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A functional analysis of mayoral political primary debates

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For many Americans who consider themselves non-partisan, independent of any particular party, mayoral primary debates can often be influential in their choice of representatives. Candidates are very aware of their influence on the American public and use their debate time to carefully portray themselves as well as leave certain lasting impressions on the public. It is therefore, important to examine mayoral primary debates to understand how candidates use political discourse in debates to gain public support. Politicians use campaign rhetoric to achieve a means to an end. If receivers of debates are not aware of carefully crafted campaign discourse and its influence in dissuading and forming support for a particular party, political discourse can be misleading for receivers of such debates, and can simply lead voters to choose a candidate based primarily upon whom they perceive as being most eloquent in comparison with other candidates responses. This research closely examines primary mayoral debates for both New York City and New Orleans. The process of Categorical Functional Analysis was used to classify candidates' statements into particular themes to examine tendencies amongst candidates during political debates.