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***POLITENESS THEORY IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN THE DEBATES  
BETWEEN HILLARY CLINTON AND BERNIE SANDERS***

***TEORIJA UČTIVOSTI U POLITIČKOM DISKURSU U DEBATAMA IZMEĐU  
HILLARY CLINTON I BERNIE SANDERSA***

Diplomski rad

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## **Summary**

Over the years, politeness theory research has brought forward numerous and varying definitions of what politeness is, resulting in disagreements over how it should be defined in the first place. On the other hand, the majority of politeness research has centered on everyday conversation usually carried out in informal settings. In this final diploma paper, we will apply the Brown and Levinson framework of politeness theory to political discourse, more specifically political debates. The corpus of this paper are five Democratic Party primary debates held in 2016 between candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders.

Key words: politeness theory, political debates, political discourse, Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders

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## 1. A brief overview of politeness theory research

The study of politeness theory has established that “people do not speak to one another just to convey information or even merely to do things (to another) but also to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships within a particular sociocultural context.” (Hickey and Stewart 2005, 3) While politeness theory has been the research subject of many influential linguists, the framework of the most prevailing theory was laid by Penelope Brown and Steven C. Levinson in *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use* (1987).

This seminal work set out to arrive at a theory that is universal to all languages, an attempt that “has been criticized and even rejected by scholars who have come from cultures in which the aforementioned notions differ from their Anglo-American counterparts.” (Kadar and Haugh 2013, 18) Nevertheless, their theory had a ripple effect on politeness research; more specifically on the notion of face, that has become near synonymous with politeness theory itself (Kadar and Haugh 2013, 18) but was first introduced by Ervig Goffman (1967, 5) who defined it as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular context”.

Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory postulates all competent adult members of society have a **negative face** (freedom of action and freedom from imposition) and a **positive face** (the positive consistent self-image or personality, the desire to be approved of and appreciated). Communicating in a way that violates the positive and/or negative face presents a **face-threatening act (FTA)**. (Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage 1987, 61-62) Brown and Levinson further claim that rational agents aim to avoid utterances that would threaten another’s face – and in the event of an FTA, there are several options to choose from.

The FTA can be **bald on-record (without redressive action)**, where the speaker is unambiguous and direct, such as for example: ‘I need you to lend me \$20.’ When using on-record strategies, the speaker can also attempt to **mitigate the threat (with redressive action)**: ‘I would really appreciate it if you could lend me \$20’, thereby appealing to the hearer’s negative face by ensuring they are not infringing on their freedom of action.

The **redressive action** can therefore appeal to the hearer's negative face (as is the case in the example above) or their positive face: 'Darling, could you lend me \$20?', which establishes or capitalizes on a friendly relationship between speaker and hearer. (Politeness: Some Universals In Language Use 1999, 316)

Brown and Levinson also refer to such appeals as **positive politeness** and **negative politeness**:

Positive politeness is orientated towards the positive face of H, the positive self-image that he claims for himself. Positive politeness is approach-based; it 'anoints' the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, S wants H's wants (e.g., by treating him as a member of an in-group, a friend, a person whose wants and personality traits are known and liked). (...) Negative politeness, on the other hand, is orientated mainly toward partially satisfying (redressing) H's negative face, his basic want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination. Negative politeness, thus, is essentially avoidance-based, and realizations of negative-politeness strategies consist in assurances that the speaker recognizes and respects the addressee's negative-face wants and will not (or will only minimally interfere with the addressee's freedom of action. (Politeness: Some Universals In Language Use 1999, 317)

Lastly, the FTA can be **off-record** or indirect: 'I don't have any money on me, I forgot my wallet at home.' In this case, the speaker could have the intention of trying to coerce the hearer into lending them some money, but if the hearer were to respond with 'Well I can't lend you money again' the speaker could claim they weren't asking for any and were simply stating they had forgotten their wallet. (Politeness: Some Universals In Language Use 1999, 316)

In addition to Brown and Levinson, significant contributions to politeness theory research were also given by Robin T. Lakoff and Geoffrey Leech. For her part, Lakoff (1973) gave three politeness rules – 'don't impose', 'give options', 'make A feel good-be friendly'. In later works, she would give three types of linguistic behavior – polite, non-polite, and rude,

where non-politeness is defined as “behavior that does not conform to politeness rules, used where the latter are not expected” and rudeness as “behavior that does not utilize politeness strategies where they would be expected, in such a way that the utterance can only be interpreted as intentionally and negatively confrontational”. (1989, 103) In *Talking Power: The Politics of Language in Our Lives* (1990), Lakoff asserted three different politeness rules – ‘distance’, ‘deference’, ‘camaraderie’ which may differ in importance according to cultural contexts. On the other hand, Geoffrey Leech’s politeness theory rests on the politeness principle which “postulates that interactants, on the whole, prefer to express or imply polite beliefs rather than impolite beliefs.” (2014, 34) Leech goes on to postulate six maxims – tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy. (2014, 35)

But as it constitutes one of the seminal works in politeness theory research, the Brown and Levinson framework attracted the bulk of the criticism, due to the already mentioned notion of universality, or the assumption that negative and positive face is universal. “A major point in these criticisms was that rationality, as it is understood in the universalistic frameworks, reflects a modern Western interpretation of rational behavior as an *individualistic* form of action.” (Kadar and Haugh 2013, 20) But Japanese sociolinguist Sachiko Ide criticized both Lakoff and Leech, in addition to Brown and Levinson, for failing to be adequate for languages with honorifics, such as Japanese. “The major linguistic devices for politeness in Japanese either fall outside of these frameworks or play a minor part in them.” (Ide 1989, 224)

Furthermore, some scholars outright reject the notion that politeness is a fixed concept that could ever be put into a universal framework:

Politeness is thus a dynamic concept, always open to adaptation and change in any group, in any age, and, indeed, at any moment of time. It is not a socio-anthropological given which can simply be applied to the analysis of social interaction, but actually arises out of that interaction. (Watts, Ide and Ehlich 2005, 11)

On the other hand, the Brown and Levinson framework lends itself well to the study of different discourse types, such as politics, and has already been applied to the analysis of political debates. (Dailey, Hinck and Hinck 2008) (Hinck and Hinck 2002) (S. S. Hinck, et al. 2013) Following these previous research models, this final diploma paper will also rely on the Brown and Levinson framework to analyze the political debates that are part of its corpus.

### **1.1 Politeness theory and political discourse**

Aside from the cultural and linguistic elements which complicate the study of politeness, Sandra Harris notes that much of the research surrounding politeness theory is confined to everyday conversation in informal settings. “Politeness has also been much less examined in relationship to institutional contexts and/or discourse types other than ordinary conversation.” (2001, 452) For instance, Leech’s aforementioned postulation that interactants prefer to be polite, rather than impolite, clearly omits discourse types where interactants are expected to engage in verbal conflict. Furthermore, the notion that human beings have a natural desire to avoid conflict or friction in interaction does not necessarily stand true for discourse types such as politics which can be highly confrontational and where participants are sometimes expected to engage in exchanges that may lead to conflict, could be unpleasant in nature, or are usually avoided in everyday conversation. In fact, politics is oftentimes considered a taboo topic in many social settings as it can quickly lead to disagreement. In *Face Aggravation, Mitigation, and ‘Unofficial’ Power in a Political Campaign Debate*, Maria Dolores García-Pastor concludes that “there are contexts generally neglected in the politeness literature where impoliteness is predominant. These contexts are typical in political discourse, and the speech event of a political debate constitutes an illustrative example.” (2002, 350)

According to Nicola Woods, political discourse “is not by any means a neutral medium of communication. Like the discourse of advertising, it is one designed to lead its audience in the direction of particular thoughts, beliefs and, ultimately, actions.” (2006, 53) Therefore, the public image and presentation of a political candidate or elected official is rarely an accident, but rather the result of a careful process with an entire team of people whose sole

job is to sway the public into adopting a favorable opinion of the politician in question. “Public statements are, whenever possible, delivered within the safe haven of a pre-arranged press conference or a friendly political chat show, where they can be prepared by professional speech-writers and rigorously rehearsed in advance.” (Woods 2006, 46)

In a maze of political advertising which has reached new heights with the dawn of social media, political debates occupy a particular position. “A candidate's purpose in a debate is to persuade the public to view him/her and his/her policies in the most favorable light.” (Hinck and Hinck 2002, 236) One of the ways in which politicians achieve this is by putting forward their opinions and ideas for solving pertinent national or world issues while putting their opponent’s opinions and ideas into question, or flat-out dismissing them. Moreover, they may put their opponent’s leadership or political skills into question as a way of portraying them as incompetent. Opposing arguments are the very essence of debate and candidates are expected to not only verbally threaten the opposing candidate’s face but to also defend their own. “For candidates in debates, advancing one's case or refuting an opponent's case effectively might affect how an audience views the content of claims for office.” (Dailey, Hinck and Hinck 2008, 6) Candidates must also expect and prepare for any past mistakes, questionable decisions, alliances, etc., to be brought up by their opponent as an attempt to discredit their abilities or character.

Debates are also a unique opportunity for voters to observe candidates in a setting where their staffers cannot come to the rescue and there is potential for dramatic conflict, as opposed to pre-recorded interviews for example. (Dailey, Hinck and Hinck 2008, 11) “Face threats are anticipated as the candidates prepare to test each other's ideas of leadership, and responses to such threats capable of defeating the opposing argument are rehearsed by the candidates in the hope of maintaining their positive appeal as leaders.” (Denton, 78) In this sense, debates are a type of obstacle course where candidates must successfully predict the arguments that will be made against them (or at the very least, be able to quickly form a satisfactory response) in order to avoid appearing incompetent and losing their appeal.

Given the specific rules laid out at the start of every political debate, the negative face is largely protected from FTAs, except for interruptions or other behavior that disregards the



rules of the debate, in which case candidates would have to successfully navigate the threat. “For the duration of the event, candidates stand on the stage as representatives of their party and platform as relative equals, not as agents of office.” (Dailey, Hinck and Hinck 2008, 11) The presence of moderators who steer the process additionally protects the candidates’ negative face. For example, the moderator of the Democratic Presidential Debate in Flint, Michigan sets out the following rules: “Before we begin as the candidates take their positions, I just want to set out some ground rules as moderators, I’ll ask questions, I’ll ask follow-ups and guide the discussion. The candidates will have one minute and 15 seconds to answer questions. They’ll have 30 seconds for follow-ups.” (Federal News Service 2016) Should a candidate overstep their speaking time, the moderator politely but firmly informs them that they have run out of time. Even though the charged nature of debates does on occasion lead to candidates defending their negative face (usually by warding off interruptions), the main goal of a debate is to assess the candidate’s ability to defend their leadership skills, policies, and previous track record, which means the positive face is at stake.

During the event, a candidate must also skillfully balance defending their face with performing their own FTAs. Dailey, Hinck, and Hinck (2008, 13) argue that the level of aggression in FTAs depends on the candidate’s assessment of what is appropriate at a particular point in a particular campaign. Aggression can prove itself to be a double-edged sword – when used appropriately, it shows determination and leadership, when used excessively, it shows a candidate who has lost his or her composure and has poor self-control. Denton (2017, 78) writes that in the 1992 US presidential debates, Bill Clinton “increased the intensity of his attacks on George Bush in the third debate in an attempt to distinguish his leadership from his opponents.”

When it comes to the audience, it is unreasonable to assume that all members are competent enough to track the debate in the manner of political analysts, nor is it common to take notes and thoroughly review them in order to determine the “winner” of the debate – audience members largely respond to the personality exhibited by the candidate during the debate. (Hinck and Hinck 2002, 236) This impression is more often what determines the “winner”, and it is crafted by FTAs and careful and calculated use of language. For example, Denton’s

(2017, 79) survey of the audience in the 2000 and 2004 presidential debates found that audience members found respectfulness toward the other candidate a positive leadership attribute.

To analyze political debates from the point of view of politeness theory as understood by Brown and Levinson, we will analyze five debates which make up the corpus of this final diploma paper. The events in question are the 2016 Democratic Party debates, organized by the Democratic National Committee (DNC), during which candidates campaigned for the Democratic nomination for the President of the United States. In 2015 and 2016, the DNC organized a total of nine debates that took place during the primaries – a process where delegates from each of the 50 states vote for their preferred candidate, which determines the Democratic nominee for the presidential election. While several candidates initially entered the race, it was Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders who emerged as frontrunners, facing off directly in five of the nine debates. These five debates, held in Brooklyn, Durham, Miami, Milwaukee, and Flint, will be used for the purposes of this final diploma paper.

## 2. Method

In this final diploma paper, we will examine the FTAs employed by Clinton and Sanders across five debates in order to provide answers to the following questions:

- a) How does the number of FTAs in each debate change as the race for the Democratic nomination progresses?
- b) How does the number of non-threatening statements (statements that mix support and threat, and direct and indirect support statements) change?
- c) What is the percentage of direct versus indirect FTAs per candidate?
- d) Which types of FTAs are favored most by the candidates and what does this say about their debate strategy?

To do so, we will break down publicly available debate transcripts into thought units which either contain direct or indirect FTAs, statements of support, or statements that mix the two. A thought unit is defined as “the minimum meaningful utterance having a beginning and end, typically operationalized as a simple sentence”. (Hatfield and Weider-Hatfield, 46) Dailey, Hinck, and Hinck go on to further define thought units as “units of text that could still be summarized as a single idea, issue, point, claim, or topic, though, again, they usually consisted of a number of sentences.” (2008, 173)

In order to subdivide FTAs according to type, we will rely on the following schema developed by Dailey, Hinck, and Hinck (2008, 82) in their analysis of politeness in presidential debates from 1960 to 2004:

- 1) Poor character and leadership competence
- 2) Poor policies and proposals
- 3) Responsibility for problems
- 4) Incorrect use of data
- 5) Disagreement
- 6) Inappropriate campaign tactics
- 7) Ridicule

These subdivision types are an adaptation of Susan Lee Kline's coding schema developed in *Social Cognitive Determinants of Face Support in Persuasive Messages* (1984). As Kline's original schema was intended for interpersonal situations, Dailey, Hinck, and Hinck adapted it to fit the context of debating. Apart from threats to face, we will also note instances of opponents expressing support for one another, again basing our analysis on Dailey, Hinck and Hinck's (2008, 173) adaptation of Kline's coding schema:

- 1) Indirect support:
  - a) Shared feelings or ideas with the opponent (agreement on attitudes, issues, and feelings)
  - b) Commonality with the opponent through shared group identity markers
  - c) Excuses for the opponent or alternative interpretations of the situation (benefit of the doubt)
- 2) Direct support:
  - a) The opponent's desirable characteristics
  - b) Good plan offered by opponent
  - c) Laudable past efforts of the opponent
  - d) Reliability of information offered by the opponent

Finally, for instances of support mixed with threat, Kline's schema was adapted in the following way (Dailey, Hinck and Hinck 2008, 173):

- 1) The opponent's possession of positive and negative characteristics
- 2) The positive and negative qualities of the ideas that the opponent proposes

Following the above-mentioned subdivision types, we will first dissect each debate individually, paying attention to the specific political developments and circumstances preceding or following each event and how they may have impacted both Clinton and Sanders. Furthermore, each debate analysis will include statements of candidates that were found important to highlight as they give a broader insight into the debate and the strategy of a particular candidate.

### **3. First debate – Durham, New Hampshire**

The February 4<sup>th</sup> debate between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders was their first one-on-one duel, but the fifth overall Democratic debate during this election period. As such, it served as the perfect opportunity for Clinton and Sanders to present themselves and their policies to the public as the frontrunners for the Democratic nomination. David A. Graham of *The Atlantic* noted: “The duo seemed determined to illustrate Archilochus’s classic binary between the fox, who knows many things, and the hedgehog, who knows one important thing.” (Graham 2016) Even the debate moderator emphasizes the same distinction at the beginning of the event: “These candidates are both running for the Democratic nomination, but they are very different from each other when it comes to what matters most and how they would go about the job of being president.”

Their opening statements certainly confirm Graham’s claim – while Sanders zeroes in on the “rigged economy” and “corrupt campaign finance system”, Clinton widens her net to also include racism, sexism and LGBT discrimination as the reasons why America is not living up to its values in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But before beginning our analysis of the FTAs uttered by both candidates in New Hampshire, we will examine the political events leading up to the debate, which certainly had an influence on the candidates’ debating strategy.

Just days before to the New Hampshire debate, the Iowa caucus took place. In *Defying the Odds: The 2016 Elections and American Politics*, James W. Ceaser (2019, 55-56) remarks that Clinton had poured time and resources into campaigning in the state to avoid a repeat of 2008 when her campaign never recovered from the loss. In 2016, she did win, but only by the narrowest of margins. “Clinton got a numerical win of sorts and avoided a humiliating defeat. Sanders got a moral victory and a psychological boost.” (Ceaser, Busch and Pitney, 55) But more significant for the New Hampshire debate is the fact that Sanders was a Senator for the neighboring state of Vermont, which gave him a significant advantage among the voters. This information is especially pertinent as we move onto the analysis of the debate.

#### **3.1 New Hampshire debate analysis**

The first Clinton vs. Sanders debate contains 62 FTAs in total, of which 59.7 percent are direct and 40.3 percent are indirect.

Table 1 provides an analysis of FTAs uttered by both opponents. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 1. Analysis of direct and indirect face-threatening attacks in the New Hampshire debate.

	Direct FTA		Indirect FTA	
	Clinton	Sanders	Clinton	Sanders
Poor character and leadership competence	3	3	5	6
Poor policies and proposals	9	-	5	-
Responsibility for problems	1	-	-	-
Incorrect use of data	5	-	-	-
Disagreement	4	5	3	6
Inappropriate campaign tactics	5	-	-	-
Ridicule	2	-	-	-
Total	29	8	13	12

The data shows that Clinton was certainly the more aggressive candidate, having uttered 67.7 percent of the total FTAs. In addition, 69 percent of her threats are direct. If we examine the content of her threats, we will see that she favored criticizing Sanders’ policies and proposals – 33.3 percent of her FTAs (both direct and indirect) fall in this category and another 19 percent of her FTAs belong to the *poor character and leadership competence* category. In fact, Clinton’s first FTAs of the debate focus on Sanders’ policies, such as free college and raising the minimum wage. In this instance, her threats rely on undermining the feasibility of Sanders’ plans, with the goal of painting him as an unrealistic politician with unachievable campaign promises.

I don't believe in free college, because every expert that I have talked to says, look, how will you ever control the costs. And of course, I believe in raising the minimum wage and equal pay for work. But the numbers just don't add up, from what Senator Sanders has been proposing. That's why all of the independent experts, all of the editorial boards that have vetted both of us have concluded that it is just not achievable. (The New York Times 2016)

But some of Clinton's sharpest moments of the debate come during a discussion on what it means to be a progressive politician, where she combines FTAs that target Sanders' character and leadership competence, his policies, and also ridicule his previous comments which questioned Clinton's progressivism.

Well because I am a progressive who gets things done. But I've heard Senator Sanders' comments, and it's really caused me to wonder who's left in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. (...) But if we're going to get into labels, I don't think it was particularly progressive to vote against the Brady Bill five times. (The New York Times 2016)

In the above example, Clinton indirectly targets Sanders' leadership competence by referring to herself as a "progressive who gets things done". This comment is followed up with a remark that ridicules his views on progressive policies as too demanding and restrictive before Clinton brings up his past policies and decision-making as counterarguments. Later on, during a discussion on whether or not she is an establishment politician, Clinton again counterargues by threatening Sanders' character and leadership competence.

People support me because they know me. They know my life's work. They have worked with me and many have also worked with Senator Sanders. And at the end of the day they endorse me because they know I can get things done. (The New York Times 2016)

As shown in table 1, 11.9 percent of Clinton's FTAs claim Sanders is threatening her face with inappropriate campaign tactics, which we will briefly reflect upon as they constitute one of Clinton's sharpest moments in the entire debate. The FTAs are a response to Sanders' own

FTAs which insinuate that Clinton having a Super Political Action Committee<sup>1</sup> (Super PAC) means she is not a trustworthy politician.

Yeah, but I — I think it's fair to really ask what's behind that comment. You know, Senator Sanders has said he wants to run a positive campaign. I've tried to keep my disagreements over issues, as it should be. But time and time again, by innuendo, by insinuation, there is this attack that he is putting forth, which really comes down to — you know, anybody who ever took donations or speaking fees from any interest group has to be bought. (...) And enough is enough. If you've got something to say, say it directly. So I think it's time to end the very artful smear that you and your campaign have been carrying out in recent weeks, and let's talk about some issues. (The New York Times 2016)

Her conclusion – that they should focus on issues – implies Sanders is not and that her having a Super PAC is not an issue either, but an attempt to smear her as a politician. Her response aims to portray Sanders as resorting to low-brow, personal attacks to avoid discussing tangible problems the country is facing. Sanders' response is considerably less direct and threatening, and he merely disagrees with Clinton's point that campaign funding is not a real issue:

You know, there is a reason why these people are putting huge amounts of money into our political system. And in my view, it is undermining American democracy and it is allowing Congress to represent wealthy campaign contributors and not the working families of this country. (The New York Times 2016)

Compared to Clinton, Sanders' performance is considerably more mellow as he is responsible for only 32.3 percent of total FTAs. Throughout the debate, Sanders shows a clear preference towards *disagreement* as his FTA of choice, as it constitutes 55 percent of his threats, both

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by the United States Federal Election Commission, Super PACs are “independent expenditure-only political committees that may receive unlimited contributions from individuals, corporations, labor unions and other political action committees for the purpose of financing independent expenditures and other independent political activity.” (Federal Election Commission n.d.)



direct and indirect. It is also worth noting that Sanders favors indirect FTAs, which make up 60 percent of his attacks. And while Clinton has FTAs in every category, Sanders only covers *poor character and leadership competence*, which makes up 45 percent of his attacks, in addition to *disagreement*. In fact, the FTAs that threaten Clinton's character and leadership are arguably some of Sanders' sharpest ones. Their content largely refers to Clinton's Super PAC, her Wall Street connections, and her being a member of the establishment. For example, when Clinton threatens Sanders' face over running an "artful smear" against her, it was in response to the following FTA.

What being part of the establishment is, is, in the last quarter, having a super PAC that raised \$15 million from Wall Street, that throughout one's life raised a whole lot of money from the drug companies and other special interests.  
(The New York Times 2016)

Clinton's sharp response to the above FTA did not deter Sanders from bringing the same point up later on, during a discussion on political campaign funding.

So what's the alternative? There are two alternatives. And, you know, we looked at it. Well, should we do a Super PAC, but I concluded, honestly, I don't represent Corporate America or billionaires, I didn't want it. So the other alternative was to ask working families and the middle class to help out in a transformational campaign. And you know what? We got 3.5 million individual contributions, \$27 a piece. I think that's pretty good. (The New York Times 2016)

What Clinton describes as a non-issue is a key talking point for Sanders, who is using campaign funding as a way of setting himself apart from Clinton. By implying Clinton represents billionaires and special interests, Sanders portrays himself as the underdog, someone who is happy to not be a member of the political establishment. But despite the severity of FTAs that come from both candidates, Clinton and Sanders also made sure to show considerable support to one another. Table 2, 3 and 4 provide analyses of statements mixing support and threat, as well as statements showing direct and indirect support. The

data in the tables below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 2. Analysis of statements mixing support and threat in the New Hampshire debate.

	Clinton	Sanders
The opponent’s possession of positive and negative characteristics	-	-
The positive and negative qualities of the ideas that the opponent proposes	2	4
Total	2	4

Table 2 contains statements that employ redressive strategies to minimize the impact of the FTA, or in other words, combine support and threat. In the following quote, for instance, Sanders employs both negative and positive politeness strategies.

I agree with much of what the Secretary said, but, madam Secretary, it is not one streak. (The New York Times 2016)

Negative politeness is displayed in the way he formally addresses his opponent by her title, while positive politeness is reflected in Sanders’ partial agreement with the preceding statements.

Clinton applies similar positive politeness strategies during a discussion on health care.

There is no disagreement between us on universal coverage for health care, the disagreement is where do we start from and where do we end up. (The New York Times 2016)

Table 3. Analysis of statements expressing direct support in the New Hampshire debate.

	Clinton	Sanders
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The opponent's desirable characteristics	2	3
Good plan offered by opponent	1	-
Laudable past efforts of the opponent	1	-
Reliability of information offered by the opponent	-	-
Total	4	3

Table 4. Analysis of statements expressing indirect support in the New Hampshire debate.

	Clinton	Sanders
Shared feelings or ideas with the opponent (agreement on attitudes, issues, and feelings)	6	6
Commonality with the opponent through shared group identity markers	1	2
Excuses for the opponent or alternative interpretations of the situation (benefit of the doubt)	1	-
Total	8	8

While there are only 6 statements mixing support and threat, 4 of which are attributed to Sanders, both candidates are quite evenly matched in statements expressing support. Clinton, however, covered a larger number of categories with her statements that expressed direct and

indirect support. It should also be noted that the opponents praised each other at the beginning and at the end of the debate. For instance, Clinton emphasizes their shared goals and Sanders expresses his support for his opponent at the beginning of the debate.

Well, let me start by saying that Senator Sanders and I share some very big progressive goals. (The New York Times 2016)

I have known Secretary Clinton for 25 years and respect her very much. (The New York Times 2016)

As the debate winds up, Sanders displays a united front with his opponent by highlighting their shared differences when compared to the candidates in the Republican party.

And as I have said many times, you know, sometimes in these campaigns, things get a little bit out of hand. I happen to respect the secretary very much, I hope it's mutual. And on our worst days, I think it is fair to say we are 100 times better than any Republican candidate. (The New York Times 2016)

Considering the advantage Sanders had in the state of New Hampshire, his lack of aggression comes as no surprise. When the results came in, Sanders won the primary with 60 percent of the vote, while Clinton walked away with 38 percent, despite the effort she had put into covering a wide variety of FTAs to gain an advantage over her opponent. (Ceaser, Busch and Pitney, 56) Sanders' strategy in this debate also confirms Daily, Hinck and Hinck's (2008, 13) claim that the level of aggression in a debate depends on the candidate's assessment of what is appropriate at a specific point in the campaign. Since an overly aggressive approach always carries the risk of being perceived as having poor composure and self-control, it is understandable why Sanders would want to hold off on more straightforward FTAs, especially when campaigning in a state he is likely to win. Clinton, on the other hand, made a real effort to discern herself and her policies, in spite of the uneven playing field.

#### 4. Second debate – Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Only a few days after the New Hampshire primary, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders met again in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for their second one-on-one debate. Hot on the heels of his New Hampshire win, Sanders was leading in the number of delegates by a margin of 36 to 32. But as TIME magazine noted, the two upcoming primaries were taking place in Nevada and South Carolina – states with large Black and Latino populations which were showing a clear preference for Clinton in the polls. (Frizell, Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton Clash in Milwaukee 2016) Concurrently, Clinton was facing pressure in the face of Sanders’ growing popularity. (Healy and Chozick 2016) But these developments did not have an overt influence on the number of FTAs in the Wisconsin debate, as the total number only slightly increased to 64, compared to the 62 FTAs in New Hampshire.

##### 4.1 Wisconsin debate analysis

Table 5 contains an analysis of FTAs uttered by both candidates. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 5. Analysis of direct and indirect face-threatening attacks in the Wisconsin debate.

	Direct FTA		Indirect FTA	
	Clinton	Sanders	Clinton	Sanders
Poor character and leadership competence	3	3	-	8
Poor policies and proposals	6	2	5	1
Responsibility for problems	-	1	-	-
Incorrect use of data	1	2	-	-
Disagreement	11	10	4	2
Inappropriate campaign tactics	2	2	-	-
Ridicule	-	-	-	1
Total	23	20	9	12

Compared to his considerably less aggressive performance in New Hampshire, Sanders clearly altered his debate strategy as he is responsible for 50 percent of the FTAs in Wisconsin. In addition, he favors direct over indirect FTAs, with 62.5 percent belonging to the former category. While the majority of his FTAs fall into the category of *disagreement* (37.5 percent), Sanders also dedicated a significant amount of attention to *poor character and leadership competence* (34.37 percent). Again, he focuses on Clinton's campaign funding and political connections, but when Clinton counters by reiterating her point that Wall Street funding does not mean a politician has lost their independence, Sanders has a much sharper response that targets Clinton's character and ridicules her defense of Super PACs.

But let's not -- but let's not -- let's not insult -- let's not insult the intelligence of the American people. People aren't dumb. Why in God's name does Wall Street make huge campaign contributions? I guess just for the fun of it; they want to throw money around. (The New York Times 2016)

While the categories of *incorrect use of data* and *inappropriate campaign tactics* only make up a relatively small percentage of Sanders' FTAs (6.25 percent each), we should note their application when Sanders defends his free healthcare policy, as they are also an excellent example of a shift in his debating strategy.

Secretary Clinton has been going around the country saying Bernie Sanders wants to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, people are going to lose their Medicaid, they're going to lose their CHIP program. What I said, and let me repeat it, I don't know what economists Secretary Clinton is talking to, but what I have said, and let me repeat it, that yes, the middle -- the family right in the middle of the economy would pay \$500 dollars more in taxes... (The New York Times 2016)

Like Sanders, Clinton's FTAs mostly fall in the *disagreement* category (46.87 percent). On the other hand, she also keeps her focus on criticizing Sanders' policies, with 34.37 percent of her FTAs falling in the *poor policies and proposals* category. But The New York Times

observed a change in how she went about threatening Sanders' face: "And rather than bashing him as she did at their debate last Thursday, she appeared to try to get under his skin by implying that he had not been transparent about the cost of his programs, such as his proposed expansion of government health care." (Healy and Chozick 2016) The very first question of the debate, aimed at Sanders, inquired about whether and how much would the federal government grow under a Sanders presidency. When Sanders offers a vague answer, Clinton seizes the opportunity to answer his question, directly addressing the moderator:

Judy, I think that the best analysis that I've seen based on Senator Sanders plans is that it would probably increase the size of the federal government by about 40%, but what is most concerning to me is that in looking at the plans - - let's take healthcare for example. Every progressive economist who has analyzed that says that the numbers don't add up, and that's a promise that cannot be kept, and it's really important now that we are getting into the rest of the country that both of us are held to account for explaining what we are proposing... (The New York Times 2016)

Despite Sanders' aforementioned response, Clinton again reiterates her argument that "the numbers don't add up" and that "we should not make promises we can't keep", without explicitly naming any of the experts she is repeatedly referring to. But when Sanders threatens Clinton's face over her friendship with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, saying he is proud to not have him as a friend, Clinton sharpens her FTAs:

Well, I know journalists have asked who you do listen to on foreign policy, and we have yet to know who that is. (The New York Times 2016)

Even though only 9.37 percent of Clinton's FTAs belong to the *poor character and leadership competence* category, an FTA of this type caused Sanders to refer to it as a "low blow" in his response. Following an innocuous question about which leaders the candidates admire, the FTA targets Sanders' criticism of President Barack Obama:

And it is a -- the kind of criticism that we've heard from Senator Sanders about our president I expect from Republicans. (The New York Times 2016)

The Milwaukee debate also witnessed changes to supportive debating strategies. The tables 6, 7 and 8 provide analyses of statements showing mixed support and threat, and indirect and direct support. The data in the tables below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 6. Analysis of statements mixing support and threat in the Wisconsin debate.

	Clinton	Sanders
The opponent's possession of positive and negative characteristics	-	2
The positive and negative qualities of the ideas that the opponent proposes	-	-
Total	0	2

We can observe Sanders applying positive politeness strategies in a statement mixing support and threat where he compliments Clinton's book before an FTA:

Where the secretary and I have a very profound difference, in the last debate -- and I believe in her book -- very good book, by the way -- in her book and in this last debate, she talked about getting the approval or the support or the mentoring of Henry Kissinger. (The New York Times 2016)

Table 7. Analysis of statements expressing direct support in the Wisconsin debate.

	Direct support	
	Clinton	Sanders
The opponent's desirable characteristics	1	2
Good plan offered by opponent	-	-



Laudable past efforts of the opponent	1	-
Reliability of information offered by the opponent	-	-
Total	2	2

Table 8. Analysis of statements expressing indirect support in the Wisconsin debate.

	Clinton	Sanders
Shared feelings or ideas with the opponent (agreement on attitudes, issues, and feelings)	9	2
Commonality with the opponent through shared group identity markers	3	-
Excuses for the opponent or alternative interpretations of the situation (benefit of the doubt)	-	-
Total	12	2

In addition to the reduction in the number of statements expressing both support and threat (only 2 compared to New Hampshire's 6), there are considerable differences in the number of statements expressing both direct and indirect support. The number of direct support statements fell from 7 to 4, and while the number of statements expressing indirect support has remained quite high, it must be noted that out of the 14 indirect support statements, 12 are attributed to Clinton. Percentagewise, the first debate had an even split between both candidates, but the second one attributes Clinton with 85.7 percent of indirect support

statements. Upon examining the thought units containing indirect support, a pattern can be observed in 3 of Clinton's 12 statements, as they all precede FTAs:

I can only say that we both share the goal of universal health care coverage.

You know, I think, again, both of us share the goal of trying to make college affordable for all young Americans.

Well, Senator, look, I think we're in vigorous agreement here. We both want to get more revenue in. (The New York Times 2016)

Considering the new strategies Clinton had adopted in threatening Sanders' policies and proposals, it can be inferred that by first emphasizing their shared goals and then moving onto dissecting his policies, Clinton is shielding herself from appearing overly aggressive. Furthermore, Clinton appears to acknowledge Sanders' growing popularity after his narrow loss in Iowa and victory in New Hampshire and makes sure to align herself with the ideas he is campaigning before criticizing them. Sanders, on the other hand, only expresses indirect support during discussions on women's rights and African American issues, areas where they have little to no disagreements. His only direct support statements preceded his FTAs on foreign policy, where he applied positive politeness strategies to highlight Clinton's impressive experience:

Judy, if I can, there is no question, Secretary Clinton and I are friends, and I have a lot of respect for her, that she has enormous experience in foreign affairs. Secretary of State for four years. You've got a bit of experience, I would imagine. (Transcript of the Democratic Presidential Debate in Milwaukee 2016)

Just like Clinton endorses his proposals before dissecting them, Sanders first acknowledges the experience his opponent has in foreign policy before moving ahead with his FTAs, showing that he is well aware of the upper hand Clinton wields in this field. But this strategy also ensures that Clinton cannot explicitly utter an FTA that capitalizes on her experience, while Sanders gives himself an opportunity to be perceived as a fair opponent who gives credit where credit is due.

## 5. Third debate – Flint, Michigan

On March 6, 2016, the third debate between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders took place in Flint, Michigan. By this point, the results of Democratic primaries across the US had impacted both campaigns, which is also reflected in the debating strategies the candidates employed. To provide more context, it should be noted that Clinton had won both the Nevada and South Carolina primaries. Even more significant was her success on Super Tuesday, which refers to a dozen Democratic contests that took place on March 1. “On that night, Clinton effectively clinched the Democratic nomination. Through several months of campaigning were still ahead, Super Tuesday made it prohibitively difficult for Sanders to overtake her.” (Ceaser, Busch and Pitney, 57) Consequently, it is reasonable to presume Sanders entered the debate with significant pressure to change the course of the primaries before it was too late.

On the other hand, the Michigan debate saw a reduced number of FTAs, with only 51 compared to Wisconsin's 64. The drop in FTAs can be accounted for by the fact that the city of Flint had fallen victim to a water crisis that had been overlooked and ignored by government officials, resulting in horrific consequences for the residents of Flint. (Wolf 2016) As it could be expected, the water crisis received a significant amount of attention in the debate and, as Clinton and Sanders had no major disagreements in this area, produced a smaller number of FTAs.

### 5.1 Michigan debate analysis

Table 9 provides an analysis of FTAs by both candidates. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 9. Analysis of direct and indirect face-threatening attacks in the Michigan debate.

	Direct FTA		Indirect FTA	
	Clinton	Sanders	Clinton	Sanders
Poor character and leadership competence	1	6	1	5

Poor policies and proposals	4	1	1	-
Responsibility for problems	-	4	-	4
Incorrect use of data	3	2	1	-
Disagreement	4	6	2	-
Inappropriate campaign tactics	-	3	1	-
Ridicule	-	2	-	-
Total	12	24	6	9

As shown in table 9, Sanders was responsible for the majority of the FTAs in the Michigan debate, or 64.7 percent, while 72.7 percent of his FTAs were direct. He continues to favor FTAs in the *poor character and leadership competence* category, which make up 33.3 percent of his FTAs, where he still focuses on Clinton’s Super PAC and Wall Street ties to paint her as a politician who doesn’t represent the interests of the working and middle class. In Flint, however, Sanders introduces another layer to these threats by mentioning the paid speeches Clinton had given at Goldman Sachs and other major banks and corporations from 2013 onwards as proof of her close ties to Wall Street. (Prokop 2016) It is also worth mentioning that while the topic of Clinton’s Wall Street speeches was brought up in the New Hampshire debate, it was the moderator and an audience member who introduced it and not Sanders, who did not even try to seize the opportunity given to him by the third parties in the debate to threaten Clinton’s face. In this instance, however, Sanders sharply threatens Clinton’s face when he asks his opponent to release the transcripts of her speeches as a clear signal that he has shifted his debating strategy.

One of us has given speeches on Wall Street for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Now, I kind of think if you get paid a couple hundred thousand dollars for a speech, it must be a great speech. I think we should release it and let the American people see what that transcript was. (Federal News Service 2016)

But the Michigan debate is also the first time the *responsibility for problems* category accounts for such a big percentage of FTAs, as 24.2 percent of Sanders’ threats fall in this

category. When we consider the fact that Michigan is an industrial state which was severely impacted by the manufacturing decline, it comes as no surprise that Sanders decided to shift his debating strategy to include more criticism of Clinton's political record in trade policies. (Roberts, Jacobs and Gambino 2016) During a discussion on the loss of manufacturing jobs in Michigan, Sanders sharply denounces Clinton's proposals.

I am very glad, Anderson, that Secretary Clinton discovered religion on this issue but it's a little bit too late. Secretary Clinton supported virtually every one of the disastrous trade agreements written by corporate America. NAFTA, supported by the Secretary cost, us 800,000 jobs nationwide, tens of thousands of jobs in the Midwest. (Federal News Service 2016)

Sanders employs a similar tone when answering a question regarding the 1994 Crime Bill, which had been addressed to Clinton first. In her response, Clinton emphasizes twice that both she and Sanders had supported the controversial bill, which Sanders uses as ammunition for his FTA that targets Clinton's campaign tactics.

Now, if I have voted against that bill, Secretary Clinton would be here tonight and she'd say, "Bernie Sanders voted against the ban on assault weapons. Bernie Sanders voted against the violence against women act." Those were provisions in the bill, as the Secretary just indicated. (Federal News Service 2016)

For her part, Clinton's FTAs constitute only 35.3 percent of the total amount, and like Sanders, she also prefers direct FTAs with 66.6 percent of her FTAs falling in this category. In Michigan, she favored the *disagreement* category, where 33.3 percent of her FTAs fall. Following closely is the *poor policies and proposals* category, with 27.7 percent. With Sanders clearly having a more aggressive strategy, especially with respect to trade, Clinton defends her face, in one instance, by bringing up Sanders' past policies.

Well — well, I'll tell you something else that Senator Sanders was against. He was against the auto bailout. He voted against the money that ended up saving the auto industry. (Federal News Service 2016)

When Sanders implies that she is misrepresenting the Wall Street bailout as a deal that saved the automobile industry, Clinton tries to respond before Sanders' time is up, resulting in him defending his negative face by sharply adding that he is still talking. To this, Clinton's response directly threatens her opponent's face by claiming he is twisting data to his advantage.

If you're gonna talk, tell the whole story, Senator Sanders. (Federal News Service 2016)

Once Clinton takes her turn, she adds another layer to her FTA by implying Sanders does not fully grasp the difficult decision-making that comes with having power and by extension, painting him as an incompetent leader.

So when I talk about Senator Sanders being a one-issue candidate, I mean very clearly — you have to make hard choices when you're in positions of responsibility. (Federal News Service 2016)

Another strategy Clinton employs in mitigating Sanders' FTAs regarding her previous political record is to dismiss them as being irrelevant and in no way indicative of what her presidency might look like. Such FTAs aim to shift the focus away from the policies she had supported (and which could possibly endanger her chances of winning the Michigan primary) by painting Sanders as someone who would rather focus on the past because his current campaign promises hold no water. More specifically, she refers to Sanders' criticism as "arguing about the 90s" on three separate occasions, one of which, shown below, refers to Sanders' FTAs regarding her previous trade policies.

You know, if we're going to argue about the 1990's instead of talking about the future, which I'd much prefer because I think every election is about the future, and you all deserve to know what we will do to help you have a brighter future — but, if we are going to talk about the 1990's I think it's only fair to say that at the end of the 1990's, after two terms of my husband's presidency, the unemployment rate in Michigan was 4.4 percent. (Federal News Service 2016)

The number of statements that mix support and threat remained low in Michigan, as shown in table 10. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 10. Analysis of statements mixing support and threat in the Michigan debate.

	Mixed support and threat	
	Clinton	Sanders
The opponent's possession of positive and negative characteristics	-	1
The positive and negative qualities of the ideas that the opponent proposes	-	-
Total	0	1

Sanders again uses both positive and negative politeness strategies to express his admiration and respect for his opponent, combining it with an FTA:

I believe, and with all due respect to my good friend, Secretary Clinton, that it is too late for establishment politics and establishment economics. (Federal News Service 2016)

Regarding statements expressing direct support, there were no changes to the overall number of statements compared to the Milwaukee debate, given that the Michigan debate also only has 4 statements as shown in table 11. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 11. Analysis of statements expressing direct support in the Michigan debate.

	Direct support	
	Clinton	Sanders

The opponent's desirable characteristics	1	-
Good plan offered by opponent	-	-
Laudable past efforts of the opponent	-	-
Reliability of information offered by the opponent	-	3
Total	1	3

The difference lies, however, in the fact that Sanders is attributed with 3 of the 4 as shown in table 11 and his statements only focus on *the reliability of information offered by the opponent* category, where he clearly signals his agreement with the points his opponent had made. Clinton, on the other hand, makes her direct support more personal.

It is important to note, however, that Clinton's supportive statement comes after the moderator refers to how Sanders had been bringing up a fundraiser for Clinton hosted by executives from a firm that had invested in domestic fracking, a significant environmental issue. In her response, Clinton demurs and switches gears to praise the Sanders campaign, before a statement of indirect support showing unity with Sanders against the Republican candidates.

I admire what Senator Sanders has accomplished in his campaign... And I just want to make one point. You know, we have our differences. And we get into vigorous debate about issues, but compare the substance of this debate with what you saw on the Republican stage last week. (Federal News Service 2016)

Through these supportive statements, Clinton shows she is aware that Sanders will use the moderator's question to utter an FTA – which he does. However, Sanders is compelled to put forward a less sharp FTA, so as not to appear as an overly aggressive and unfair opponent.



He does so by joking about the state of the mental health of Republican party members and even emphasizes that their differences are by no means personal.

You know, we are, if elected president, going to invest a lot of money into mental health. And when you watch these Republican debates, you know why we need to invest in that. But here's the difference. Here is the difference. It's not a personal difference. We just do things differently. (Federal News Service 2016)

Compared to the Milwaukee debate, there are more changes in the indirect support category, where the number of statements dropped from 14 to 9. Clinton still holds the lead, however, with 6 indirect support statements to Sanders' 3. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 12. Analysis of statements expressing indirect support in the Michigan debate.

	Indirect support	
	Clinton	Sanders
Shared feelings or ideas with the opponent (agreement on attitudes, issues, and feelings)	5	2
Commonality with the opponent through shared group identity markers	1	1
Excuses for the opponent or alternative interpretations of the situation (benefit of the doubt)	-	-
Total	6	3

## 6. Fourth debate – Miami, Florida

In the short time frame between the Michigan and Florida debates (the latter took place on March 9), both candidates won a primary each – Sanders took the victory in Michigan, while Clinton won Mississippi. But despite his victory, Sanders was still trailing behind Clinton in terms of delegates. (Johnson 2016) *Time* magazine also noted that while Sanders' Michigan victory was a morale booster, Clinton was still well on her way to seize the nomination. (Frizell 2016) The primaries in the state of Florida were taking place on March 15, and with 246 delegates at stake, both candidates were eager to win the primary – Clinton to solidify her lead and Sanders to build upon his Michigan victory and hopefully turn the primaries around. (BBC 2016) Compared to the Michigan debate, there is a significant increase in the number of FTAs in Florida which stands at 61, compared to the 51 FTAs in the previous debate.

### 6.1 Florida debate analysis

Table 13 contains an analysis of all FTAs in the Miami debate. The data in the table was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 13. Analysis of direct and indirect face-threatening attacks in the Florida debate.

	Direct FTA		Indirect FTA	
	Clinton	Sanders	Clinton	Sanders
Poor character and leadership competence	4	3	2	6
Poor policies and proposals	8	5	2	2
Responsibility for problems	1	-	-	-
Incorrect use of data	2	-	-	2
Disagreement	4	9	3	-
Inappropriate campaign tactics	-	4	-	-
Ridicule	-	4	-	-

Total	19	25	7	10
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Having uttered 42.6 percent of FTAs, Clinton was the less aggressive candidate in the Miami debate, where she favored direct FTAs as 73.1 percent of her attacks fall in this category. Leading with the number of FTAs is the *poor policies and proposals* category, which accounts for 38.7 percent of her attacks. Similar to Sanders' strategy in the previous debate, Clinton focuses on her opponent's past policies and political record. But while Sanders had threatened Clinton's face through targeting her previous policies vis-à-vis trade and jobs, Clinton zeroes in on immigration. Considering that there were 1.8 million Hispanics living in Florida in 2016, making up 15 percent of the Democrat population in the State, immigration policy was bound to come to the forefront. (BBC 2016) In the following paragraph, Clinton combines FTAs that target Sanders' past policies and his character by implying he had even sided with Republicans and far-right groups in the past when it came to immigration policies.

And in 2006, when Senator Sanders was running for the Senate from Vermont, he voted in the House with hard-line Republicans for indefinite detention for undocumented immigrants, and then he sided with those Republicans to stand with vigilantes known as Minute Men who were taking up outposts along the border to hunt down immigrants. So I think when you were running for the Senate, you made it clear by your vote, Senator, that you were going to stand with the Republicans. When you got to the Senate in 2007, one of the first things you did was vote against Ted Kennedy's immigration reform which he'd been working on for years before you ever arrived. (Times 2016)

Such threats targeting Sanders' immigration record add to Clinton's FTAs regarding his policies and proposals that we have also observed in previous debates, where she continues to paint them as unrealistic and infeasible. An important discussion point in Florida is the 2007 bill on immigration reform, which Clinton had supported, and Sanders did not. While he argues that the 2007 bill had guest-worker provisions that were akin to modern slavery,

Clinton counterargues by naming a number of influential politicians and organizations which supported it.

You know, I think it's very hard to make the case that Ted Kennedy, Barack Obama, me, La Raza, United Farmworkers, Dolores Huerta, leaders of the Latino community, would have supported a bill that actually promoted modern slavery. That was one of the many excuses used not to vote for the 2007 bill. (Times 2016)

In addition to *poor policies and proposals*, 26.9 percent of Clinton's FTAs fall in the *disagreement* category and 23.1 percent in the *poor character and leadership competence* category, where Clinton uttered one of her sharpest FTAs in the debate. Specifically, Sanders was asked to elaborate on the comments he had previously made on Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, where he had favorably described Castro as someone who gave the Cuban people education and access to healthcare. Even though Sanders concludes his answer by emphasizing that Cuba is an authoritarian undemocratic country, Clinton puts forward an FTA where she portrays Sanders as someone who supports the repressive policies of authoritarian regimes.

And I just want to add one thing to the question you were asking Senator Sanders. I think in that same interview, he praised what he called the revolution of values in Cuba and talked about how people were working for the common good, not for themselves. I just couldn't disagree more. You know, if the values are that you oppress people, you disappear people, you imprison people or even kill people for expressing their opinions, for expressing freedom of speech, that is not the kind of revolution of values that I ever want to see anywhere. (Times 2016)

As we have acknowledged in the previous three debates, one of Sanders' key strategies is to put Clinton's legitimacy as a politician into question by pointing out her Wall Street connections. Clinton's defense prior to the Florida debate included counterarguing that her ties to Wall Street have no influence on her decision-making as a politician. For the first time

in Miami, however, Clinton employs a new defense strategy, which is to imply Sanders is being hypocritical and is working together with fossil fuel industry giants, the Koch brothers.

But they did just put up a little video praising you for being the only Democrat who stood with the Republicans to try to eliminate the Export/Import Bank, which has helped hundreds and hundreds of companies here in Florida be able to export their goods and employ more Floridians. So from my perspective, you sided with the Koch brothers. (Times 2016)

For his part, Sanders uttered 57.4 percent of the FTAs in Florida, of which 71.4 percent are direct. The categories of *disagreement* and *poor character and leadership competence* share the highest number of FTAs, with 25.7 percent each, closely followed by *poor policies and proposals* with 20 percent. In Miami, Sanders reiterates his FTAs regarding Clinton's campaign funding and Wall Street ties, but an FTA that ridicules Clinton's response significantly sharpens his delivery.

Look, clearly, clearly, the secretary's words to Wall Street has really intimidated them, and that is why they have given her \$15 million in campaign contributions. (Times 2016)

Sanders employs a similar strategy while discussing college debt, where he very sharply accuses Clinton of plagiarizing his policies.

I think what Secretary Clinton just said is absolutely right. I think I said it many months before she said it, but thanks for copying a very good idea. (Times 2016)

As has been noted above, some of Clinton's FTAs regarding Sanders' character and political record include claims that he had sided with hardline Republicans and far-right anti-immigrant groups. Since such FTAs carry the danger of turning away many potential Floridian voters, Sanders' defense includes threatening Clinton's face over resorting to inappropriate campaign tactics.

What the secretary is doing tonight and has done very often is take large pieces of legislation and take pieces out of it. No, I did not oppose the bailout or the support of the automobile industry. No, I do not support vigilantes, and that is a horrific statement, an unfair statement to make. (Times 2016)

In addition to defending his face from Clinton’s FTAs regarding immigration policy, he also names instances when Clinton herself failed to stand up for immigrant interests.

Well, when we talk about efforts to assist immigrants, Secretary Clinton prevailed upon the governor of New York, Elliot Spitzer, who wanted to do the right thing and provide driver’s license to these who were undocumented, she said don’t do it, and New York State still does not do it. In Vermont, by the way, I worked with officials and undocumented people in Vermont do have the ability to get driver’s license. When we talk about immigration, the secretary will remember that one of the great tragedies, human tragedies of recent years is children came from Honduras where there’s probably more violence than almost any place in this country, and they came into this country. And I said welcome those children into this country, Secretary Clinton said send them back. (Times 2016)

Moving onto the analysis of statements mixing support and threat, we observe the number has remained unchanged with regards to the Michigan debate. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 14. Analysis of statements mixing support and threat in the Florida debate.

	Mixed support and threat	
	Clinton	Sanders
The opponent’s possession of positive and negative characteristics	1	-

The positive and negative qualities of the ideas that the opponent proposes	-	-
Total	1	0

In the following example, we can observe Clinton using a positive politeness strategy to tentatively approve of Sanders’ criticism of past Democratic presidents.

You know, in the debates we’ve had — maybe this is the seventh or so — Senator Sanders is always criticizing the two recent Democratic presidents — President Clinton and President Obama. And that’s fine, but I wish he would criticize and join me in criticizing George W. Bush, who I think wrecked the economy and created the conditions for the great recession. (Times 2016)

With regards to direct support, however, there is a significant drop from the previous debate which had 4 such statements. By contrast, Florida has only one, courtesy of Clinton. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 15. Analysis of statements expressing direct support in the Florida debate.

	Direct support	
	Clinton	Sanders
The opponent’s desirable characteristics	1	-
Good plan offered by opponent	-	-
Laudable past efforts of the opponent	-	-
Reliability of information offered by the opponent	-	-

Total	1	0
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A similar pattern can be observed in indirect support, where the number of such statements dropped to 6 from 9 in Michigan. While the previous debate witnessed statements that aim to unify the candidates vis-à-vis their Republican opponents, the only moment that could come close to such statements in Miami was Clinton’s response to a question regarding Donald Trump and his proposal of building a wall along the Mexican border.

Well, I think both of us, both Senator Sanders and I, voted numerous times to enhance border security along our border. (...) And in fact, if he cared to know anything about what members of Congress, like the senator and I have done, where it was necessary, we did support some fencing. (Times 2016)

The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 16. Analysis of statements expressing indirect support in the Florida debate.

	Indirect support	
	Clinton	Sanders
Shared feelings or ideas with the opponent (agreement on attitudes, issues, and feelings)	3	2
Commonality with the opponent through shared group identity markers	1	-
Excuses for the opponent or alternative interpretations of the situation (benefit of the doubt)	-	-



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Total	4	2
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## **7. Fifth debate – Brooklyn, New York**

More than a month after the Democratic debate in Miami, the fifth and last debate between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders took place in Brooklyn, New York. There are two significant factors we should consider while examining this final debate. One, prior to the New York primary, Sanders had won eight of the nine most recent Democratic caucuses and primaries (Pilkington and Gambino 2016) but Clinton's victories across the American south still allowed her to stay in the lead (Zurcher 2016). Two, the stakes were incredibly high at the New York primary, which carries a significant number of delegates – 291 out of the 1,383 needed to secure the Democratic nomination. (Pilkington and Gambino 2016)

It should also be considered that in early April, Clinton's campaign manager Robby Mook wrote that her lead of almost 230 delegates made it considerably difficult for Sanders to overtake her. To do so, he would need to win delegate-rich contests in New Jersey, California, Pennsylvania, and New York – with 60 percent of the vote. Sanders' chances were quite low, however, since the only primaries he had won with this margin were in his home state of Vermont and the neighboring New Hampshire. (Ceaser, Busch and Pitney 2019, 57-8)

In addition, Clinton had served as Senator for the state of New York for two consecutive terms, meaning that the electorate was already, if anything, familiar with her as a politician. But considering Sanders' previous upset victories, Clinton could not enter the New York debate expecting a landslide victory. On the other hand, this was the last opportunity for Sanders to directly appeal to voters and seize the nomination.

Keeping this in mind, the New York debate witnessed changed and more aggressive strategies by both candidates. Cathleen Decker of *The Los Angeles Times* remarks that “the Democratic candidates in their debate came close to behaving as the Republicans have all year: They flared in anger and rudely dismissed each other's positions.” (Decker 2016) The opponents' modified strategies are certainly reflected in the significantly higher number of FTAs – 109 in total, of which 76.1 percent are direct.

### **7.1 New York debate analysis**

Table 17 contains an analysis of the FTAs uttered by both candidates in the New York debate. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 17. Analysis of direct and indirect face-threatening attacks in the New York debate.

	Direct FTA		Indirect FTA	
	Clinton	Sanders	Clinton	Sanders
Poor character and leadership competence	8	10	8	5
Poor policies and proposals	9	6	4	1
Responsibility for problems	3	3	-	-
Incorrect use of data	1	2	-	-
Disagreement	12	11	6	1
Inappropriate campaign tactics	2	9	1	-
Ridicule	3	4	-	-
Total	38	45	19	7

With 47.7 percent, Sanders slightly falls behind Clinton regarding the total number of FTAs. On the other hand, his FTAs are clearly more direct than those of his opponent, as only 13.5 percent of his FTAs are indirect. The majority of Sanders' FTAs fall in the categories of *poor character and leadership competence* and *disagreement*, with 28.8 percent and 23.1 percent, respectively. For the first time, however, the *inappropriate campaign tactics* category holds a significant percentage of Sanders' FTAs – 17.3. A sign of how far the race for the Democratic nomination has progressed, it is also an indication that Sanders is no longer afraid to call out the information offered by his opponent that he believes to be deliberately untrue. During a discussion on raising the national minimum wage, for instance, Sanders accuses Clinton of suddenly changing her policy.

Well, I think the secretary has confused a lot of people. I don't know how you're there for the fight for \$15 when you say you want a \$12-an-hour national minimum wage. (CNN 2016)

Sanders does the same in another example concerning a statement Clinton had made in the media, where she established a connection between Sanders' gun policies in Vermont and gun violence in New York. When Clinton demurs in her response to the moderator's question, Sanders seizes the opportunity to threaten Clinton's face over her inadequate reply.

Well, the only problem is, Wolf, she didn't answer your question. (...) A statement that was refuted by the governor of the state of Vermont, who was a supporter of hers, who said, yeah, in campaigns people tend to exaggerate. (CNN 2016)

One of the most important discussion points in the New York debate was the question of judgment and the ability to be president. Even though the FTAs in the example below are not unique to this debate, Sanders makes them more pointed by directly making references to what he believes is bad judgment on Clinton's part.

But I do question her judgment. I question a judgment which voted for the war in Iraq, the worst foreign policy blunder in the history of this country, voted for virtually every disastrous trade agreement which cost us millions of decent-paying jobs. And I question her judgment about running super PACs which are collecting tens of millions of dollars from special interests, including \$15 million from Wall Street. I don't believe that that is the kind of judgment we need to be the kind of president we need. (CNN 2016)

As was noted in the previous debate, Sanders employs ironic comments that fall within the *ridicule* category to expose what he considers to be the flaws in Clinton's arguments. Even though only 7.7 percent of his FTAs belong in this category, we should make note of a few such FTAs due to their ferocity. The example below concerns Clinton's claims that she has not been swayed by donations of big banks and that she has criticized them over their subpar behavior in the past.

Secretary Clinton called them out. Oh my goodness, they must have been really crushed by this. And was that before or after you received huge sums of money by giving speaking engagements? So they must have been very, very upset by what you did. (CNN 2016)

Even though Sanders shows a clear preference for direct FTAs, we should also briefly reflect on an indirect FTA that demonstrates his ability to make comments that get under his opponent's skin. In the following example, Sanders remarks that Clinton might disagree with his opinion, which is a statement he employs quite often to introduce disagreements into the debate and discern himself without uttering an elaborate FTA. The difference lies, however, in the content of this statement, where he talks about involving the youth in the political process. To imply that Clinton would disagree with his view paints her in a very unfavorable light, arguably even more so than his repeated claims that she belongs to the political establishment.

But, I will also say, and this is important and maybe the Secretary disagrees with me, but I am proud that millions of young people who previously were not involved in the political process are now coming into it, and I do believe, I do believe that we have got to open the door of the Democratic party to those people. (CNN 2016)

While Clinton's New York performance was slightly more aggressive with 52.3 percent of total FTAs, 33.3 percent of those are indirect, indicating that even though she may have uttered more FTAs, her performance could have been perceived as less aggressive considering that a third of her FTAs were indirect. Another third of Clinton's FTAs, or 31.6 percent, belong in the *disagreement* category, followed by *poor character and leadership competence*, 28.1 percent, and *poor policies and proposals*, 22.8 percent. As discussed above, Sanders threatens Clinton's judgment and presidential qualities by using her past policies and connections to special interest groups against her. When she takes her turn, Clinton does the same, but by implying he is incompetent and unprepared to not only face the challenges that come with being president but also to carry out his own campaign promises.

But if you go and read, which I hope all of you will before Tuesday, Senator Sanders' long interview with the "New York Daily News," talk about judgment and talk about the kinds of problems he had answering questions about even his core issue, breaking up the banks. When asked, he could not explain how that would be done and when asked about a number of foreign policy issues, he could not answer about Afghanistan, about Israel, about counterterrorism, except to say if he'd had some paper in front of him, maybe he could. I think you need to have the judgment on day one to be both president and commander-in-chief. (CNN 2016)

Clinton continues to imply Sanders is an incompetent candidate during a discussion on how to combat the power of big banks. While Sanders clearly advocates breaking them up, Clinton presents her more moderate strategy by implying Sanders' policy is unreasonable and without regard for the existing policymaking process in the US.

That is the law. Now, this is our ninth debate. In the prior eight debates, I have said, we have a law. You don't just say, we're upset about this. I'm upset about it. You don't just say, go break them up. You have a law, because we are a nation of laws. (CNN 2016)

The same strategy resurfaces while the candidates discuss their climate change policies, where Clinton employs a more indirect strategy that highlights her realism and ability to comprehend the scope of every issue the nation is facing.

Now, it's easy -- it's easy to diagnose the problem. It's harder to do something about the problem. (CNN 2016)

We can also observe the same strategy during a discussion on social security when Clinton claims that she is in vigorous agreement with Sanders when it comes to expanding social security, while Sanders argues she is incorrectly claiming that this has been her position all along. One of Sanders' key arguments against Clinton is that she belongs to the political establishment; in this example, she uses his argument against him.

It's always a little bit, uh, challenging because, you know, if Senator Sanders doesn't agree with how you are approaching something, then you are a member of the establishment. (CNN 2016)

Going back to the issue of climate change, Clinton also sharply denounces Sanders' policies as infeasible in the current political climate.

I don't take a back seat to your legislation that you've introduced that you haven't been able to get passed. I want to do what we can do to actually make progress in dealing with the crisis. And my approach I think is going to get us there faster without tying us up into political knots with a Congress that still would not support what you are proposing. (CNN 2016)

The issue of Clinton's paid speeches to big banks also arises on the New York stage, as was already noted. Prior to the New York debate, Clinton had responded to Sanders' FTAs targeting her Wall Street speeches by arguing that she would release the transcripts once everybody else did – a defense Sanders could easily dismiss by claiming he had no paid speeches to release. In New York, however, Clinton changes her strategy and threatens Sanders' face over not releasing his tax returns.

But I will tell you this, there is -- there is a long-standing expectation that everybody running release their tax returns, and you can go -- you can go to my website and see eight years of tax returns. And I've released 30 years of tax returns. And I think every candidate, including Senator Sanders and Donald Trump, should do the same. (CNN 2016)

As demonstrated in table 18, the number of statements that mix support and threat remains low, although it did increase by one compared to the Florida debate. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 18. Analysis of statements mixing support and threat in the New York debate.

Mixed support and threat	
Clinton	Sanders

The opponent's possession of positive and negative characteristics	-	-
The positive and negative qualities of the ideas that the opponent proposes	1	1
Total	1	1

In the following example, Sanders applies a positive politeness strategy when he partially agrees with the preceding statement of his opponent.

Look, much of what Secretary Clinton said was right. We had a crime bill. I voted for it. (CNN 2016)

We can observe the same scenario as in table 18 in statements expressing direct support, shown below in table 19. The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 19. Analysis of statements expressing direct support in the New York debate.

	Direct support	
	Clinton	Sanders
The opponent's desirable characteristics	1	1
Good plan offered by opponent	-	-
Laudable past efforts of the opponent	-	-
Reliability of information offered by the opponent	-	-
Total	1	1



Clinton continues to lead with the number of indirect support statements in New York, while Sanders’ only statement of indirect support refers to their time working in the US Senate together, which pales in comparison to some of Clinton’s statements such as the one during their discussion on social security.

I have supported it. You know, we are in vigorous agreement here, Senator.  
 In fact, their whole idea is to turn over the Social Security Trust Fund to Wall Street, something you and I would never let happen. (CNN 2016)

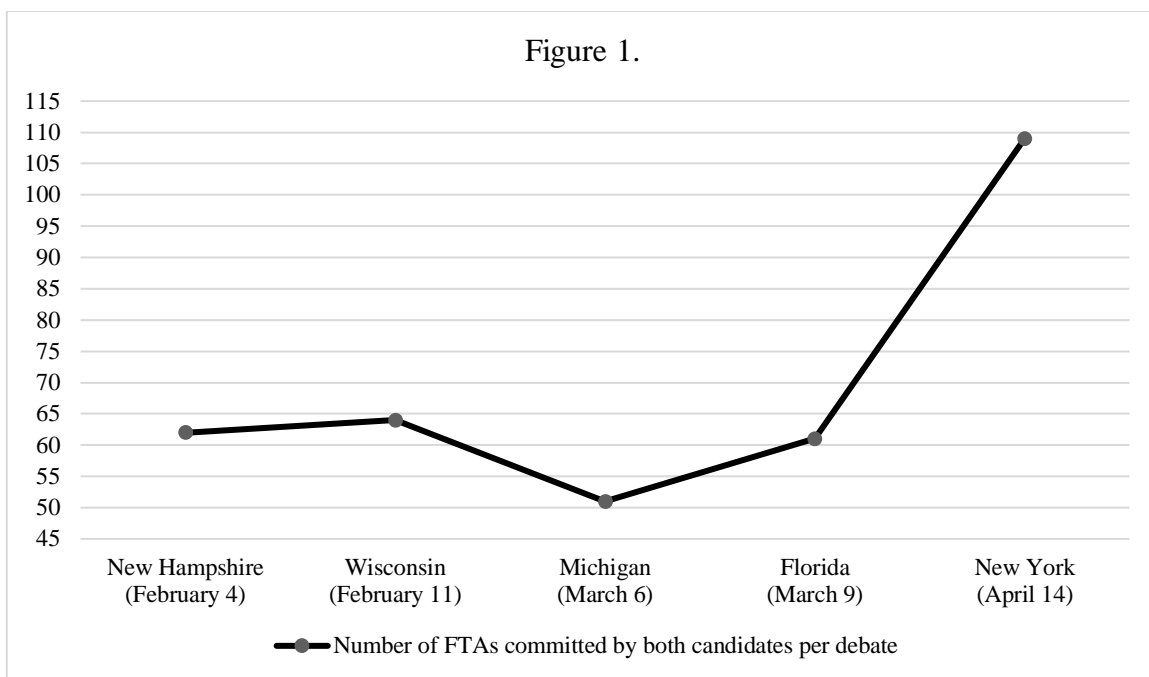
The data in the table below was obtained through the method outlined in section 2 of this final diploma paper.

Table 20. Analysis of statements expressing indirect support in the New York debate.

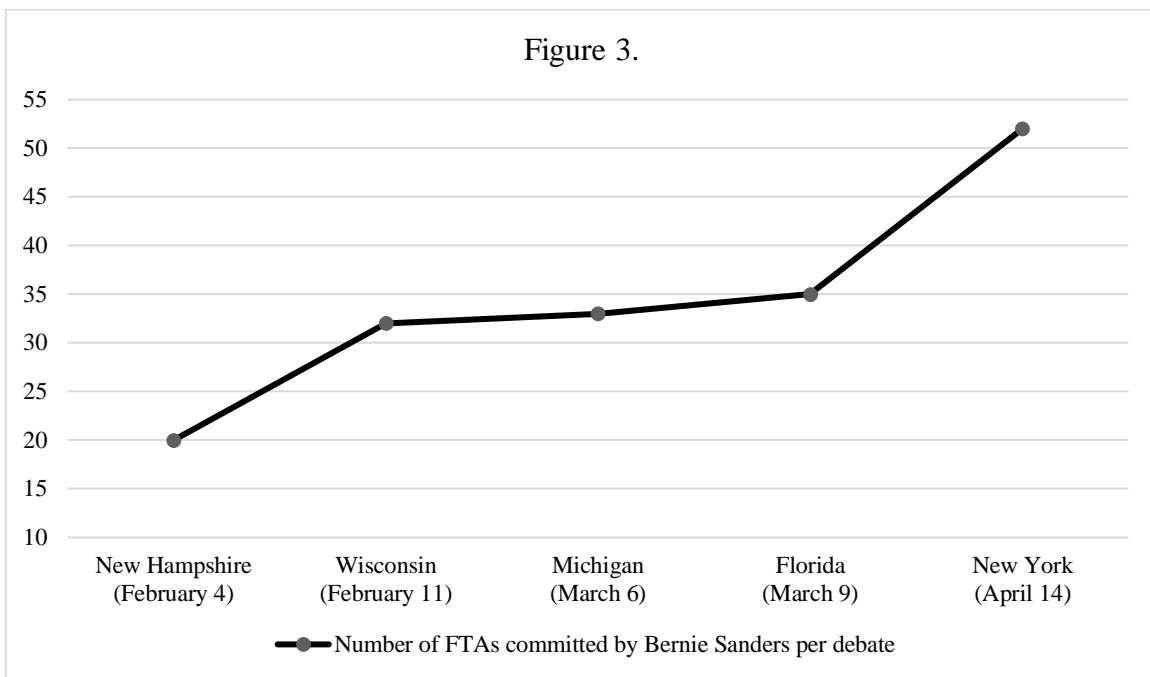
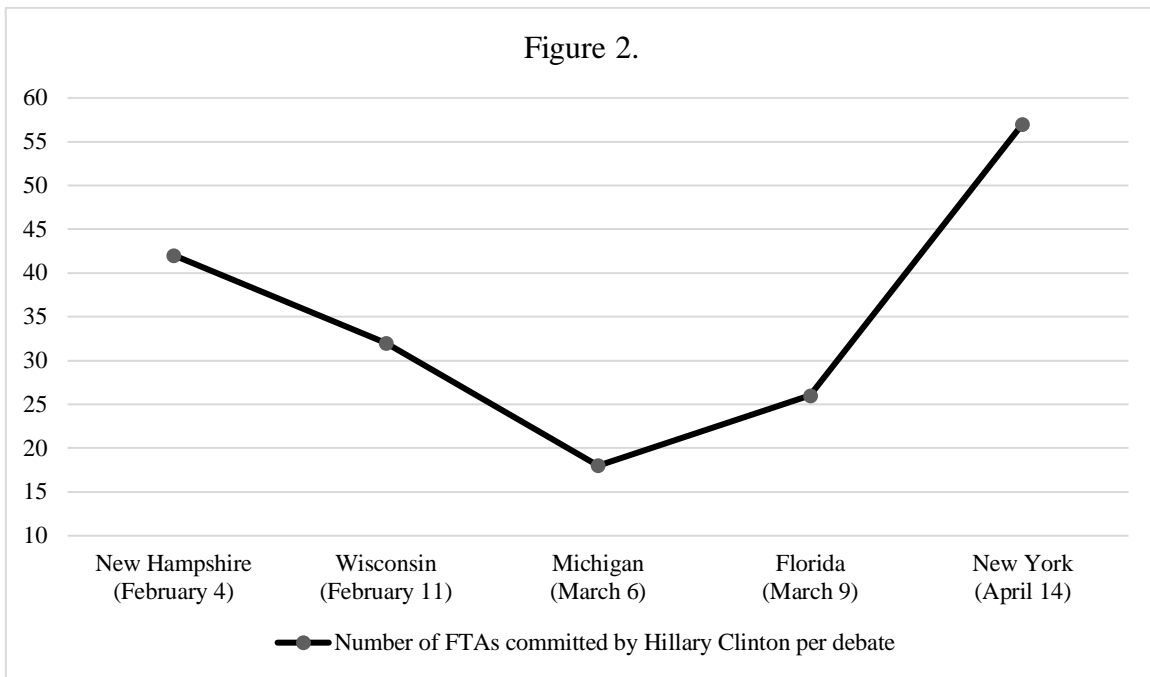
	Indirect support	
	Clinton	Sanders
Shared feelings or ideas with the opponent (agreement on attitudes, issues, and feelings)	5	-
Commonality with the opponent through shared group identity markers	-	1
Excuses for the opponent or alternative interpretations of the situation (benefit of the doubt)	-	-
Total	5	1

## 8. Discussion

After analyzing thought units that contain FTAs, both threat and support, and direct and indirect support, we have come to identify individual debate strategies and how Clinton and Sanders approached the difficult task of presenting themselves as the best candidate for the Democratic nomination. The answer to our first research question – how does the number of FTAs in each debate change as the race for the Democratic nomination progresses – is summarized in figure 1 below.



After a slight increase in the number of FTAs from New Hampshire to Wisconsin, there is a noticeable drop in FTAs in Michigan. As already discussed, the debate was held in Flint and a major portion of the debate involved discussing the city's water crisis – a topic the two opponents did not disagree on and therefore attracted less FTAs. But the FTAs pick up immediately in Florida until their peak in New York, which was their last debate. At the time, there were no plans for another debate and with important primaries approaching, both candidates were on the offensive. Figure 1, however, offers an incomplete picture regarding the changes to individual strategies. In figures 2 and 3, we can observe the changes to the number of FTAs per candidate, per debate.

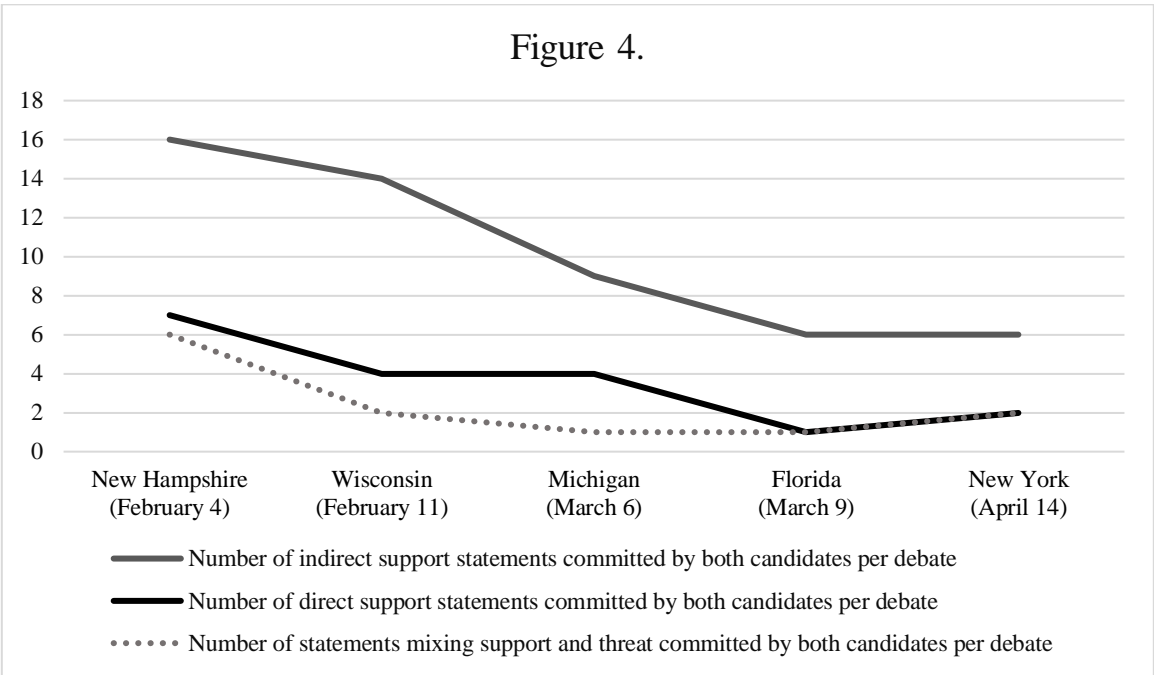


With the exception of the New York debate, Clinton’s most aggressive performance was, in fact, the first debate in New Hampshire. After February 4<sup>th</sup>, the number of Clinton’s FTAs begins to dip, reaching its highest low in Michigan, before rising again in Florida. If we consider the broader context of the Democratic contests taking place parallel to the debates,

Clinton appears to employ more aggressive strategies after experiencing losses. The Michigan debate, for instance, took place only days after Clinton’s important victories on Super Tuesday, solidifying her position as the frontrunner for the nomination. But after an unexpected loss in Michigan, she sharpens her strategy in Miami. As such, Clinton appears to modify her debate strategies according to her performance in the preceding primaries.

Sanders, on the other hand, exhibits a different pattern. His considerably less aggressive performance in New Hampshire is accounted for by the fact that he represented neighboring Vermont in the US Senate, resulting in a considerable advantage in New Hampshire. But as he did not enjoy the same privilege in other states, the number of FTAs rises from Wisconsin onwards.

Our second research question – how the number of non-threatening statements (statements that mix support and threat, and direct and indirect support statements) changed – is demonstrated in figure 4.

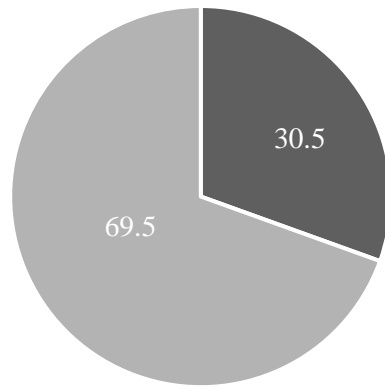


Across all three categories, there is a reduction in the number of statements from one debate to the next, inversely proportional to the total number of FTAs, which shows nearly consistent growth from one debate to another. The resulting conclusion is that the opponents

gave less importance to showing support as the Democratic contests progressed and grew in intensity.

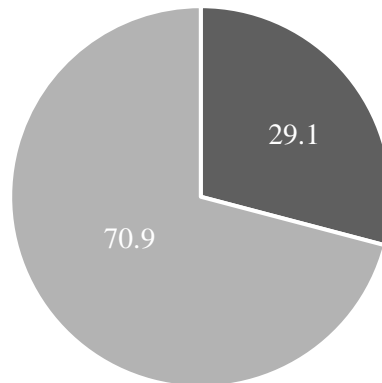
Our third research question – what is the percentage of direct versus indirect FTAs per candidate – is answered by figures 5 and 6.

Figure 5.



- Percentage of total indirect FTAs committed by Hillary Clinton
- Percentage of total direct FTAs committed by Hillary Clinton

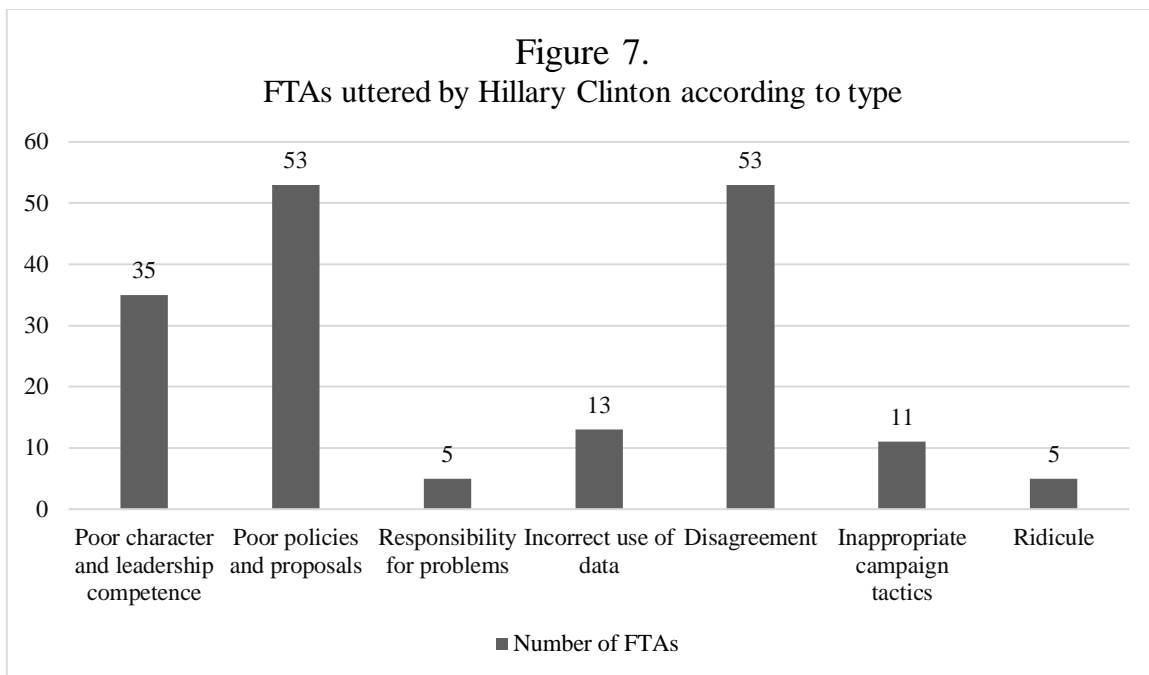
Figure 6.

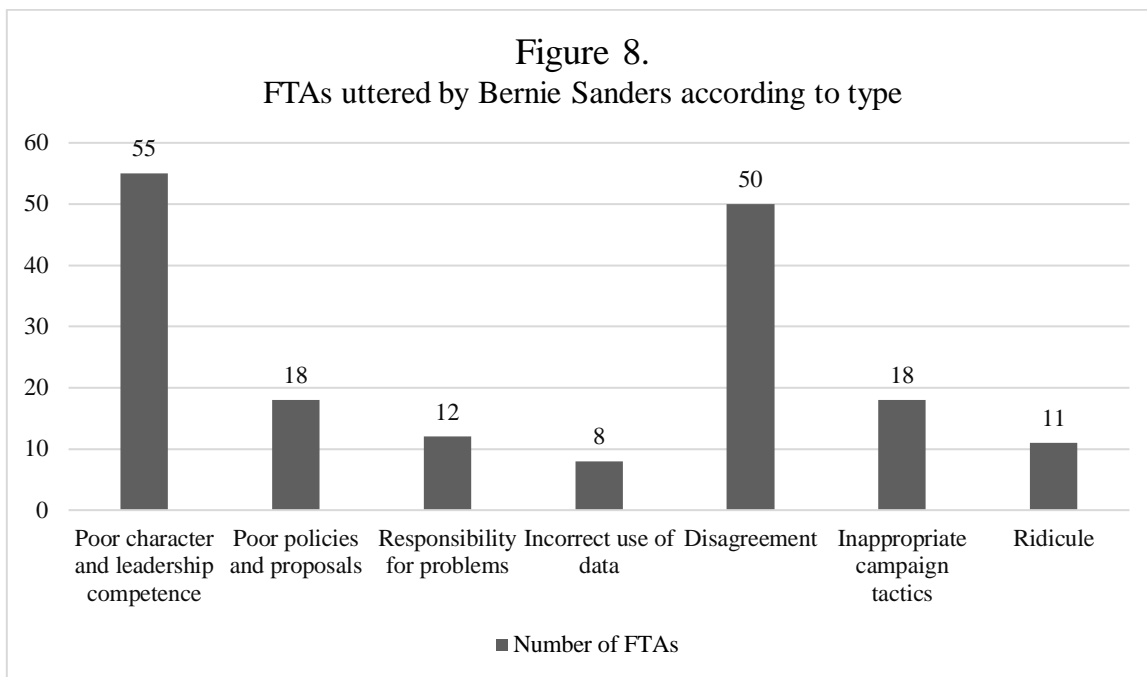


- Percentage of total indirect FTAs committed by Bernie Sanders
- Percentage of total direct FTAs committed by Bernie Sanders

After analyzing data from all five debates, we can draw the conclusion that the difference between Clinton and Sanders is minimal. While there is variation across individual debates, Clinton used indirect FTAs 30.5 percent of the time, while Sanders did so 29.1 percent of the time.

The answer to our final research question – which types of FTAs are favored most by the candidates and what does this say about their debate strategy – is presented in figures 7 and 8.





The opponents do share similar numbers in categories such as *disagreement*, while the differences between the number of FTAs in the *incorrect use of data* category are not strikingly large either. But an area where we can very clearly observe different strategies are the categories of *poor character and leadership competence* and *poor policies and proposals*. Data concerning Clinton shows a clear preference for attacking Sanders’ policies and proposals. Percentagewise, these FTAs make up 30.3 percent of the total amount. The debate highlights presented in this final diploma paper offer sufficient insight into the content of these FTAs, such as presenting Sanders’ plans as unrealistic and infeasible. In addition, 20 percent of her FTAs target Sanders’ character and leadership, where she attempts to portray him as an inexperienced politician who is unreasonable in his demands, does not grasp what it takes to overcome difficult political challenges nor what it takes to bring his campaign promises to fruition.

With 31.9 percent of his total FTAs falling in the *poor character and leadership competence* category, Sanders exhibits a different debate strategy. While Clinton targets his campaign promises and policies, Sanders goes after Clinton’s competence to be a successful leader. He paints her as a member of the political establishment; a politician who is out of touch with their constituents and is afraid to challenge the status quo. Considering his opponent’s vast

political experience, which also includes working in the Cabinet of the United States, Sanders could not take the route Clinton had and threaten her face over being inexperienced or unreasonable. What he did do, however, was to use Clinton's own experience and connections against her, threatening her face over her ties to big banks and campaign funding, with the end goal of having the audience perceive her as an untrustworthy politician.



## **9. Conclusion**

By analyzing political debates from the point of view of politeness theory, or more specifically, FTAs, we have gained a deeper insight into the debate strategies of the individual candidates. Furthermore, we were able to discern their broader campaign strategies and how they approached the difficult task of discrediting their opponent as they fought to secure the Democratic nomination.

The data on Clinton's FTAs reveals that the primary goal of her debate strategy was to discredit Sanders' policies and proposals. Concurrently, the preference and attention she gave to this FTA type also reveals what she finds most threatening about her opponent. It follows, then, that Clinton saw Sanders' plans for free healthcare and college, for instance, as the biggest threats to her campaign and the possibility of becoming the Democratic presidential nominee.

Sanders, on the other hand, shows a clear preference towards threatening Clinton's character and leadership competence, which is also an indication of what he finds most threatening about his opponent. Indeed, Sanders' focus on attacking her leadership skills and character through the numerous references to her political connections and bank ties reveals his campaign sees Clinton's political experience as the biggest threat to Sanders becoming the Democratic nominee. By painting her as a politician who will be held back by special interests in addressing the needs of the American working and middle class, Sanders is undermining her political experience and ability to be a successful leader.

After reviewing the data concerning the number of FTAs in all five debates, we were able to grasp how the level of aggression changed from one debate to the next. With the exception of Michigan, every debate saw an increase in the total number of FTAs when compared to the preceding debate. We have already addressed the specific issues surrounding the Michigan debate that led to the significantly lower number of FTAs, so we will not cover it here. Therefore, while the individual debates were not immune to the specific circumstances related to the city or state they were held in, the progress of the primaries and the urgency it

placed on the candidates to secure as many delegates as possible to gain the lead reflected in a rising number of FTAs from one debate to another, Michigan notwithstanding.

Upon examining the FTA data concerning Clinton and Sanders individually, we can also gain an understanding of how their level of aggression changed from debate to debate. Clinton, for instance, adapted her aggression to how well she was doing in the Democratic contests, displaying higher numbers of FTAs in debates that followed losses or disappointing performances in the primaries. As a result of Clinton slowly gaining a steady lead in the number of delegates, putting significant pressure on the Sanders campaign, Sanders' debate performances steadily increased in aggression, reaching their peak in the final debate in New York.

We were also able to identify similarities in the candidates' debate strategies – both Clinton and Sanders preferred direct FTAs over indirect FTAs with almost identical ratios.

In addition to FTAs, non-threatening statements also provided an insight into changing debate strategies and shifting priorities as the primaries progressed. Non-threatening statements – indirect support and direct support statements as well as statements mixing support and threat – were found to decrease in number from one debate to another. This leads to the conclusion that showing support to their opponent became less important as the pressure of political campaigning mounted.

Finally, the data obtained has shown that politeness theory can be successfully applied to political discourse, more specifically political debates. In fact, it can be used as an insightful tool for the analysis of campaign strategies, political image, and how a politician running for office approaches the task of discrediting their opponent.

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