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Abstract

Research on televised election debates has been dominated by studies of the United States. As a result, we know far less about other national contexts, including the many parliamentary democracies that now hold televised election debates. This article makes two contributions to address this. Theoretically, the study argues that traditional approaches for understanding the development of campaign communication practices (particularly, Americanization and hybridization) are limiting when applied to television debates, and instead offers an alternative theoretical approach, the concept of speciation drawn from biological science. This is then applied in the empirical section of the article in a comparative analysis of the evolution of televised election debates in four parliamentary democracies: Australia, Canada, West Germany/Germany and the United Kingdom. Based on this analysis, the article argues that the logic of parliamentary democracy coupled with more diffuse party systems has created a distinctive type of televised debate, generally more open to smaller parties based on their success at winning seats in the legislature.

Keywords

comparative research, election campaign, parliament, political parties, television debates

In many parts of the world, televised election debates are now a fixture of election campaigns. Despite this, our understanding of these broadcasts is largely shaped by research on the United States (for a discussion of recent literature on televised debates, see the next section). We know very little about how institutional variables, such as the system of government or party system, have shaped the format of election debates in specific national contexts. Elections are "a time when the self-representation of the political system and the political class is expressed most clearly" (Mergel 2009: 256). This is especially true in the case of election debates, which can be seen as manifestations of the choice the electorate faces. The way this choice is constructed and presented does not happen by accident, but is the product of a political environment. Yet we know very little about these processes.

This is the gap this article aims to fill with a comparative study of the history of election debates in Australia, Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom. These countries are all established liberal democracies and advanced economies. Most importantly for our purposes, they are all parliamentary democracies that have held election debates for varying lengths of time.

The role of election debates in parliamentary democracies is particularly ambiguous. In rejecting calls for election debates in the UK during her premiership, Margaret Thatcher argued that "We're not electing a president, we're choosing a government" (quoted in Cockerell 2010). The implication of Thatcher's statement is that the seemingly presidential form of election debates, focused on party leaders and not the wider party platform, is alien to parliamentary democracy.

This article offers a different perspective. Drawing on the metaphor of speciation from biological science, it argues that televised debates in parliamentary democracies

have evolved in response to environmental pressures. As a result, in many countries, they have taken a distinctive form defined by their relative openness to smaller parties that are unlikely to wield executive authority.

Existing Literature Relevant to Understanding Election Debates in Parliamentary Democracies

Unsurprisingly, given their centrality to election campaigns in many countries, the study of election debates has produced a large body of research. Much of this work is in the "effects tradition" (Curran et al. 1982), focusing on the influence of television debates on voters' decisions and thinking. The general consensus is that debates have only a limited impact on most voters' electoral preferences, with some evidence of influence on undecided voters. Stronger evidence exists that debates can have other effects, including voter learning and agenda setting (Benoit et al. 2003; Schrott 1990). Effects research has been counterbalanced by more critical work. Some of this research has examined the rhetorical strategies employed by politicians, frequently being critical of the standards of argumentation employed (Marietta 2009; Siepmann 1962). Other researchers have critiqued the focus on debate winners, losers, and electoral impacts. Instead, they claim, it is more important to understand the role that debates play in democratic and civil life (Coleman 2010). Recent years have seen a newer strand of literature emerging, focused on countries in the developed world with high levels of internet connectivity, examining how viewers now use two screens (the traditional television and a second internet-enabled device) to comment on broadcasts in real time (Anstead 2015; Anstead and O'Loughlin 2011; Elmer 2013).

Debate research remains very US-centric. This is not to say that there are no studies of other countries (for the best overview of debates in various countries, see Coleman

2000). However, as noted by McKinney and Karlin (2004) and Birdsell (2014), there is less work on televised election debates outside the US. Recent debate literature provides further evidence of this. A Scopus literature search for articles on televised debates published between 2000 and 2015 reveals that a total of 166 articles have been published.[1] While the language limitations of this search should be noted (as the search terms employed were in English), an overview of the results is instructive: 80 of the articles are on the US. The next most studied country is France, with 12 articles. Only two other countries (Germany and the UK) make it into double figures. What is perhaps most striking, though, is the near complete absence of any comparative work. Only five articles were comparative, all examining just two countries. Of these, four used the US as one-half of their comparison, with only Benoit and Henson's study of Australia and Canada drawing exclusively on non-US examples (2007).

Beyond the debate-specific literature, political communication research offers two theoretical perspectives that might provide tools for studying election debates in parliamentary democracies. The most obvious is Americanization, which is normally defined as the hypothesis that "campaigning in democracies around the world is becoming more and more Americanized, as candidates, political parties and new media take cues from their counterparts in the United States" (Swanson and Mancini 1996:4; for a thorough discussion, see Negrine and Papathanassopoulos 1996). The Americanization thesis is an attempt to explain what Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue is the convergence of media systems and campaign communication in different countries. Trends include a greater focus on the party leader and candidate personality; the growing use of marketing-derived research methods; the proliferation of specialist political consultants; and an increased role for communication

technology, especially broadcast media, and latterly, the internet (Kavanagh 1996; Mergel 2009; Nord 2001).

Within this theoretical paradigm, we would understand the development of television debates in a non-US context as the exportation of a US political genre that is leader- and media-focused. Indeed, a number of scholars draw this link, seeing the development of televised debates in specific national contexts as influenced by the US example (Nord 2001 on Sweden, and Downs 2012 on the UK). Televised debates are also an area where US expertise is shared: the American Commission on Presidential Debates, the organizers of US debates since 1988, spends a significant amount of its time advising other countries on best practice in debate organization (Minow and LaMay 2008). This would seem to support the idea that the spread of televised debates is an example of Americanization.

There are, though, problems in seeking to understand televised debates as Americanization. First, discussion of Americanization does not just relate to substantive changes in electoral practice, but also functions as a discourse. This discourse is not neutral, but often negative. Rose (1974) argues that Americanization was used as an insult as far back as the 1830s, while Mergel (2009) notes that the term had developed negative connotations in Germany by 1900. Other writers note that contemporary use is frequently critical (Nielsen 2013; Nord 2001; Scammell and Semetko 1995).

Second, the Americanization thesis has been critiqued for being overly simplistic. It has been argued that to focus on the role of the US example is to misunderstand the processes that are driving changing political communication practices. It is for this reason that some critics argue that the concept of modernization is rather more useful.

In this context, modernization is defined as "a wider, more general process that is producing changes in many societies, changes which are difficult to attribute to a single cause and which go far beyond politics and communication" (Swanson and Mancini 1996: 6). Modernization theory is concerned with the changing patterns of economic, political and social life in advanced societies, and how this changes political communication practices.

However, both Americanization and modernization theories suffer from another problem when used for comparative analysis: they do not allow for distinctive national conditions in shaping electoral practices (Blumler and Gurevitch 2001). Writing about the UK, Kavanagh (1996) argues that British institutions, including the frequency of elections, the ban on televised advertising, and more disciplined and centralized political parties hold back the influence of the US example. More broadly, in their comparative study of 18 Western democracies, Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue that, while there is a general trend of convergence towards practices found in the US, national politics and culture continue to impose limitations on this process.

Criticisms of this kind have led to an alternative theory being proposed: hybridization. In the context of political communication, hybridization is defined as the "merger of country and culture specific campaign practices with selected transnational features" (Esser and Strömbäck 2013: 292). In practice, this means that different countries can be subjected to the same external pressures (the increased professionalization of politics, for example), but divergent outcomes will occur when these trends are combined with national factors (Plasser and Plasser 2002).

Hybridization may seem like a more useful theoretical tool for understanding televised debates in parliamentary democracies. However, the metaphor of

hybridization does have some important limitations. The use of the term is predated by two distinct ideas of the hybrid, coming from other areas of academic enquiry.[2]

In the first instance, the hybrid is an idea drawn from biological science. The first recorded use of the term in the mid-seventeenth century references the issue of a tame sow and a wild boar (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2015; for a discussion of etymology, see Chadwick 2013: 9–14). In biology, a hybrid is the offspring of two different species. However, hybrids are normally sterile, unable to procreate further (Hine and Martin 2015).[3] This makes the metaphor of hybridity problematic, as it suggests the moment of fission between the parents is also a moment of conclusion, leaving little room for development. In the case of televised election debates outside the US, where formats have changed over time, this assumption is not particularly useful.

More recently, the concept of hybridity has drawn interest in the social sciences, proving an attractive analytical tool for cultural and post-colonial studies, where it has been used to understand the movements of people, ideas and cultural products in a globalizing world. In this body of literature, the hybrid is produced by a process of continual cultural exchange and reinvention (Kraidy 1999). There remain problems with employing hybridity as understood in this tradition for the analysis of election debates, however.

First, the history of the term when applied to human society is far from positive. Early usage reflected a nineteenth-century concern with racial purity and a fear of degradation (Young 2005). This use lingers in the implication that hybrid cultural products are impure compared to the forms that preceded them (García Canclini 1995). Second, the cultural studies definition of hybridity focuses on deterritorialization (Kraidy 1999). This assumption is hardly surprising in literature

influenced by globalization, but becomes problematic in the context of election campaigns, where national institutions retain significance. Finally, and in contrast to the biological hybrid, cultural hybridity is not static, but characterized by "ambivalence and nonfixity" (Mitchell 1997: 533). While the format of election debates might change over time, there are also certain periods when they are fixed and institutionalized—they have rules regarding participation, for example.

If neither Americanization nor hybridity provide suitable theoretical frameworks for explaining election debates, we shall turn our attention elsewhere. Biological science does offer us an alternative metaphor: speciation. In biology, speciation is the process where a new species emerges (Berlocher 1998). A full discussion of the various processes of speciation is beyond the scope of this article, but the metaphor is best illustrated by allopatric speciation. In this form of the process, a single species—a common ancestor—is divided by geography. The different environments the two groups inhabit create different evolutionary trajectories, driven by distinct logics of natural selection (White 1968).

The metaphor of speciation contains a number of assumptions. First, evolution is based on interaction between the species and the environment it inhabits. Over time, the latter shapes the former (Mayr 1963). Second, speciation focuses on a process of separation, contrasting with hybridization's focus on fusion. Third, biologists think of speciation in terms of a "continuum of divergence" (Nosil 2012: 3), meaning that it is a process that takes place over time, making it possible to find examples with degrees of divergence from the common ancestor.

These attributes make the metaphor of speciation a useful tool for understanding election debates in parliamentary democracies, and how they have evolved.

Employing the theory of speciation as a metaphor to understand changes in election debates has an important normative consequence: unlike the negative discourses associated with either Americanization or hybridity, speciation stresses the distinctiveness of televised debates, removing the historical connotations of alien imposition or lesser offspring of a purer form.

Applying the Theory of Speciation to Televised Election Debates

To apply the theory of speciation to televised debates in parliamentary democracies, an analysis of the development of broadcasts in the four case study countries is offered, focusing on the environmental pressures shaping them. Prior to this, though, two important general points are made.

First, speciation requires a single common ancestor. While it might not technically be the first election debate,[4] there can be no doubt that the 1960 Kennedy–Nixon broadcasts created the genre's mythology (Kraus 1962). The Kennedy–Nixon contest continues to dominate popular and journalistic thinking about elections. Even as late as 2010, when the UK had its first election debate, it continued to be central to discussions: the Kennedy–Nixon debates were mentioned no fewer than 31 times in the national press during the election campaign.[5]

Second, it is worth considering some comparative data, especially the changing form of party systems in the case study countries.

[Figure 1 about here]

[Figure 2 about here]

Figures 1 and 2 show the effective number of political parties for seats won in the legislature and vote share respectively for the case study countries between 1965 and

the present (for calculation, see Laakso and Taagepera 1979). These data lead to two important conclusions. First, to varying degrees, party systems in the case study countries contain an increasing number of political parties achieving some electoral success. As we shall see, this has had profound consequences for election debates. Second, Figure 2, for the purposes of comparison, also contains the effective number of political parties found in US presidential elections since 1968. This figure is consistently lower than in the case study countries. While there have been third party candidates for the US presidency who have elevated the effective number of parties in the political system (and one, Ross Perot, who appeared in the 1992 presidential debates), the US has experienced no multi-election cycle challenge to the bipartisan system. This contrasts with the experience of the other countries, and is a major environmental pressure explaining debate evolution.

Canada

Canada has two environmental attributes that have shaped the format of election debates. First, debates have long replicated the ethnic and linguistic division in the country. The French language has been a feature since 1968, when David Réal Caouette, of the Ralliement des Créditistes, gave his responses in French, while Liberal Pierre Trudeau alternated between French and English answers. The two official languages have now become further embedded in the debate schedule, with distinct English and French contests. In 2004, the leaders of all the major parties were sufficiently proficient in French to fully participate in the French language debate (LeDuc 2005).

The second environmental force influencing Canadian television debates (related to the English and French communities) is the country's party system. In part, this

relates to the success of smaller parties, such as the National Democratic Party, the Bloc Quebecois and the Green Party, in achieving parliamentary representation. Furthermore, the success level of larger parties in Canada has fluctuated. The most extreme example of this occurred in 1993, when the Progressive Conservative Party's support collapsed, falling from 161 to 3 MPs. More recently, in 2013, the Liberal Party—which had ruled Canada for 69 years in the twentieth century—became the third largest party, winning just 34 seats and 18.9 per cent of the vote. In the subsequent 2015 election, they won 184 seats and 39.5 per cent of the vote and returned to government (on Canada's party system, see Carty et al. 2007).

Given the relative fluidity of the party system, it is not surprising that Canada's election debates have evolved in two ways. First, they have increasingly included smaller parties, featuring up to five participants. Second, the criteria for debate inclusion are relatively formalized. It is broadly agreed that parties need to fulfill two requirements to participate:

- have representation in the House of Commons
- consistently be polling above 5 per cent in national opinion polls (Amber 2000).

The application of these rules has not been uncontroversial. In 2008, shortly before the general election, Independent MP Blair Wilson joined the Greens. Coupled with the party's poll ratings, this should have given the Greens access to the debates for the first time. However, two of the major parties tried to veto the inclusion of the Greens by threatening to withdraw themselves. Faced by losing major parties, the consortium organizing the debates backed down and withdrew the invitation to the Greens,

although following a public outcry, the Greens were re-instated (CNW 2008a, 2008b; see also Burman 2008).

The power of informal criteria for debate participation can be compared to previous attempts by the Green Party to litigate their way into earlier broadcasts. Canadian law defines broad principles that broadcasters should adhere to during elections. Section 8 of the 1987 Television Broadcasting Regulations says that "During an election period, a licensee shall allocate time for the broadcasting of programs, advertisements or announcements of a partisan political character on an equitable basis to all accredited political parties and rival candidates represented in the election or referendum" (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission 1987).

Based on these broad requirements, the Green Party sued for access to televised debates in 1988. However, the courts ruled against them in 1993, on the grounds that the debates included parties from across the political spectrum, so were not partisan. Provided this requirement is met, participation became a matter for broadcasters, in negotiation with political parties (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission 1995).

The unfolding history of Canadian debates has been defined by three distinctive environmental features: a desire to reflect that Canada has an Anglophone and Francophone community; willingness to include smaller political parties (in this case, smaller parties being defined as those with seats in the legislature, but unlikely to hold any position in the executive, much less the premiership); and the development of informal rules for inclusion, as opposed to legal requirements for participation.

West Germany/Germany

West German citizens got their first taste of formal televised debates in 1972.[6] Termed the *Elefantenrunden* ("elephant round") due to the large number of participants, the requirement for participation was for a party to hold a seat in the Bundestag prior to the election, although it should be noted that the German electoral system has a 5 per cent national vote share threshold for parties to be awarded list seats (Klingemann and Wessels 2001). The *Elefantenrunden* system was clearly a product of West German politics. As one scholar writing on the history of televised debates in the country argued in 1990: "The parliamentary nature of the West German political system, the coalition structures of the government, and the multiparty nature of the system prevent a head-to-head meeting of the two Chancellor candidates" (Schrott 1990: 570–1).

This comment was premature. Helmut Kohl used the dislocation in the party system caused by reunification as a reason to withdraw from subsequent broadcasts. This meant that election debates went on hiatus until 2002. When they returned, it was in a new format, the TV-Duelle (television duel) debates, only including the leaders of the two major parties, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and SPD (Social Democratic Party).

Some scholars saw this development as Americanization and at odds with the logic of the country's constitution (Helms 2004). Smaller German parties reacted aggressively to the new debate format. In 2002, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) attempted to litigate their way into debates, using Section 1 of the Political Parties Act to challenge their exclusion. This piece of legislation guaranteed "Parties should be treated equally if a public institution is providing them with facilities or other public resources" (Federal Republic of Germany 1967). However, the courts rejected the claim that airtime in an election debate was a public resource.

The court also considered non-inclusion through the prism of the Basic Law. The German constitution guarantees political parties equal opportunities, and it also guarantees that broadcasters control their own programming (Federal Republic of Germany 2012). In light of these contradictions, the courts established a number of tests for inclusion in the TV-Duelle based on previous, current, and potential levels of support a party enjoys. One of the tests is the likelihood of a party's leader being Chancellor after the election. This requirement meant that the court had essentially backed the logic of the TV-Duelle as a contest for executive office (Gröpl 2002).

This is not quite the conclusion of the story. The 2013 election saw two distinct types of televised debate. As well as the now regular TV-Duelle between the leaders of the two major parties, a format similar to the old *Elefantenrunden* re-appeared. This broadcast, taking place three days before the election, was titled "Berliner Runde: Die Partieispitzen im Wahlkampfendspurt" ("Berlin Round: Top Candidates in the Final Phase of Election"). In a manner similar to the West German debate format, each party with members in the Bundestag was invited to send a representative. However, unlike debates in the 1970s and 1980s, the leaders of the two major parties did not attend, instead sending senior figures from their parliamentary parties.

By 2013 German debates had evolved into a multi-format system reflecting the environment created by parliamentary elections, which selects both the legislature and, through that decision, the executive. The combination of TV-Duelles and the new *Elefantenrunden* meant that parties had different levels of access, dependent on their size and likely role post-election.

Australia

In the 10 elections held in Australia since the country's first election debate in 1984, only once has there been no debate, when in 1987 incumbent Prime Minister and Labor Leader Bob Hawke refused to debate Liberal John Howard. This decision was taken because Hawke believed that the 1984 debates had been detrimental to Labor. In the 1990 election, Hawke again agreed to participate. Debates have been a fixture in Australian elections since (Coleman 1997; Senior 2008).

Of all the case study countries, Australia has the most stable debate format. Only the two major parties, Labor and the Liberal coalition, have ever been invited to participate. The reason for this seems likely to be the relative stability of Australia's party system. Certainly in terms of seat share in the legislature (shown in Figure 1), Australia remains a two party system. The Green Party has offered the most significant challenge to this duopoly, winning a seat in the Commons in both the 2010 and 2013 elections, as well as multiple seats in the Senate (the upper house, elected through the alternative vote). The Green Party has been even more successful in terms of vote share, as illustrated in Figure 2. The party's most successful election occurred in 2010, when they won an 11.76 per cent vote share.

The Green Party has argued that this success provides justification for their inclusion in debates (Green Party of Australia 2013). It is also interesting to note that if the criteria for debate inclusion used in Canada or Germany were applied, the Greens would be invited. However, the efforts of the Greens have (thus far at least) proved to be futile, even at State level. In the 2015 Tasmanian elections, the Green Party leader in the State, Nick McKim, was invited to speak at the second of a three debate series, due to consistent levels of support the party had received in multiple State elections. However, the invitation was later withdrawn during negotiations with the two larger parties (McCann 2015).

Of the countries in this study, it is Australian debates that have evolved least during their existence, and this is not really surprising. As Figures 1 and 2 show, the effective number of political parties, measured both in terms of seat and vote share, has increased in recent decades. However, it has happened to a smaller degree than in the other countries in this study.

United Kingdom

The UK organized its first debate broadcasts in 2010. Elections prior to this had seen numerous abortive attempts to organize televised election debates (Mitchell 2000). In 2010, though, the electoral arithmetic meant that all major parties believed they would gain from debates: the incumbent Labour Party was behind in the polls, while the opposition Conservative Party was not yet satisfied they could win a majority. As the third party, the Liberal Democrats always saw debates as a vital platform to raise their profile (Cowley and Kavanagh 2010: 147–8).

After the first Prime Ministerial Debate (as the programmes were branded) was broadcast, it was the third party that seemed to have read the situation most accurately, with the Liberal Democrat's leader Nick Clegg deemed the winner in post-broadcast polls, and his party surging to unprecedented ratings (Wells 2015). While the Liberal Democrats were not able to achieve these levels of support in the election itself, there is no doubt that the debates and the accompanying wave of "Cleggmania" played a pivotal role in shaping the course of the 2010 election campaign (Coleman 2010).

Partially because of this example, debate organization was more complex in 2015. The central question was which parties should be invited to appear, due to changes in the UK party system since 2010. The clearest manifestation of this was the level of

support being achieved by the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in second tier elections. In finishing top in the 2014 European Parliamentary Elections, UKIP became the first party other than the Conservatives or Labour to win a national election since the Liberals in 1910. In Scotland, polls gave the Scottish National Party (the SNP) a significant lead that, if maintained, would win a huge increase in seats. Polls were also showing increased support for the Green Party, who already had one MP (for changing levels of party support prior to the election, see Wells 2015). In this climate, the broadcasters proposed a modified debate format. Instead of three debates featuring three party leaders as in 2010, they instead suggested a four-three-two format, where the first debate would include the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and UKIP, with the second debate featuring the three established parties, and the final debate the biggest two parties (see BBC News 2014).

The Conservative Party rejected this proposal, on the grounds that the Greens, with an MP in the House of Commons, should be included (Wintour 2015). In part, this argument was driven by political self-interest. Following an indecisive result in 2010, many Conservatives blamed the debates for depriving them of a majority (*The Daily Telegraph* 2015). Nonetheless, the Conservative critique was not completely irrational in the increasingly fractured UK party system. Following extended negotiations, the politicians and broadcasters agreed a new and complex series of programmes. In practice only one of these would be a true televised election debate featuring all the major protagonists – a seven-way debate including the leaders of the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, UKIP, the Greens, the SNP and Plaid Cymru.

Despite this complex party environment, the courts have not intervened in debate organization in the UK. In 2010, the SNP went to court to prevent election debates featuring the leaders of the major parties being broadcast in Scotland. The SNP

argued that they were a major party in Scotland, but excluded from the highest profile event of the campaign. The broadcasters argued that the SNP did not warrant a place in the UK-wide debate, as they were standing in insufficient constituencies to form a majority government. Furthermore, the broadcasters argued that they were holding election debates especially for Scotland, featuring all relevant parties. The court ruled that broadcasters had made sufficient effort to give the SNP a platform, so there was no case to be answered (Smith 2010). The idea that televised debates in UK are a private arrangement between the broadcasters and political parties is re-enforced by both the Electoral Commission and Ofcom (the UK's regulator of independent broadcasters) stating that they are not responsible for participation in debates (Electoral Commission 2013; Ofcom 2015).

Of all the case study countries, televised debates in the UK have evolved at the most rapid rate. The fracturing of the UK party system between 2010 and 2015 created an environment that put huge pressure on a debate format that only offered a platform to the three largest parties. Ultimately, it was unsustainable.

Conclusion: Environmental Pressures on Television Debates in Parliamentary Democracies

Drawing on the metaphor of speciation, this article has examined the environmental factors that have shaped the evolution of televised debates in four parliamentary democracies. Three factors seem to warrant particular attention: country-specific events and trends, changes in party systems across all the case study countries, and the logic of parliamentary systems as distinct from presidential systems.

As is evident from the history of television debates in the four case study countries, evolution has frequently been driven by distinctive national circumstances. In Canada,

multilingualism has indelibly shaped debate formats, while the rise of Celtic nationalism in the UK led to the inclusion of the SNP and Plaid Cymru in the 2015 debates. In Germany, reunification gave Helmut Kohl the excuse to refuse debates completely.

Beyond these country-specific environmental pressures, though, a broad pattern shared across all the case study countries is an increasing number of parties in the party system, measured either by seats won or national vote share. Correspondingly, in many of the case study countries, televised debates have included more participants. This is a radically different trajectory to the US party system, which remains bipartisan, as do—in the vast majority of cases—US televised debates.

Based on the history of the case study countries, two arguments might challenge the claim that the development of multiparty politics is driving the evolution of debate formats. First, Australia may appear an outlier. After all, its two major parties have managed to maintain their duopoly in debates. There are two responses to this. The first is to note that this is actually not surprising. Compared to the other countries in this study, Australia is closest to retaining a classic two-party system. Additionally, in Australia the debate format has not been immune from pressure, with the Green Party campaigning for inclusion at both the federal and state level. Second, in Germany, the TV-Duelle introduced in 2002 might also be argued to undermine the idea of a distinctive species of parliamentary election debate. However, the return of the *Elefantenrunden* format in 2013 has ensured that multiparty politics has been re-embedded in German televised debates.

It can also be argued that changes in debate format in the case study countries are related to the logic of parliamentary systems. Elections in a parliamentary democracy

form the legislature, meaning smaller parties have a powerful argument in favor of being included in some form, even if they are unlikely to hold executive office. Certainly in Canada, Germany and the UK, holding parliamentary seats makes up an important element of discussion around debate inclusion (albeit coupled with other metrics such as opinion polls and second tier elections). That the executive is formed from the legislature has a second important ramification. Unlike a presidential system, and especially one with separation of powers and federalism as in the US, political actors in a parliamentary system share the same institutional space to a far greater degree. Thus premiers and government ministers regularly debate with representatives from all parties that have legislative seats. Multiparty televised election debates can be seen as an extension of this.

Televised election debates in parliamentary systems therefore have a greater openness to multiparty participation and at least some recognition that parties have a claim to appearing based on winning seats in the legislature. It is for these reasons that we can talk in terms of a distinctive species of televised election debate.

There are limitations to this analysis. This kind of comparative work suffers from two problems: too few cases and too many variables (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 5). There are clearly other cases that could be considered, including other parliamentary systems with deeply embedded multiparty systems, such as Israel and the Scandinavian countries. Additionally, very different examples might be studied. It would be fruitful, for instance, to examine how televised election debates are organized in multiparty presidential systems of the kind found in Latin America. It is possible that a broader study would reveal greater complexity, with additional variables creating other "species" of debate format, beyond the taxonomy described in this article.

Other variables could be considered too. This article has focused on the system of government and party system, but we might also think about the role played by media systems, which can vary radically between different countries. Hallin and Mancini (2004) identify four media system variables (the development of the media market; political parallelism; the professionalism of the news media; and the role played by the state) that might usefully be employed as a starting point for such an enquiry. Media systems are also dynamic and technological changes will also play a role in evolving debate formats. In many of the case study countries considered in this article, debates began in the era of broadcast television, when there were few channels. Today, there are not only more channels, but also new media actors competing to organize debates. In the last elections in both the UK and Canada, for example, non-broadcasters attempted to negotiate with political parties to organize election debates.[7] Such developments have the potential to disrupt established debate formats.

Media systems and media system change may prove to be especially important because, in all the case study countries, television debates are organized through a private agreement between broadcasters and political parties, often after a process of hard-fought negotiations. The media system may well dictate the strength of political and media actors in these negotiations, while technological change may create new actors, disrupting established relationships.

This study has both specific and broad implications. Specifically, it means that televised debates should not be seen as an alien imposition on parliamentary democracies. Instead, they have evolved to reflect the institutional logic of that system of government, and so can step out of the long shadows cast by their US counterparts and be understood on their own terms. More broadly, though, the theory

of speciation can have applications for other areas of enquiry in political communication, especially where specific practices or institutional forms have been imported into new contexts, but then gone on to take a radically different form. This might prove useful in studying, for example, television advertising practices, data-driven campaigning techniques, or campaign fundraising efforts. These are all areas where the US example plays a central role, but where practices and outcomes are largely defined by national-level regulation. Perhaps most important the theory of speciation points us towards a mode of enquiry—more focused on change than stasis, and using comparison to understand difference as well as similarity. Such an approach has great potential to open up new avenues of enquiry and generate insights.

Notes

1. The dataset for this analysis was constructed by searching for the appearance of the phrases: "television debates" OR "election debates" OR "leaders debates" OR "Presidential debates" in Scopus. False positives were then removed to create the final dataset.
2. It is worth noting that recent years have seen great interest in hybridity in another area of communication studies, with much discussion of a hybrid media system being forged through the interaction of old and new media (Chadwick 2013). While not directly relevant to this study, this concept has been influential in debate research, especially on two-screen viewing.
3. This is generally, although not universally, the case. The most obvious example of a sterile hybrid is a mule, created by breeding a male donkey and a female horse. This is due to donkeys and horses having a different number of chromosomes. Plant hybrids are more likely to be fertile and able to reproduce than animal hybrids.
4. As with all historical constructs of this kind, the truth is rather more complicated. Radio debates between primary candidates took place in 1948 and 1956 (Benoit 2002). In terms of general elections, Sweden actually has a good claim to holding the first television debate, beating even the US. However, the format of this event was closer to a joint press conference, with candidates answering questions in turn (Coleman 1997: 9).
5. These figures were calculated by using Nexis to search for "Kennedy" AND "Nixon" AND "debate" between April 6 to May 5, 2010, the formal period of the election campaign.

6. Some literature on the topic claims the 1969 election featured the first debate. This discrepancy appears to be because party leaders appeared together on regular news broadcasts in 1969, but not on a formal debate programme. Kleinsteuber (2005) states 1969; Baker and Norpath (1981) and Schrott and Lanoue (1992) both state 1972.

7. This process is already ongoing. In the UK in 2015, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* newspapers unsuccessfully attempted to organize a debate in conjunction with YouTube. In Canada in 2015, a debate organized by *The Globe and Mail* newspaper and Google Canada featured the leaders of the Conservatives, the Liberals and the National Democratic Party.

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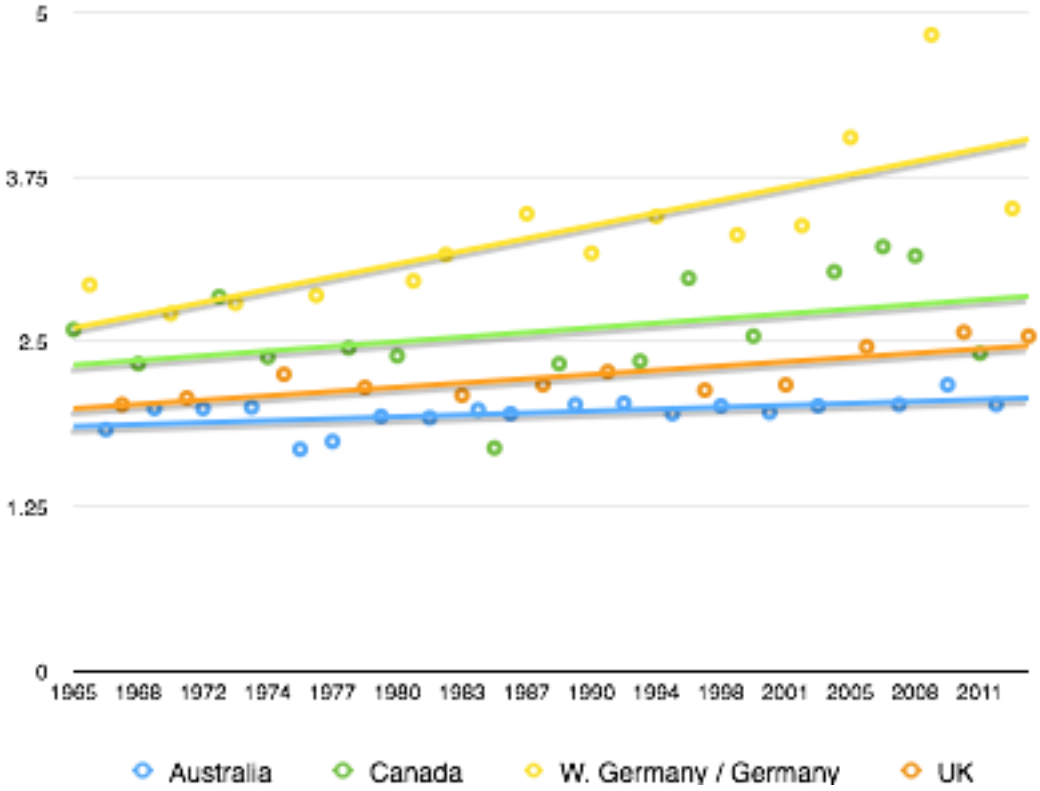
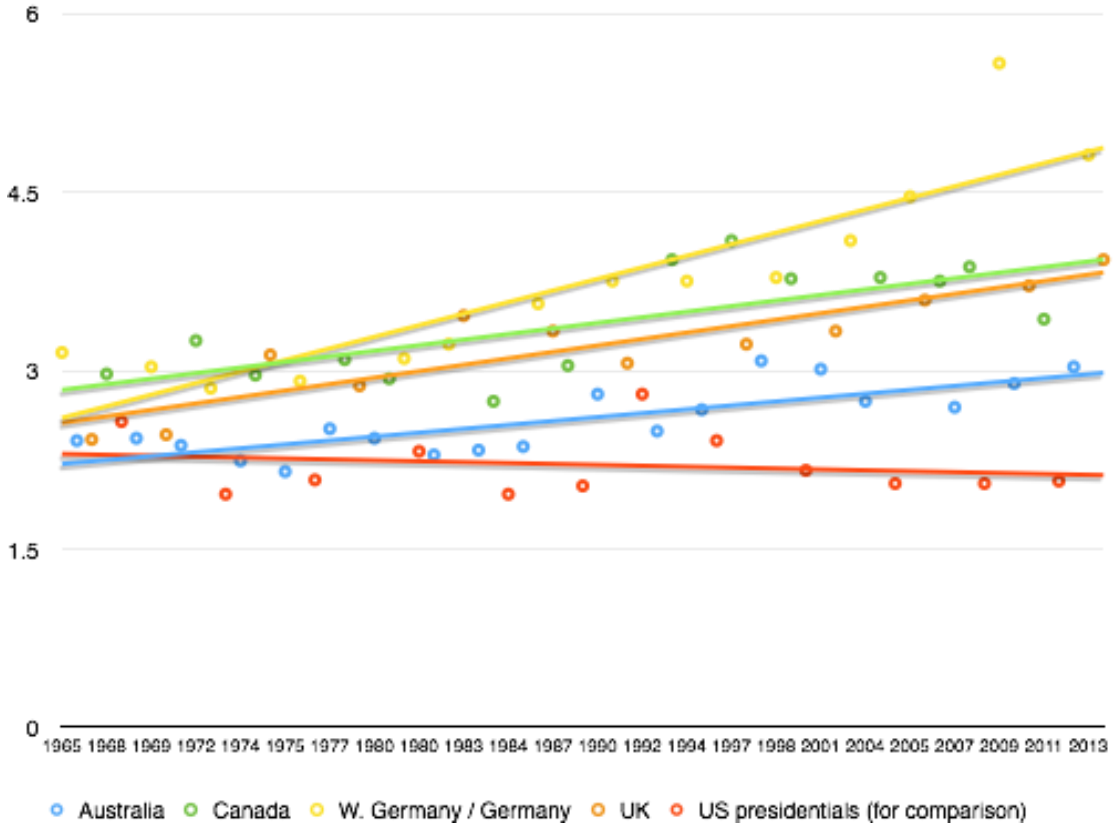
Figure 1: Effective number of political parties by seats won in various democracies, 1965 – 2015



Data from Brancati, 2015

Figure 2: Effective number of political parties by vote share won in various democracies, 1965 – 2015



Data from Brancati, 2015