future peace mentions were coded as one. Next, in order to account for non-normality of intensity rating in each of the groups, a Spearman's rank correlation was conducted including theme and intensity rating as the variables. The results of the analysis showed a small, but statistically significant negative correlation ( $r_s = -0.235$ ,  $N = 75$ ,  $p < .05$ , two-tailed), which suggested that future-based peace mentions tended to be more negatively intense than future-based, non-peace mentions, showing that there was a relationship

between the peace theme and the intensity of discussion of that theme, and in this case that relationship was mostly negative.

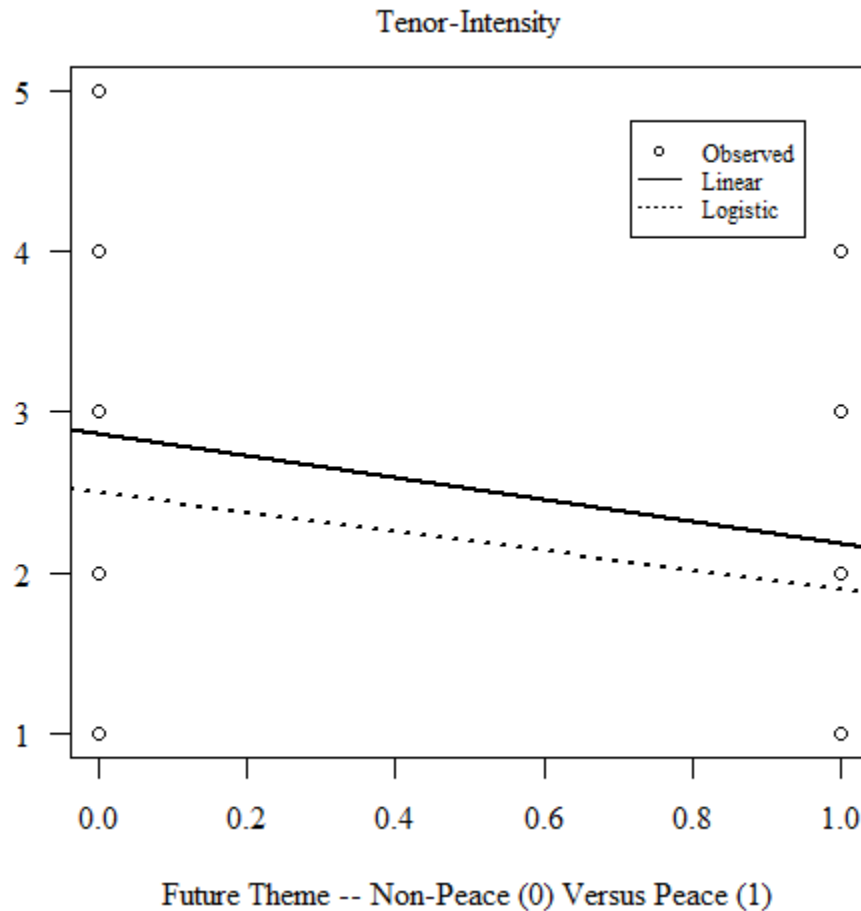


Figure 4. Showing the correlation between Tenor-Intensity and Future Non-Peace-Peace theme.

### RQ 3: Discussion

To determine the seriousness, urgency and importance attributed to posterity concerns by candidates, the study calculated for the intensity in policy discussions pertaining to the welfare of future generations as presented by candidates within the debate corpus. Two themes, including peace and the economy, were correlated with intensity of mentions in policy discussions to find out whether or not candidates actually emphasized these themes with regard to posterity. The

analysis showed that the economic theme, or economic matters were not that intensely emphasized in connection with the future time frame as the test produced a non-significant result. However, the peace category showed a small, but statistically significant negative correlation with intensity showing that candidates were anxious about the future of the U.S. and the world in general when it came to matters of peace. With subcategories such as war, military, weaponry, defense matters, and terrorism and homeland security issues in this category, a qualitative examination of the peace theme and analysis of candidates' discussions and stances seemed to agree with the findings from the quantitative analysis.

The researcher found that the Peace theme not only cascaded through presidential debates but that matters relating to peace, international relations, defense spending, and weapons modernization were always very intensely debated and emphasized in the debates. The ranking of the Peace theme as important to posterity is thus supported by the qualitative analysis. As an example, during the first Kennedy-Nixon (1960) debate, matters related to peace and stability, defense, the procurement of ammunition, and funding for The Pentagon and other defense projects were most fiercely debated among the debate corpus sampled. Examples of such tense debates included discussions relating to US-China relations over Quemoy Islands, Taiwan and territories over the China Sea.

The qualitative analysis also revealed strong negative attributes used in connection with the Peace theme. Ford and Carter (1976) spent considerable time in their debate discussing the nuclear arms race and The SALT I agreement, with Carter (1976) actually remarking that, "I know that non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is number one issue for the world." These discussions and examples provide valuable insights into how the U.S. views its role and place on

the international scene and supports the strong, negative, sentiments seen both quantitatively and qualitatively surrounding the peace theme discussions.

In conclusion, the analyses in Chapter Four indicate the sentiment which permeates the debate when it comes to a discussion of issues relating to posterity. Thematic frames identified to be of utmost importance in securing prosperity for posterity received marginal treatment within the sampled corpus and featured less in policy discussions. The qualitative analysis also revealed strong negative attributes used in connection with the peace theme indicating a concern about issues relating to peace in domestic, and especially, international affairs. The implications of these analysis and the discussions are further evaluated and synthesized in the findings, interpretations and recommendations sections in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explains the findings and results from this dissertation, especially findings on how posterity is presented on the debate stage. It also discusses areas in which the dissertation adds to an understanding of the communication field and supports the view that debates are a veritable forum for policy discussion. The findings have been divided into three sections; following Creswell's (2003) description of the presentation of findings of a content analysis study. The first section, expected findings, discusses what the researcher hoped to find based on the theoretical frame work adopted, and on prior research, following the deductive method. The second section, emerging findings, discusses discoveries made in the course of the research. It covers issues and ideas that became apparent as the study unfolded. The third section, discrepant findings, discusses surprises and issues that ran contrary to expected results. The richness of the study comes from having applied multiple research methods to triangulate results, affording the study added credibility and validity. The last portion of the chapter discusses the implications of the findings in the field of communication and media, identifies some limitations in the study, proposes new research trajectories, and offers a conclusion to the study.

#### **Expected Findings**

This section discusses what the researcher hoped to find based on the theoretical framework adopted for the study and on prior research, following the deductive method (Creswell, 2003).

**Support for themes and categories.** An analysis in response to RQ1 on thematic frames characteristic of policy issues within US presidential debates revealed that U.S. presidential

debates were concerned with similar themes as would be expected in political discourse based on the Comparative Manifesto Matrix (Laver, 2001) found on Table 1 and Table 4 of this dissertation (pages 72 & 73). That is, the themes identified and indexed in the dissertation mirror exactly those predicted by theory and literature to be the most frequently occurring in debates on policy issues in electoral systems and particularly during presidential debates. Thus, the economy, politics, peace, international matters, social issues, education, and the environment were confirmed as prime themes within debates. The findings, therefore, align with empirical research and are consistent with the literature as to what concerns candidates during political elections at any level of public life, but most especially during presidential debates. In the analysis of RQ3 on policy issues candidates consider most important in securing a prosperous future for posterity, the dissertation found an agreement in themes regarding posterity as postulated in the literature, thus confirming the same thematic concerns (see Table 9, page 82). These also align with themes in future studies literature recorded by (De-Shalit, 1995, Joidin, 2010). Thus, the expectation that these themes, adapted apriori for this study, will be present in an analysis of US presidential debates is supported.

**Support for theories.** One aim of this dissertation was to assess the veracity of established theories such as the framing theory and the saliency theory, and to add to the body of evidence in support of the relevance of these theories in the study of communication phenomena (Creswell, 2003; Zeibland & Mcpherson, 2006). The dissertation concurred with the tenets of the framing theory, which states that frames are the products of a society in which they are found (Entman, 2010; D'Angelo and Kuypers, 2010). Themes and discussions within debates and political manifestos reflect what concerns a particular society at any given point in time. The thematic categories identified and indexed in this dissertation support this view (RQ1).

Candidates repeatedly emphasized their stances on the various themes with every argument made, emphasizing the main concerns of their discussions and by so doing, framing the debate around those issues and promoting them as electoral agenda items. The constant reference to “a better future” by candidates in the transcripts analyzed (Obama, 2008; Kennedy, 1960) for instance, supports a preponderance of the socio-cultural theme that people are invested in creating a better future for posterity (Abshire, 2009).

The study also supports the saliency theory (Laver, 2001; McCombs et al, 1997) which states that the frequency of mention of a particular word, theme or issue equates to its importance and dominance (Laver et al, 2001; Humphrey & Gary, 2000, Budd & Donohew, 1967) in a communicative text. Therefore, the fact that presidential candidates concerned themselves with the thematic issues and categories indexed in this study speaks to the importance of those issues in American public and cultural life. The analysis in Chapter Four shows that when it comes to themes, the economy was mentioned four times more than all other themes, followed by political matters and peace and international matters (RQ1). When it comes to issues related to posterity (RQ3) the economy, peace issues and education emerged as themes most concerning to issues related to posterity. These thematic categories therefore illustrate that these were the most salient themes identified in the corpus. The more the mention of an idea, concept or theme, the greater the salience or importance attached to that idea or theme (Laver 2001; Humphreys & Garry, 2000, Budd & Donohew, 1967; McCombs et. al, 1997).

**Support for valence issues.** Laver, Budge & Volkens (2001) explain a valence issue as an issue where only one position is possible because of overwhelming perceptions of its moral superiority, obviousness, or rightness. With valence issues, only one course of action is popular and the key differences between parties come from the varying extent to which candidates

mention their positions on those valence issues (Laver & Garry, 2000). Stokes (2001) argues that the most important issues in politics tend to be valence issues, De Vreese (2001) agrees and adds that “valence is a key concept in understanding framing effects. Valence frames have the capacity not only to affect cognitive responses but also to shift attitudes and ... assessments.” These scholars agree that on valence issues, we will not find party differences in terms of the pro or con positions they adopt on them, since candidates will largely endorse the same position in most policy areas.

Thus, the analysis shows that candidates fundamentally agreed on most policy positions. On tax matters for instance, candidates from both parties, all, always indicated that they wanted a reduction in taxes. The difference usually came for whom tax cuts should be made and by how much. In the analysis of the texts, Democratic Party candidates tended to push for an increase in corporate taxes for businesses while bringing down the burden of individual taxes on the middle class (Kennedy, 1960; Gore, 2000; Obama, 2008). Meanwhile Republicans tended to argue for a reduction in tax rates for both corporations and individuals and in some cases, argued against an increase in taxes for corporations and individuals in the upper income bracket (McCain, 2008). The following exchange between McCain and Obama illustrates this point. In reflecting on his stance on taxes against the stance of his opponent, Obama (2008) said he and his opponent had two very different visions of the future of the country. He wanted to provide a tax cut for 95% of working Americans and he added that:

Then Exxon mobile which made \$12 billion record profits over the last several quarters, they can afford to pay a little more so that ordinary families who are hurting out there to figure out how they're going to afford food, how they're going to save for their kids'



college education, they need a break...we've got to pay for the core investments that make this economy strong and somebody has got to do it. (p. 5)

McCain responded, saying "American businesses are paying the second highest tax rate anywhere in the world at 35%. Let's not raise taxes for anybody."

The analysis also shows that candidates of both parties have always been interested in reducing the deficit and in paying down the national debt (Gore, 2000; Dukakis, 1988). Also, improving the lives of every American and keeping the country safe and secure from terrorism, both foreign and domestic, were also valence issues on which candidates agreed (Bush, 2000; Kennedy, 1960). The idea of energy independence and overall economic growth for the nation was also generally agreed upon by candidates. Most candidates also wanted better schools, increase pay for teachers, the institution of sensible gun laws, embarking on the eradication of poverty, moving families from welfare to work, and, creating a better and fairer society where inclusiveness and respect for civil liberties reigned (Nixon, 1960; Kennedy, 1960; Bush, 2000).

**Results triangulation.** Triangulation is the use of different methods to confirm and cross-validate findings within a single study, and it provides more support for conclusions drawn (Creswell, 2003; Ziebland & Mcpherson 2006). Through various methods, the study sought to arrive at acceptable findings and conclusions. Soft data for qualitative analysis was collected following the Critical Framework Analysis method (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994), and hard data was collected by giving quantitative attributes to the qualitative features identified in the transcripts (Creswell 2003; GAO, 1996; Holsti 1969; Riffe 200). In addition, the study used apriori themes identified as germane to presidential debates and political platform manifestos (Laver, 2001). The methods applied reinforced each other and provided support and verification for the larger

framing theory lens. The ability to triangulate the results from the study makes the findings generalizable to the study of other presidential debate transcripts.

### **Emerging Findings**

This study analyzed presidential debate transcripts to determine the extent to which policy discussions during debates reflected the aspirations of posterity as delineated in the literature on future concerns (De-Shalit, 1995; Wolfe, 2008; Read, 2011; Gopel, 2011). The analysis revealed that future category frames, identified to be of utmost importance in securing prosperity for posterity, were mentioned less frequently and less intensely than those that referred to short-term concerns. It was significant that environmental matters ranked last in the debates, when time dimensions were considered. Only about 4% of total discussions in the debates sampled were attributed to environmental issues and only about 1% of those discussions were in connection to the future. In the transcripts sampled, only during the 1988 Bush-Dukakis debate did environmental concerns feature briefly for the first time in the discussions. After that brief mention, nothing on environmental matters was seen again in any significant way, in the sampled corpus, until the 2000 Bush-Gore debate. RQ2 posed the question on the proportion of thematic discussions attributed to posterity frames and its analysis supports the assertion that more policy proposals were focused on the short-term.

Education, another category identified as important for a prosperous future (De-Shalit, 1995, Mulgan, 2009), only received marginal treatment within the sampled corpus. Though this category captures the aspirations of the American people towards the future, and though candidates agree education “will be the driver of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” only about 10% of the discussions regarding future proposals could be attributed to this theme in the corpus. Amid rising challenges from countries like Russia and China, America needs to take a leadership role

in global competitiveness with adequate investment in education, if future generations are going to be prepared to compete. Kennedy (1960) said, “The U.S. education system should be second to none...,” but after a discussion about failing schools, school construction, teachers’ salaries, and standards with Nixon in 1960, education did not feature as a main question frame again until the McCain-Obama 2008 debate, within the debate corpus sampled.

Despite Obama’s assertion that education not only has to do with our economic future but also has national security implications, McCain’s remark during the same debate is a testament to the neglect of this important frame as relates to posterity. McCain (2008) said, Bush’s No-Child-Left-Behind policy was the first time in 200 years that there was a discussion, at the national level, about what to do with education in America. An analysis of the education theme, therefore, revealed the oversight in focusing on long-term results today. Obama (2008) noted that “There never has been a nation on earth that saw its economic decline and continue to maintain its primacy as a military power. So we’ve got to get our education system right” (p. 61). He also stressed the need to improve early childhood education, improve reading scores, reduce dropout rates, reduce delinquency rates, recruit new and competent teachers, and increase teachers’ salaries.

Thus, though revamping the education system has been the main goal, in some cases regulations and innovations in teaching and learning have not yielded desired results. Obama’s remark that, “despite the fact that the U.S. spends more per capita than any other country on education, we trail most of the countries of the world by every international measurement in math and science competence” illustrates the point (Obama, 2008).

In the domain of social issues, the United States has striven to become a “fair union,” ever marching forward to becoming “a more perfect union.” America has striven towards

inclusiveness, striving to meet the aspirations of every segment of the population. But the analysis in this study indicated that the governing elite do not extend this “fairness” to generations ahead. Candidates Dukakis (1988) and George Bush (2000) both talked of keeping our commitment to the older generation in terms of social security, health, and other benefits, but there is little talk of keeping our commitment to future generations. Candidates tap into America’s glorious past, its heroes, and its history, to advance their agendas but seem to be oblivious of how future people will evaluate policies discussed and enacted today, especially on how those policies will impact future lives. Researchers (Ekeli, 2005, 2007, 2009; Read, 2011; Thompson, 2003) agree that present day decisions and policies will have perhaps greater consequences on posterity than even on present times (Ekeli, 2005, 2007, 2009; Joidin, 2010; Read, 2011). Thus, fairness, equality, and inclusiveness of all peoples, regardless of temporal existence, are important factors policy makers should consider in decision arenas.

**The importance of time as variable.** Time (short-term and long-term timeframes) was an important variable in the analysis within this dissertation. An examination of the policy issues analyzed with time as a variable (RQ2) revealed that 59% of policies proposed were geared towards the short-term time frame (between 1 and 5 years) and the midterm (between 10 and 20 years), and not for the long term. Only 41% of the discussions reflected periods of 50 years and over. Since this study was interested in measuring time, frequency, and the degree of intensity of policy discussions, the analysis revealed that although policy is engaged with decisions about the future (Graham, 2010; Ekeli, 2005, 2007 & 2009), more policy issues discussed were geared towards the short-term future rather than the long-term future, as was predicted in the problem definition section of the dissertation in Chapter One.

Within the debates for instance, it appeared McCain (2008) concentrated more on resolving issues in the present time frame, while Obama seemed to be more invested in the younger generation and posterity, as seen in various exchanges between them. Gore (2000) remarked that current fiscal policy decisions are an attempt to “shuffle debt down to posterity.” These exchanges provide glimpses into how long-range policies have fared with parties, candidates, and the nation in the last 50 years of policy proposals on the debate stage, during presidential election campaigns, and even in government. To redress this short-term view, politicians will have to adapt Dukakis’ “guts and will politics” and Obama’s “culture and ethic of responsibility” to see beyond the present.

The above emerging findings thus support the conclusion, that the future time frame is less emphasized while the present time-frame is more favored in policy considerations. Per the framing theory on which this study is premised, a topic that is not framed will never enter the public discourse (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2010). Findings from this dissertation should be particularly troubling and concerning to futurists, considering that the sampled debates span close to a half century of policy discussions. The study concludes that debates are opportunities missed to shed light on the importance to plan for longer-term futures.

### **Discrepant Findings**

Ziebland and Mcpherson (2006) urge a researcher to present discrepant information that runs counter to themes, and to look for negative evidence or deviant cases that do not fit with the emerging storyline and that warrant particular attention. Creswell (2003) also encourages researchers to present information they found contradictory or negative in their work. This study thus made some interesting discoveries which ran contrary to expectations.

**Divergence between quantitative and qualitative results.** In assessing the intensity of the economic malaise affecting both present and future generations, the quantitative and qualitative results diverged from each other on the intensity in presenting the economic frame. This was a surprise because the expectation from issue salience, frequency and the rhetorical analysis all indicated that economic matters were very intensely debated and candidates were overall dissatisfied on matters concerning the economy. But when the future time frame was isolated as a factor and tested against the economic theme, the test produced a non-significant result.

A possible explanation could be the result of having considered the economy against intensity in the future time frame only. The researcher supposes significance could have been achieved should the test have considered all time frames. However, the interest of this study was to examine the impact of policy on posterity only and as such all time frames were not considered in the analysis. Also, the fact that only main frame questions were coded for analysis could have been responsible for the divergence. A line by line coding of utterances might have produced different results, as Weber (1990) says larger units of text are more difficult to code and some information is generally lost in coding larger units beyond grammatical sentences.

**The prominence, manifest and latent findings.** The analysis in the study revealed that when it came to “prominence,” that is, the point within debate responses where candidates made references to the future, references about the future occurred in initial positions in discussions, to about the same degree as present/past time references. This was contrary to what the researcher expected to find. With the suggestion from Grosseries (2008) that posterity is used only for political expediency and Inayatullah’s (2003) remark that future affairs are valued but not prioritized, this study predicted that future references will be found mostly as taglines at the end

of candidates' responses as they rounded off their arguments. The study did not expect to find future references in lead positions as openings to arguments and responses, but the analysis proved the contrary.

If, therefore, candidates made posterity references early in answering debate questions, one could have concluded that meant posterity issues were treated as salient and central in discussions. But further analysis of “manifest” (obvious references to the future timeframe) and “latent” utterances contradicted that finding because most future references, though prominently placed within responses, were seen to be mostly latent and not manifest. As such, there were more covert references than overt references to posterity. This finding supported the logical conclusion that the connections to posterity issues could have been mostly missed by the audience, since audiences are usually passive listeners or viewers. Audiences would have had to actively process the references to make the connection between latent references and posterity. However, the fact that posterity issues were prominently placed in debate responses was a surprising and interesting finding, indicating that candidates referenced posterity often, but reinforcing the fact that they do so more to boost their own positions rather than in recognition of the rectitude of doing so.

### **Seminal Media and Communication Concepts: Enhancing the Field**

In a study of this nature, it is important to crystalize seminal contributions to the furtherance of understanding within a particular field of inquiry. To that effect, this section of the dissertation seeks to catalog those critical media and communication concepts this study upholds and enhances, especially as they contribute to a better understanding of the communication and media field, and as they enhance an understanding of the role of presidential debates in the evolution of political discourse in the country. The study crystalizes these findings by affirming

that presidential debates are an environment for constructing political reality, affirming that debates are veritable media events; affirming the advocacy role of the media, and affirming that debates and post-debate analysis are conduits for the evaluation of the power of media effects.

**Constructing political reality during primetime debates.** This dissertation makes the case that presidential debates are high profile fora, and are consequential in the discussion of the future trajectory of the country. Debates grip national attention and the debate stage is a conduit for the peoples' voice. Debates bring candidates face to face with the electorate and provide opportunities for people to vet those who want to lead the country (Trouw, 2005; Trent & Friedenberg, 1995). Debates help the electorate learn more about matters of public policy and to make informed choices, having had the chance to hear and consider each candidate's vision for the country. This engagement and exchange with candidates consequently produces a more educated and more engaged electorate (Trent & Friedenberg, 1995; Wells, 1999). These aspects elevate presidential debates beyond mere primetime entertainment to becoming a veritable forum for policy discussions.

However, this dissertation concludes that more could be done during debates in shifting policy discussions from short-term fixes to longer-term outlook. It argues that the anxiety candidates feel about their political futures influences them to be short-sighted in taking stances with longer-term consequences for the country and as such, candidates tend to promote short-term fixes on myriad political issues (Gopel, 2011; Gosseries, 2008). Thus, the dissertation challenges all parties; journalists, politicians, researchers, pundits, and media, involved in overseeing debates as an integral part of the political and electoral process in the country, to look past the short-term and to evaluate the longer-term effects of proposal stances as presented on stage during primetime election debates.



Journalists could steer questioning more towards visionary, substantive and longer-term policy discussions rather than focusing on trivialities such as gaffes and “got you moments” during debates. Johnson-Cartee (2013) suggests that political campaigns are “journalist-centered rather than candidate-centered,” indicating that journalists have a lot to do with the tenor, tone and questions during debates. Matera & Salwen (1996) actually place the blame on errant debates on journalists, for asking “unwieldy questions” which allow candidates to skirt around discussing the real policy issue at stake. Therefore, tactful questioning by journalists could cause candidates to stick to explaining their positions on each policy throughout the debates. This study considers this aspect pivotal for all presidential debates in all elections and pivotal in ensuring that debates remain a veritable channel for constructing political reality in the country.

**Affirmation of primetime debates as veritable media events.** This dissertation affirms and supports the fact that nationally-televised primetime debates are veritable media events capable of entertaining, informing, educating, fulfilling the traditional role of the media, and satisfying all media programming goals. The media thrive on conflict, controversy, and drama and seek to generate or at least encourage these during presidential debates (Barnes, 2011) as they pit candidates against each other, journalists against candidates or citizens against candidates. Debates offer conflict, personality clashes, heated exchanges, “got you moments,” and gaffes, and these unfold right before viewers’ eyes as the nation watches in real time. D’Angelo and Lombard (2006) point out that, a “content analyses of U.S. presidential campaign news have shown that stories regularly cover aspects of media politics such as candidate-press interactions and candidate performances designed to attract media attention” (p. 5). Similarly, Matera and Salwen (1996) state that “the journalists, too, are keenly aware that they are being viewed and scrutinized by a national audience and their peers” (p. 2). This deliberate attempt at generating

conflict and controversy during campaigns and on the debate stage by journalists and even by candidates, makes for entertaining television.

Happenings during debates become fodder for TV programs, talk shows, late night comics, cartoons, and lampoons, and aspects from debates even end up permanently engraved in the American social and cultural consciousness. Several memorable headlines, taglines, clichés, and metaphors have come down into the American political, media, sociological, and cultural consciousness from interactions among candidates and journalists on the debate stage during primetime presidential debates. Such include “Bensten’s (1988) “Senator ... you’re no Jack Kennedy” quip, or Regan’s (1984) “I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience,” and his even more famous “Are you better off than you were four years ago” question (Regan, 1980).

All these aspects make for veritable entertainment episodes, meeting the entertainment objectives of the media. No surprise then that existing research on presidential debates, especially as examined within the field of mass communication and media studies have focused mostly on issues regarding image-making or image-repair (Coombs, 2010) conundrums candidates end up in after debates, owing to the heightened sense of conflict and adversarial relationships debates highlight. But debates as media events also have the power to pass on powerful didactic messages in the form of policy stances, dealing with moral questions, and dealing with issues about social equity and fairness, so debates can truly inform and educate. Matera & Salwen (1996) state that research indicates at least modest public knowledge acquisition and campaign interest from viewing debates (p.2), and Johnson-Cartee (2013) adds that “narratives constructed by journalists become influential and contagious; most people rely on them.” People do actually learn from viewing debates, albeit to varying degrees.

The media could become even more central in shaping the nation's social, cultural, moral, and political agenda by deliberately highlighting substantive frames as debates unfold on stage, in headlines, scrolling news texts, pullouts and live tweets. These could all be about lines that advance particular agendas as presented during debates. In the particular case of this dissertation, for instance, such callouts, scrolling text, breaking headlines could be about issues such as green constitutionalism, climate change, debt ceilings, balanced budgets, and other subjects which promote posterity causes. Drawing attention through such highlights during debates and during post-debate analysis, these issues could register better in the minds of the electorate and can even influence final votes. Thus, though debates are entertaining, they can also do more in informing and educating, if the media would highlight substance more than entertainment during debates and post-debate analysis. Communication scholarship can therefore begin to shift away from studying only the entertainment value of debates to more policy studies of the medium (Noam, 1993).

**Affirmation of media effects theories in the study of presidential debates.** Various studies over time have propounded theories supporting the fact that we are all, affected by media in various ways and to varying degrees. Simply stated, this group of theories form the basis of media effects. As different as they are in approach and focus, these theories provide evidence backing the validity and reliability of the assumptions of the effects that media have on society (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Scheufele, 1999). This dissertation invoked some of these media theories to answer questions and hypotheses and sought the tenets of these theories to explicate the positions and stances by candidates.

The framing theory, the overarching lens through which this study unfolded, illustrated in the analysis in this dissertation how politicians and journalists use thematic frames to indicate saliency through the frequency and intensity in framing and reframing themes about national life in the debates (McCombs et al, 1997; Humphreys & Garry, 2000; Laver et al 2001). As communicators, politicians organize messages in schemas (Scheufele, 1999), as they put forward policy proposals, and the media in their gate-keeping and agenda-setting roles select and repack certain ideas, priming audiences to accept the messages as presented (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010). The media thus foster what to cover, highlight, and expand on in the news selection, news analysis, and editorial processes as explained by the framing, agenda-setting, and gate-keeping theories. Specifically, in presidential debates, the media, reframe topics brought up for discussion during debates and primes audiences to accept candidates' messages. This illustrates the influence of the media on viewers, whether as powerful or limited effects, during elections, a fact which can affect final votes, illustrating media effects on society during elections. Thus, the basic premises of these various theories of media effects found to be tenable. This dissertation thus contributes to the furtherance of an understanding of media effects theories in the communication field.

**Affirmation of the press as change agents.** The role of the press as the voice of the under-represented and as a tool for social change cannot be overemphasized. In fulfilling its social responsibility, the press have an important role to play in bringing forward for discussion issues that may otherwise not be in the public arena. Issues extensively covered by the media become household topics, easily recognized in the country's collective awareness. As the purveyors of free speech, the press have a constitutional mandate to operate in the best interest of the governed (Keech, 1991; Horwitz, 1989; Baran and Davis, 2008). Al Gore (2000) describes

the press as “keepers of the score cards.” Therefore, in addition to reporting the news and drafting history, the press as the fourth estate, have a social and moral responsibility to serve in the public interest (Baran & Davis, 2008).

Thus, when it comes to issues pertaining to posterity, the press could play an adequate, advocacy role as explained in this dissertation, in becoming a voice for posterity by packaging and repackaging longer-term themes from debates, and placing those issues top on their news selection agendas and in their programming. McCombs et al. (1997) declare that there is “a causal assertion that the priorities of the media agenda influence the priorities of the public agenda” (p. 703). Thus if the media prioritizes posterity issues, it is possible that consciousness about posterity issues could become mainstream.

The media could also highlight efforts by advocacy groups, individuals and governments who are working towards conveying a more prosperous future to posterity. This dissertation describes advocates, including the press, working towards conveying a more prosperous future to posterity as ombudsmen (Agius, 2006; Gopel, 2011). The media in particular could become apologists for posterity, should they become aware of what their role could be in enhancing future-positive frames in their programing, and bringing posterity issues more into the limelight. Therefore, affirming the media as an agent for change and advocacy in this dissertation enhances this important but overlooked role of the media.

### **Further Research Trajectories**

There are still some lingering questions which need to be investigated. However, the scope and time frame for this present research project could not answer all such questions. The following therefore, could be areas for future research.

Research on third party candidates to gauge their stances on posterity issues could provide more insights than has been obtained from candidates of the two main parties in this study, because third party candidates tend to be more attuned to issues considered favorable to posterity than candidates from the two dominant parties (Republican and Democratic). Ralph Nader and the Green Party platform, are an example that this could be the case, with their strong focus on environmental issues, social justice, and equality. A similar study could investigate whether party affiliation could determine if members of certain political parties could be more sympathetic to future-just causes than members of another party by comparing support for posterity causes with party affiliation as variable, and even comparing individual presidential agendas, looking for support for future-just causes from a party affiliation viewpoint.

A longitudinal study on “promises made” on the campaign trail and debate stage, and “promises kept” when candidates actually become president could be illuminating in concluding whether future-just policies framed in debates by candidates are followed-through and implemented by the time a candidate takes office as president of the United States. A pre and post comparative analysis of the policy agendas of various presidents and their eras could be done to provide such insights. Similarly, a study on whether winning candidates ever consider “viable and interesting ideas” presented by their opponents on the campaign trail and debate stage, when the winning candidate becomes president, could be a promising area of studies about how sincerely and seriously candidates and presidents really are about “working across the aisle.”

New research from this study could also trace an “ideal America” through the various proposals that have been made in debates over time, by compiling “good proposals” in the various thematic categories which could serve to produce an ideal society, if implemented. The

findings from such research could prove informative to future policy makers and it could inspire them to consider reasonable and well-meaning proposals made by all candidates, whether they win or lose, rather than focusing just on the agenda of a single candidate or a single party. This could lead to a broader, and hopefully, more positive outlook in the vision and direction of policy for the good of the country. A realization at the end of this study is the fact that the material needed for the creation of an ideal America, or in other words, solutions to most of America's problems are already known. It appears what is lacking in the policy arena is more the spirit of cooperation, agreement, and implementation.

Next, with the prevalence of technology today and with the availability of sophisticated software and algorithms, a researcher could create and run simulations of what the results could be if certain policies were adapted and implemented as opposed to others. Such simulations could produce viable options which could be put to vote to policy makers, for scenarios with the most promising outcomes at the least possible cost. Such testing via simulations and modelling could help eliminate costs and guesses, and, help preempt or minimize failures in policy implementation prompted by short election cycles and brief political terms (Trouw, 2005). This may eliminate or cut back on policies that could prove disastrous and costly in the long-run for the country. The advances in the health care industry with remote medicine possibilities and with innovations in the business and aviation sectors point to these possibilities.

Innovative courses and curricula could be developed in universities and colleges to introduce new courses in the future studies area. Communication faculty could partner with other academics across disciplines to present new departmental programs and create new curricula. Some universities, such as the universities of Houston, Hawaii and Regent, and colleges such as California College of the Arts, and Ann Arundel Community College have started offering

courses in the future studies areas. Another recent example is NASA's engagement in and introduction not just of a Planetary Protection officer, but of courses in Planetary Protection as well ([nasa.gov](http://nasa.gov)).

## **Limitations**

As a study in mass communication research, this dissertation was not able to make recommendations that could be adopted in the corridors of power for effective change in government and government processes in the United States. In recognition of calls by scholars such as Noam (1993) for research which could affect policy, this dissertation closes with the hope that communication scholars can actively seek ways of incorporating policy-change proposals in mass communication research in future. The study was not also able to illustrate whether candidates who focus on longer term policy proposals are seen to be more visionary, and therefore, gaining an advantage to winning more elections. This will take comparison of election results and candidates' positions over several election cycles to adequately verify this assertion. However, that could be an area for further research in future. The dissertation also could not incorporate opinions and stances by third party candidates because they never poll high enough to be included in debates. Their views were, therefore, not available to the researcher for analysis in this study.

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to examine the centrality of posterity issues in American presidential debates. Communicators, sociologists, scholars and researchers have found that parents would make sacrifices so that their offspring be better off in life. Thus, the central point which this study grappled with throughout, was to determine the extent to which decisions made in political circles today consider the interests of posterity and long term futures, in order to make the socio-



cultural frame of a better tomorrow for posterity a reality. The study thus content-analyzed a sample of presidential debate transcripts to evaluate the policy stances of presidential candidates on issues as they concern posterity. The study argued that although all debates and policy proposals were engaged with the future, it was the short-range future which was mostly considered in debate proposals and not the long-range future, which better captures the aspirations of futurists and posterity. The study called for greater consideration of longer-term perspectives in policy outlook.

This dissertation also examined ways in which findings from the research enhance an understanding of seminal mass communication and media concepts. It discussed some limitations to the study and also suggested some trajectories for further research. As Dukakis (1988) said, “we need to be serious about building a strong and good America.” To that end, the researcher hopes that future-just causes gain recognition on the map of political imperatives in the United States, without which Americans could be imperiled in the long-run if the future is consistently discounted in present times, especially in the face of intense global competition from emerging states and new “super powers.” The study contributes to evaluating debates as a veritable forum for policy discussions and as a relevant milieu within which to study mass communication and media phenomena. It is the researcher’s hope that this work accomplished that goal.

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## Appendix A

### Content Analysis for Presidential Debates – Topic Guide and Coding Instructions

#### General Instructions:

- This code book sets forth instructions on coding transcripts of presidential debates and newspaper articles for a content analysis of policy frames on issues regarding posterity as portrayed in presidential debates and post-debate newspaper analyses. As a coder, you are asked to do the following:
  - Please contact the researcher in case you have questions, need clarification for concepts or definitions or questions about procedure.
  - Make notes in the margin of borderline decisions-e.g. reasons for coding sentences/quasi sentences in particular categories or sub-categories if you think it might be ambiguous/misunderstood or if you believe your category choice could potentially be confusing, and discuss it with the researcher.
  - Please read each debate transcript carefully. Then reread the transcript again but this time, pay close attention to each sentence separately. For each sentence do/consider the following carefully.
    - Please color-code your categories (subcategories) time frames, and variables within the debate corpus for easy identification and cross-checking.
    - Please number each sentence within the debate transcript.
    - Please do not change the major categories for any reason. However, you may add/subtract or merge subcategories if you feel a subcategory is not

covered in the matrix below. Before you do so, please consult the researcher and make a note of the addition in the margin.

- Please complete the accompanying excel file and fill out all segments as necessary (see instructions below).

Thank you for your help.

#### File Information

- When saving the Excel file for submission, please include your Last name at the start of the file name replacing the ‘Your Name’ – e.g. Your Name – CApresdebates.xls is saved as Epwene – CApresdebates.xls.
- Please do not change the format of the file or order of the columns within the excel file. The individual spreadsheets will be consolidated into a single file for analysis.

Data Entry – Below is information for coding and entering data for each column. Please follow the directions carefully. If you have any questions, please email or call the researcher. Enter data in the same format for all categories and columns. For instance, enter all time in seconds, and all dates with four digit years, so 1960 for instance should be 1960 and not 60.

Important: Begin by coding each sentence, that is, from one end punctuation mark to the next (i.e. full stop, question signs and exclamation points). Please do not code the formulaic openings and closings of the debate. Code the questions for theme, time frame and tenor, if time is “future”. Start coding the first response of the first debate.

Columns	Variables	Instructions	Labels (examples)
A	Debate Number	Please enter the number of the debate (in chronological years)	D#1
B	Debate Year	Please enter the year during which the debate took place	YYYY (1970)
C	Decade	Please enter the decade e.g. 70, 90	YY (70)
D	Coder	Enter your last name	Last Name (Epwene)
E	Debate Theme	Enter the overall theme of the debate e.g. Economy, Domestic Affairs etc.	Foreign Affairs
F	Question Number	Please enter the question number for that debate e.g. 1	Q#1 and #23

G	Question number running tally	Enter question number for all the debates	e.g. #12
H	Question Source	Please enter the source of the question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderator (Mod)</li> <li>• Journalist on Panel (JPan)</li> <li>• Audience member (in the room) (Aud)</li> <li>• Offsite-through letter, Youtube, Twitter, email etc. (Off)</li> </ul>	Journ. on Panel (JPan)
I	Answer Number	Please enter the answer number for that debate e.g. 1	#1
J		Enter running tally for answer number 12 overall	#10
K	Question/Answer Topic	Please enter the overall topic for that question and answer e.g. economy, politics	Economy
L	Candidate/speaker	Enter the name of the candidate responding to the question e.g. Clinton, Dole	Clinton
M	Party	Enter the candidate's party e.g. democratic, Republican	Dem, Rep (1 for Dem, 2 for Rep)
N	Sentence Number	Enter a number for the sentence you are coding and enter a number for the sentence overall in the debates (e.g. 1 for that debate, 100 overall-running tally)	Sent#1 and 45
O	Quasi Sentence Number	Enter a number for each <b>political idea, issue, frame or argument</b> being discussed.	QSent#1
P	Quasi Sentence tally	Running total for quasi sentences	E.g. 2 of 35
Q	Quasi sentence description	Enter a brief description of the quasi sentence (for category and time verification and to calculate reliability) e.g.	School reform proposal



		Discussion about the economy, Immigration controversy	
R	Category (Frame) and subcategory  <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="background-color: red; color: black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 2px;">○ Economy</div> <div style="background-color: orange; color: black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 2px;">○ Politics</div> <div style="background-color: yellow; color: black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 2px;">○ Science and Technology</div> <div style="background-color: green; color: black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 2px;">○ Environment</div> <div style="background-color: olive; color: black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 2px;">○ Education</div> <div style="background-color: purple; color: black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 2px;">○ Health care</div> <div style="background-color: magenta; color: black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 2px;">○ Social issues</div> <div style="background-color: blue; color: black; padding: 2px;">○ Peace and international affairs</div> </div>	<p>In the appropriate column enter a number for the subcategory. Refer to the matrix below. Add a subcategory if you feel strongly it is not represented in the matrix, make a note of it and consult the researcher.</p> <p>*Do not change the major categories.</p>	Economy, Debt crisis (enter subcategory number) e.g. 1/7
S	Time	<p>Enter the time frame mentioned or referenced within the quasi sentence (enter 1 for Past, 2 for Present and 3 for Future) If no time frame is used leave blank, do not enter zero.</p> <p>Important – If time frame is Future, complete the tenor, intensity and future+category columns. If time is Present or Past, do not code the Tenor, and intensity and future+category columns, leave blank.</p>	Future (3)
T	Tenor	For Future time (Time-Future), code the tenor of the statement regarding the future. Enter 2 for positive and 1 for negative (if neutral leave blank. Do not enter a zero.	Positive (2)
U	Intensity	For each positive and negative tenor coded, judge to what degree the speaker is positive or negative and rate that on a scale of 1-5. Use grammatical, linguistic and context clues to make the judgment e.g., a statement that says “The future is very, very bleak” will be coded as negative (tenor), and 5 (intensity).	Very important (4)

V	Future and Category (Future+category)	If time is Future, then code the category referred to in connection to the future.	FEcon, debt crisis (F1/7)
W	Prominence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manifest</li> <li>• Latent</li> </ul>	Enter whether future time frame reference is “manifest” or “latent” A manifest future time frame will reference the future directly or denotatively, with words like “future, tomorrow, grandchildren, posterity” or with similar linguistic markers. A latent reference can only be inferred connotatively by reading between the lines. Use context clues to decide (write in the word clue).	Manifest (future) Latent (write in clue)
X	Space	Enter whether the reference to the future is a Word (1) a Phrase(2) a Sentence (3) Sentences (4)	Sentence (3)
Y	Position/placement	Is the reference to the future in the <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning of response (first sentence or as soon as answers starts) (3)</li> <li>• Middle (Body, mid portion of response) (2)</li> <li>• Ending (Last portion, sentence) of response (1)</li> </ul>	Beginning (3)

### Category and Subcategory Matrix

#### **PEACE (FPeace)**

1. Foreign and international affairs (except trade-code under economy)
2. Military matters (deployment, expansion, contraction)
3. War and conflict intervention

4. Terrorism and new threats (including cyber threats)
5. Modern warfare and modern weaponry (minus bio and syndromic attacks-code under health care)

### **POLITICS (FPol)**

1. Freedom, democracy and human rights
2. Constitutional matters
3. Government, administration (centralization/decentralization of power)
4. Political authority, corruption
5. Laws, order and legal matters (except prisons-code under social)
6. Policy issues and legislation (except education and health care)

### **ECONOMY (FEcon)**

1. Free markets/enterprise and protectionism
2. Regulations (minus health care and education)
3. Economic policies and planning
4. Corporations and non-profits
5. Production and factors of production (Land (not including conservation), labor, capital and entrepreneur)
6. Nationalization
7. Debt Crisis (borrowing, balancing the budget)
8. Taxes and taxation issues
9. Trade (plus international)
10. Energy-cost (code conservation and alternative sources under environment)

11. Employment and unemployment issues (minus unemployment compensation-code under social policies)

12. Information (economy-not Tech)

### **SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE (FTech)**

1. Computers and innovative technologies
2. Modern Roads and bridges (construction etc.)
3. Newer and cheaper means of transportation-including roads, bridges, sea and air
4. Newer and user-friendly buildings
5. Genetics (for health care e.g. stem cell research)
6. American Reconstruction Act

### **SOCIAL AND WELFARE POLICIES (FSoc)**

1. Social justice and Prisons
2. (Social) welfare (including food stamps)
3. Social security (protecting and preserving for seniors and taxing etc.)
4. Unemployment (help and compensation)
5. Fabric of society and national way of life (general if not under any of these)
6. Marriage, family and alternative life styles
7. Multiculturalism and diversity
8. Poverty eradication, resource (fiscal) management-distribution, redistribution and minority care
9. Immigration and Border issues/crisis
10. Care of veterans and military families

## **ENVIRONMENT (FE<sub>vn</sub>)**

1. Natural resources and natural resource management (water, forest, deserts, wind, energy, National Parks)
2. Sustainability and sustainable use of resources, sustainable development-recycling, conservation etc.)
3. Energy and alternative sources of energy-fossil fuels, nuclear energy, wind, and solar
4. Global warming/ozone depletion, climate change etc.
5. Population-numbers, control etc.
6. Genetics and genetic engineering, humans, plants, animals and food
7. Resource management and energy conservation
8. Energy
9. Resources-water, air, parks
10. Population
11. Food
12. Genetics
13. Natural disasters, wind, water, fires, famine and droughts

## **EDUCATION (FE<sub>d</sub>)**

1. Education Policies
2. Schools at all levels-expansion and limitation
3. Regulations
4. Global competitiveness
5. Innovations in teaching and learning

## **HEALTH CARE (FHealth)**

1. Health care policies (except ACA-Affordable Care Act)
2. The Affordable Care Act (Obama Care)
3. Healthcare Regulations
4. Modernizing the health care system including EHRs (electronic health records) and Decision support systems (DSSs), State Healthcare Exchanges
5. Bio threats including germ/chemical warfare and syndromic attacks/effects on (People and food and water supply)

Matrix adapted from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), the UN Future Literature Files and from The Center for Saving America's Future Report.

## Appendix B

## Excel File for Collecting Data From the Content Analysis

[illegible]

## Appendix C

### Debate Distribution and Analysis Legend From Table 5

<i>Debate Number, candidates and debate year</i>
1-KN-1960: First Kennedy-Nixon, 1960 presidential debate
3-KN-1960: Third Kennedy-Nixon, 1960 presidential debate
2-CF-1976: Second Carter-Ford, 1976 presidential debate
2-BD-1988: Second Bush-Dukakis, 1988 presidential debate
3-GB-2000: Third Gore-Bush, 2000 presidential debate
3-MO-2008: Third McCain-Obama, 2008 presidential debate

Key as used in study

1-KN
3-KN
2-CF
2-BD
3-GB
3-MO