

The Formality of Referents in New Jersey Gubernatorial Debates Between 1981 and 2025

Tyler Rotella

Abstract: This study examines the interpersonal formality of referents, the statements candidates use to address their opponents, such as “Mr. McGreevey” or “Senator Corzine,” in New Jersey Gubernatorial Debates over a 44-year time frame from 1981-2025. Following the methodological framework developed by Scott et al. (2021), 1,000 coding units across 21 debates were coded on a 1-7 valence scale in a content analysis, categorizing each unit into one of three categories: formal, informal, and disrespectful. Although no significant change in formality was observed over time, incumbency was found to be the primary indicator of formality across debates. This study proposes the “Open-Seat Effect,” finding that debates without an incumbent were significantly more informal than those with one present. The results of this study challenge prior research that attributes increased informality to cultural shifts, suggesting instead that the structural campaign conditions dictate informality, providing a foundation for future analysis of political discourse at the state level.

Keywords: Political Discourse, Elections, Debates, New Jersey, Informality, Incivility

1. Literature Review

The consensus of the American people is that American politics has become disrespectful. When asked to describe the tone and nature of politics, an overwhelming 84% said that it has become less respectful (Pew Research, 2023). This disrespect can be described by incivility, which Frimer et al. (2022) “define as impolite language that observers typically find to be rude and/or disrespectful”. Incivility has been portrayed as an overwhelmingly negative aspect of modern political discourse.

A content analysis by Scott et al. (2021) of all televised presidential debates explored the honorifics used by presidential candidates against their opponents. They found that over time, the honorifics used have become less respectful, which they claim indicates an overall increase in incivility due to the degradation of politicians’ rhetoric. However, other studies have indicated that incivility affects political communication in cycles, with periods of respectful politics and others with disrespectful politics (Goovaerts & Turkenburg, 2023; Shea & Sproveri, 2012). Although the consensus is inconclusive on whether incivility has progressively increased over time, most do agree that the current political climate is significantly more uncivil than the average. This recent rise in incivility makes it important to understand its potential societal consequences.

Debates offer the public the opportunity to watch the major candidates discuss policy issues. It is the only opportunity to see both candidates discuss the same issues at the same time and offer an extended time to hear them speak, commonly 60-90 minutes (Benoit et al. 2007). On average, roughly 25% of debates are spent discussing character rather than issues, allowing for confrontations between candidates on more personal subjects (Benoit et al. 2003). These character-level exchanges are often where “incivility spirals” form. An incivility spiral suggests that one uncivil action from one party can result in a defensive response from the other, which can potentially result in a physical altercation if not prevented (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). The implications of an incivility spiral during a debate mean that a single uncivil statement made by a politician could result in a degradation of the debate into disrespectful arguing about personality rather than respectful argumentation on issues. It is important to consider the characteristics of politicians to judge their inclination to use uncivil rhetoric. Men are significantly more likely than women to respond to incivility with further incivility, potentially fueling the flames of the incivility spiral (Cortina et al. 2017). In 2023, only 24% of governors, 25% of senators, and 32.7% of state legislators were women, meaning the more combative men form a supermajority of candidates in debates (Schaeffer, 2023).

1.1 Effects on the Population

Rises in incivility have resulted in a decrease in faith in political institutions, which is directly correlated with an increase in legal permissiveness (Marien & Hooghe, 2011). The probability of accepting illegal activities is 43% among highly distrusting citizens, while only 18% among highly trusting citizens. A government requires the trust of its people to properly function, and without that trust, the people are more likely to look the other way when people break the law. Highly distrusting citizens are not a fringe group, with incivility by prominent politicians being found to decrease the public’s trust in not just them, but the political system as a whole (Mölders & Quaquebeke, 2017). In a study conducted with 6,055 Danish citizens in 18,805 interviews over 18 months, Bøggild and Jensen (2024) found that incivility has no positive benefits for the political system and only contributes to people losing faith in the basic function of democracy. These findings are likewise corroborated by Van’t Riet & Van Stekelenburg (2022), who found that an increase in incivility decreases political trust without a positive effect on political participation. These findings regarding incivility also indicated the public’s awareness of such rhetorical tactics, with the citizenry being capable of distinguishing between civil disagreements and outright uncivil fighting. Likewise, the public is able to identify when exchanges involve issue-based negativity or personal negativity (Brooks & Geer, 2007). The rise in incivility and fall in political trust for politicians and institutions has resulted in a public that is theorized to be composed of “critical citizens” whose increased scrutiny of the government forces officials to act properly (Marien & Hooghe, 2011). However, the critical citizen was found to be “quite tolerant with regard to fiscal fraud or false social security claims”, meaning that any benefits from a more critical citizenry would result in greater legal

permissiveness. Despite the negative implications of incivility on the broader political landscape, politicians continue to use it due to perceived electoral benefits.

Politicians like Donald Trump commonly invoke uncivil language within their rhetoric, making them appear relatable to the average voter who has grown bored with the vague language used by mainstream politicians (Lammers & Baldwin, 2020). Uncivil political discourse, such as that seen in public affairs talk shows, is scored by viewers as more entertaining compared to more civil alternatives (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). Argumentative people are more likely to find uncivil political exchanges as entertaining, which is linked to an increase in political trust in this group. These findings indicate that the personality of viewers affects their reaction to incivility. Additionally, Brooks & Geer (2007) found that uncivil negative trait-based messaging by politicians resulted in the greatest increase in political interest, suggesting that incivility has modest positive effects on the engagement of the electorate, potentially increasing turnout at elections.

Politicians might additionally prefer incivility because it fosters greater partisan polarization, with citizens feeling angrier toward the “other side” (Gervais, 2019). By demonizing their opponents, they create an environment where their supporters feel no other choice but to support them. By creating a more energized and combative public, it is theorized that incivility can boost voter turnout. Yet it could equally result in less voter turnout because incivility depresses interest in what politicians have to say, and potentially politics as a whole, allowing it to be used by unpopular incumbents to minimize voter turnout (Feinberg & Frimer 2023). If incivility increases or decreases voter turnout in elections, it nonetheless proves to be a powerful tool for politicians seeking to influence voter demographics in their favor.

A common sentiment regarding incivility is that it is entertaining and, as such, increases the public’s attention to political issues. However, the moral disapproval of the statements made by politicians has been found to outweigh any potential gains made by the increased attention (Feinberg & Frimer, 2023). Any positive effects on the political environment are nullified due to the public’s disdain for norm-violating behavior. The public prefers politicians to be respectful, and as such, does not tend to reward negative behavior with increased support. Despite this, Mutz (2007) found that they are still entertained by uncivil debates more than civil ones and are more likely to recall statements made by an uncivil politician than a civil one. Incivility is a complex, subjective issue, one that can cause both positive and negative effects for democracy.

1.2 Study Justification

The purpose of this study is not to answer the question of whether incivility is harmful to American politics, but rather to investigate whether the trends of rising incivility in presidential debates are applicable at the state level, which currently lacks research. In their Functional Analysis of Senate and Gubernatorial debates, Benoit et al. (2007) noted that the types of statements made by candidates mirrored those at the presidential level, with acclaims being the most popular form of statement, followed by attacks and then defenses. The potential for

state-level trends to mirror that of the presidential level raises three hypotheses based on those formulated by Scott et al. (2021) in their presidential study:

Hypothesis I: The percentage of formal statements will decrease over time.

Hypothesis II: The percentage of informal statements will increase over time.

Hypothesis III: The percentage of disrespectful statements will increase over time.

The three hypotheses work under the interpretation that civil political discourse has declined over time, with increased informality creating an environment where disrespectful statements will become commonplace.

In his analysis of federalism, Young (2015) chose to focus on New Jersey since “longstanding tradition describes the Garden State as generic.” As such, a study seeking to replicate the presidential content analysis of Scott et al. at the state level would attempt to focus on a generic state, such as New Jersey.

In a study of the civility of state legislatures through surveys of lobbyists in each state, Kettler et al. (2022) found that states with citizen legislatures that are democratically controlled and have growing economies have higher perceptions of civility. The focus of this study, New Jersey, falls under several of these categories, strengthening the argument that the results of this study could be more civil than the often negatively perceived presidential debates.

For all the reasons previously mentioned, a study that explores the change in formality over time in New Jersey Gubernatorial Debates could prove valuable in determining the relationship between the state and presidential levels of political communication. As such, the guiding question for this study is: “How has incivility in New Jersey Gubernatorial Debates changed over time through the usage of honorifics and referents from 1981 to 2025?”

2. Method

This study aims to serve as a pilot study following the framework developed by Scott et al. (2021) in the context of New Jersey Gubernatorial Debates. It includes all publicly available debates from each election cycle between 1981 and 2025 using publicly available recordings from the C-Span archives and YouTube. Debates were the best means of collecting data as they provide “an extended opportunity to learn about the candidates, particularly compared with television spots” (Benoit et al. 2007). This study utilized one coder throughout the data collection process. A sample size of 1000 coding units across 12 campaign cycles and 21 debates was collected. To ensure the validity of the coding process, two independent coders evaluated 50 coding units, 5% of the overall sample size. The inter-coder reliability was accessed using Cohen’s Kappa, resulting in a coefficient of $\kappa = 0.632$, indicating substantial agreement.

Additionally, both coders recorded substantial agreement with the master key ($\kappa C1 = 0.7689$; $\kappa C2 = 0.7069$).

2.1 Coding Explanation and Justification

For this study, an interpersonal referent is the manner in which an addresser refers to the addressee(s), signalling disrespect, neutrality, or respect through the varying terms used. A coding unit is designated as the terms used to describe the addressee, such as “Jim McGreevey” or “Governor Kean.” A coding unit does not include tone, overall statement, or body language, and only analyzes the words used directly. The degree to which the interpersonal referents demonstrate respect is placed on a scale from 1 to 7 as adopted by the study by Scott et al. (2021). Table 1 shows the different valence levels of address terms, edited to provide examples relevant to New Jersey rather than presidential debates. Referents with a valence of 1 or 2 show meaningful disrespect for the addressee, compared to terms with a valence of 3, 4, or 5, demonstrating varying levels of informality, with some purposeful and accidental disrespect due to the absence of the highest honorific titles. A respectful address term that is appropriate for a political setting earns a valence level of 6 or 7.

When reviewing a debate, the moment a candidate directly refers to their opponent, the year, the speaker, the target, the statement, and the timestamp is written down. Depending on the level of respect in the statement, the unit is graded with a valence level designated by Table 1. For example, in 1997, Murray Sabrin referred to Christine Whitman as “Borrow and Spend Christie Whitman,” which was then coded as a valence of 1 because it described Governor Whitman using the pejorative adjectives of borrow and spend. These adjectives have a negative connotation in political settings and were intended as an insult to her governing style.

Table 1. Coding Scheme for content analysis of address terms in gubernatorial debates.

Interpersonal Referent	Debate Examples	Coding/Valence (1-7)
Pejorative Adjective	"He is a coward" "Tax and Spend Jim McGreevey"	1
Purposeful distortion or mocking of candidate name	"Murphy's Law" "Corzine-Buono years"	2
Partial Name (Only first or last name used)	"Jim" "The Corzines"	3
Full Name of Generic Individual Reference (No title or rank used)	"Chris Christie" "This governor" "My opponent"	4
Absent Highest Professional/Political Rank/Title	"Mr. Schundler" "Mayor McGreevey" instead of "Senator McGreevey"	5
Use of "Proper" Professional Title	"Governor Murphy" "The assemblyman"	6
Double Honorific; Highly formal	"Mr. Governor" "Mrs. Congresswomen"	7

Since not all candidates make the same number of referents or appear in the same number of debates, all coding units were averaged per politician and campaign year to find the average number of referents. This allows, as a hypothetical example, a debate in 1985 that has far fewer units compared to 2017 to become comparable and applicable for greater analysis.

Darr (2011) suggested that the formality of referral statements “create an environment conducive to civility and to the passage of quality legislation.” This study, therefore, focuses on referral statements because they provide a consistent, objective indicator of baseline civility in political debate.

2.2 Study Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to the referents candidates use in reference to their opponents, and as such, the overall substance of their rhetoric is outside of the scope of this study. If candidates are formally respectful in their referents, and not in their substance, this study would label such debates as formal and not uncivil. Despite this limitation, the results of this can help develop a greater understanding of the mechanics state-level politicians use, such as the use of formal referents to promote social distance.

3. Results

The hypothesis of this study predicted a decrease in the overall formality of gubernatorial debates, yet there is no significant trend indicating that the percentage of formal referents has changed in the 44-year time frame between 1981 and 2025 ($p = 0.799$; two-tailed; $\alpha = 0.05$). This data is illustrated in Chart 1. The lack of a trendline can be explained by the volatility of the formality variable, with years with incumbents being relatively high (48.19% of referents were formal in years with an incumbent), but for years with an open seat, formality was relatively low (only 13.17% of referents were formal in years without an incumbent). When considering incumbency rather than the debate year, there is a clear difference; debates where an incumbent is participating have more formal referents ($p = 0.011$; two-tailed; $\alpha = 0.05$).

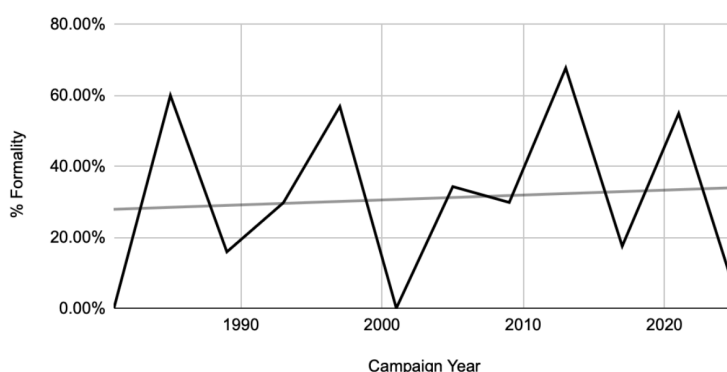


Chart 1:
The Change in the Percentage of Formal Referents over Time

The second hypothesis proposed that the inverse relationship between formality and informality would result in an overall increase in informal referents; however, this too was shown to have no significant trend ($p = 0.693$; two-tailed; $\alpha = 0.05$). This data can be seen in Chart 2. When accounting for incumbency instead of year for informal referents, there is, similarly to formal referents, a significant difference ($p = 0.016$; two-tailed; $\alpha = 0.05$). In debates with an incumbent, 50.72% of referents were informal compared to debates with an open seat, where 83.93% of referents were informal.

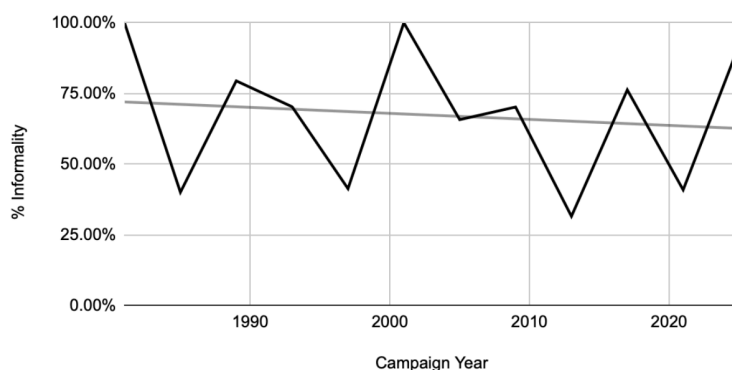


Chart 2:
The Change in the Percentage of Informal Referents over Time

The third hypothesis posited that, due to the conventional wisdom in political analysis stating that politics has become less civil, the percentage of disrespectful referents would increase over time. Although the trend is somewhat stronger than in the other two variables, it too was found to be insignificant ($p = 0.122$; two-tailed; $\alpha = 0.05$). Chart 3 visualizes the change in disrespect over time, with an R^2 of 0.22, suggesting that 22% of the variance in disrespect can be explained by the passage of time. When considering incumbency rather than the year, there is no significant difference, with similar percentages of disrespectful referents in both

debate environments (1.09% of referents were disrespectful with an incumbent while 2.90% of referents were disrespectful with an open seat), indicating that other factors, such as the individual personalities of politicians, may account for the remaining variance ($p = 0.351$; two-tailed; $\alpha = 0.05$).

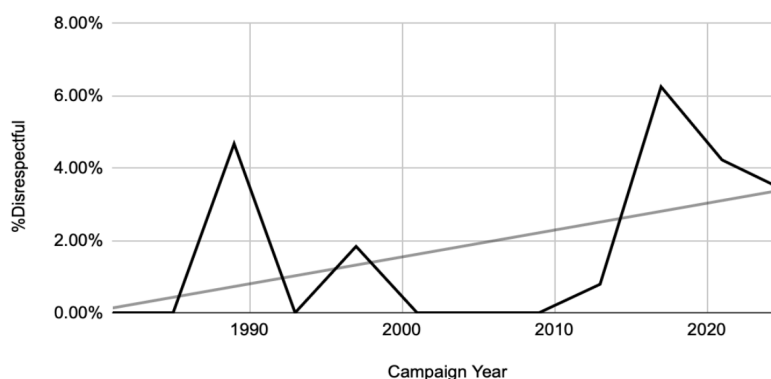


Chart 3:
The Change in the Percentage of Disrespectful Referents over Time

Table 2 compiles the five candidates with the highest average valence levels, indicating the highest levels of formality out of all candidates. The inverse is shown in Table 3, which shows the five candidates with the lowest average valence levels, indicating the highest levels of informality amongst candidates. What is important to note is that a candidate with a low valence level is not necessarily uncivil, but simply does not demonstrate the expected level of respect for their opponents in a political debate setting.

Candidate	Campaign(s)	References	Average Valence
Peter Shapiro	1985	16	5.5
Chris Christie	2009 and 2013	98	5.3877
Doug Forrester	2005	44	5.25
Barbara Buono	2013	93	5.1827
Christine Whitman	1993 and 1997	71	5.1408

Table 2:
The Five Candidates with the Highest Average Valence Level

Candidate	Campaign(s)	References	Average Valence
Thomas Kean	1981, 1985	36	3.1944
Mikie Sherrill	2025	58	3.4827
Bret Schundler	2001	13	3.6923
Kim Guadagno	2017	61	3.754
Jim Courter	1989	62	3.9677

Table 3:
The Five Candidates with the Lowest Average Valence Level

Although the passage of time was not a significant predictor of the formality of gubernatorial debates, the presence of an incumbent in the debate environment results in an increase in formal referents. The inverse of this is demonstrated in Chart 4, which illustrates the difference in the percentage of informal referents between incumbent and open-seat debates. This suggests that incumbent participation stabilizes the debate conversation more than the given era in which the debate takes place.

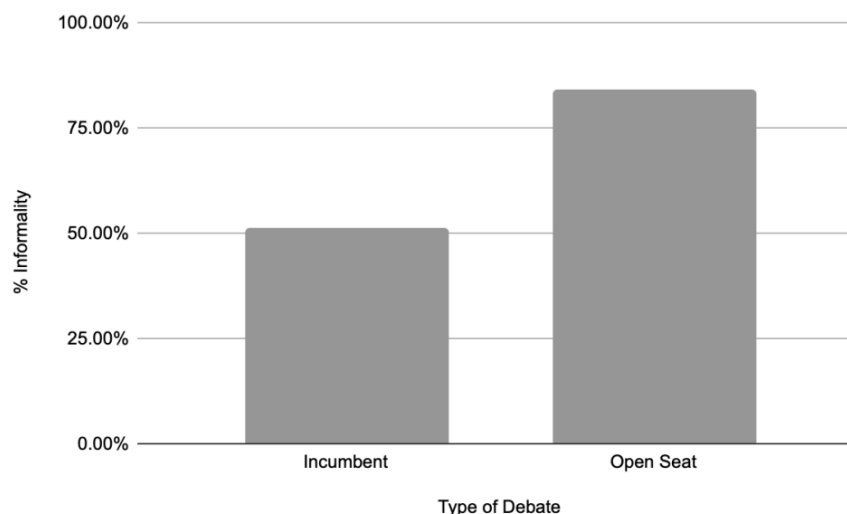


Chart 4:
The Percentage of Informal Referents Dependent on Type of Debate

4. Discussion

The passage of time is an unreliable indicator of the apparent formality of given gubernatorial debates. As seen in Charts 1, 2, and 3, there are no statistically significant trends related to time. This is due to periodic shifts, with specific cycles having high levels of formality, while others are marked by high levels of disrespect. This cyclical pattern could be attributed to the presence of the incumbent, the residing governor. The governor brings credibility to debates; holding the most powerful office in the state demands respect. Despite challengers making significantly more attacks than the incumbent (Benoit et al. 2007), they still have to acknowledge that their opponent is the governor, leading to their referents being more formal even if their substance is not. Senator Barbara Buono, in the 2013 debates, is a clear example of this trend, being extremely combative towards Governor Christie throughout the two debates, yet still referring to him as the governor the entire time. Darr (2011) suggests that this could be attributed to a respect for the office itself, as referring to Christie in any other manner would be disrespectful to the position of governor. Challengers respect the office and refer to the governor as such to demonstrate this.

Open-seat debates demonstrate a different trend than those with an incumbent governor. While debates with incumbents had a relatively even percentage of formal and informal referents, open-seat debates were overwhelmingly informal, with 83.93% of referents being coded as informal, as seen in Chart 4. One potential explanation for this overwhelming preference for informal referents could be that the title of governor acts as insulation for a candidate from personal referents, so when no incumbent is participating in the debate, the

referents become more targeted toward the candidate's character. The atmosphere of an open-seat debate is noticeably more combative, with most of the disrespectful referents coded being seen in open-seat cycles. This might be due to both candidates lacking the authority of the office, resulting in them attempting to discredit their opponent more to prevent them from gaining momentum.

4.1 Coding Unit Exploration

Until 2007, when Governor Corzine banned the practice, elected officials in New Jersey could hold multiple elected offices at once. Jim McGreevey was one of these politicians, being both the Mayor of Woodbridge and a state senator during the 1997 campaign cycle. In a particular exchange between him and incumbent governor Christine Whitman, she referred to him as "Mayor McGreevey," which in the context of the study was coded as a 5 rather than a 6 on the valence scale. This was due to Governor Whitman omitting his highest political title of senator for the lower title of mayor. This was a rhetorical attempt to discredit Mr. McGreevey as a candidate for governor, making audiences not see him as a state senator with years of experience in Trenton, but as a local mayor who does not have the ability to handle the pressures of the governorship. This particular exchange is indicative of the complexities of political campaigns, where the rhetorical strategies candidates use have purposeful meaning to make themselves appear more electable than their counterparts.

Referents on the borderline of valence levels require deep analysis, resulting in greater time spent on these borderline references. A coding unit coded as a 4 must either include the candidate's full name or a generic reference to an individual, which can result in statements that appear to be either more or less formal to be categorized at this level. One such instance of this occurrence was with the common referent of "this governor." It was originally coded as a 6 due to the presence of the professional title, but was later recorded as a 4 due to the vague reference to the individual; "this" could apply to anyone with the title of governor and, as such, was viewed as generic.

4.2 Comparison to the Presidential Level

The tactics candidates use in state-level contests were found to mirror those of the presidential level by Benoit et al. (2007), and the results of this study find a similar connection. The Scott et al. (2021) content analysis that this study replicates found an average valence level of 4.925 for all general debates, while the average valence level for the gubernatorial debates was 4.624, which indicates a similar trend between the two. This study reaffirms the conclusion made by Benoit et al. (2007): state political discourse mirrors the trends of presidential debates. However, the presidential study found an overall increase in informality over time, suggesting that debates have become less formal and more disrespectful. This study does not find the same result, yet it can be explained by the lack of inclusion of primary debate data in this study. Primary debates were found to be significantly less formal than general elections, so due to the

overall increase in primary debates in recent years, in combination with the presidential study having an overall larger data sample (1948-2020), it is reasonable to assume that the addition of these two factors not present in this study explains the difference in results.

When only accounting for the 1980s onwards, the trends between the gubernatorial and presidential debates mirror each other. The general range of formality in the presidential debates stays within 30-50%, while in the gubernatorial debates, that range was 0-60%. The presidential range is more precise due to the greater quantity of debates analyzed in that study, compared to the 1-2 gubernatorial debates viewed per cycle. Formality was often the less common characteristic of coding units in both studies. Although the percentage of formal referents varied by campaign cycle, it consistently remained less common than informal statements.

Between 1960 and 2020, 8 presidential debates had an incumbent present, while 5 were open seats, meaning 38.4% of presidential debates during this period were open-seat campaigns. Comparatively, between 1981 and 2025, 6 gubernatorial debates had an incumbent present while 6 were open seats, meaning 50% of gubernatorial debates during this period were open-seat campaigns. Since open-seat debates were found to be significantly more informal than ones where there was an incumbent, this explains why this study had an overall lower average valence score than the presidential study. This means this study contained a balanced sample size not biased toward either form of debate, making the results potentially more applicable.

5. Conclusion

The 12 New Jersey Gubernatorial debates between 1981 and 2025 have demonstrated no significant change in the formality of referents over time. State-level political discourse has not seen a meaningful change in how politicians refer to each other in debates. The major indicator of whether a debate will be formal is the presence of an incumbent. This study suggests that the presence of an incumbent results in all candidates in a debate demonstrating a higher overall level of formality than if the incumbent were not present.

The existing literature does not acknowledge the importance of incumbency on the level of formality in debates, and as such, this study proposes the existence of an “Open-Seat Effect.” This effect suggests that in campaigns where there is no incumbent running, the candidates for the office will be significantly less formal in the language they use to refer to their opponents. For candidates running, understanding this trend could be important to avoid portraying themselves in a way the public morally disapproves of (Feinberg and Frimer, 2023). The existence of the Open-Seat Effect provides a new interpretation of informal political discourse in debates, that rather than passage of time being the indicator of informality, the conditions of the campaign itself dictate the formality. Previous research that found rising informality over time may have unknowingly measured open-seat frequency rather than meaningful shifts in political norms. This means that the existing literature has potentially misattributed core characteristics of debate functions to cultural changes. The consequences of the Open-Seat Effect will change how

researchers design studies, how they account for variables, and how policymakers interpret claims about civil decline.

This study presents robust findings not present in the existing literature, defining the formality of state-level political discourse, allowing for future exploration of the subject to have a baseline understanding of the trends to expect. Incivility has been found to negatively affect institutional trust and interest in politics (Bøggild & Jensen, 2024; Feinberg & Frimer, 2023), but since there was no significant increase in disrespectful referents in the 44-year timeframe, the negative consequences of political communication pose no immediate threat to New Jersey political discourse.

Incivility is less of an existential threat at the state level, with the formality of debates being more related to incumbency than a shift in political communication. This study suggests that although state-level trends mirror those of the presidential level, they are more dependent on the particular circumstances of the debate rather than the era in which they take place.

6. Further Directions

This study was limited by its scope, focusing only on the referents and honorifics used by candidates in reference to their opponents, omitting the tone, body language, and substance of statements made by candidates. These variables could all potentially have meaningful impacts on the overall civility of a debate, yet went unaddressed in this study. A more comprehensive study of the civility in gubernatorial debates could definitively reveal whether the era in which a debate takes place has an effect on the level of civility.

Additionally, a study that analyzed the primary debates for governor could reveal potentially unique trends not seen in the general debates. Due to the ideological relatability of candidates in primary debates, it could be assumed that they will be more friendly and respectful towards each other. Presidential trends indicate that these types of debates will be more informal, but a study that analyzes whether primary gubernatorial debates share a similar characteristic could be important to the overall literature.

To create a more nuanced understanding of whether the trends of informality at the state level mirror those of the federal level, a study that analyzes the referents between gubernatorial candidates in a greater number of states should be conducted. Taking states that, such as California or Wyoming, have voted with extreme partisanship at the national level for decades could reveal whether a minority party's chances of winning result in increased informality. New Jersey has seen extremely competitive gubernatorial debates during the past 12 cycles, which means that competitiveness could have influenced candidates to change their formality to gain traction with voters. By studying more states, some with competitive and some with non-competitive gubernatorial campaigns, it could reveal whether the chances of a candidate winning influence their formality.

Further study into the Open-Seat Effect could prove valuable in developing the body of literature on incivility. A study that was to explore the different levels of formality in incumbent

and open-seat debates across a larger sample size of states could help validate the effect's validity. A potential exploration of House of Representatives, Gubernatorial, Senate, and Presidential debates could provide greater insight into whether the effect applies to the different levels of political office, or if it is a trend exclusive to gubernatorial debates.

References

- Andersson, L. M., & Pearson, C. M. (1999). Tit for tat? The spiraling effect of incivility in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(3), 452–471. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/259136>
- Benoit, W. L., Brazeal, L., & Airne, D. (2007). A functional analysis of televised U.S. Senate and gubernatorial campaign debates. *Communication Studies Faculty Publications*, 7. https://scholarworks.umd.edu/communications_pubs/7
- Benoit, W. L., Hansen, G. J., & Verser, R. M. (2003). A meta-analysis of the effects of viewing U.S. presidential debates. *Communication Monographs*, 70(4), 335–350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0363775032000179133>
- Bøggild, T., & Jensen, C. (2024). When politicians behave badly: Political, democratic, and social consequences of political incivility. *American Journal of Political Science*, 69(4), 1064–1081. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12897>
- Brooks, D. J., & Geer, J. G. (2007). Beyond negativity: The effects of incivility on the electorate. *American Journal of Political Science*, 51(1), 1–16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4122902>
- Cortina, L. M., Kabat-Farr, D., Magley, V. J., & Nelson, K. (2017). Researching rudeness: The past, present, and future of the science of incivility. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 299–313. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000089>
- Darr, C. R. (2011). Adam Ferguson's civil society and the rhetorical functions of (in)civility in United States Senate debate. *Communication Quarterly*, 59(5), 603–624. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2011.614208>
- Feinberg, M., & Frimer, J. A. (2023). Incivility diminishes interest in what politicians have to say. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 14(7), 787–795. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506221136182>
- Frimer, J. A., Aujla, H., Feinberg, M., Skitka, L. J., Aquino, K., Eichstaedt, J. C., & Willer, R. (2022). Incivility is rising among American politicians on Twitter. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 14(2), 259–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506221083811>
- Gervais, B. T. (2019). Rousing the partisan combatant: Elite incivility, anger, and antideliberative attitudes. *Political Psychology*, 40(3), 637–655. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12532>
- Goovaerts, I., & Turkenburg, E. (2022). How contextual features shape incivility over time: An analysis of the evolution and determinants of political incivility in televised election debates (1985–2019). *Communication Research*, 50(4), 480–507. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502221135694>
- Kettler, J. J., Fowler, L., & Witt, S. L. (2022). Is it us? Is it them? Or is it this place? Predicting civility in state legislatures. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 22(1), 50–69. <https://doi.org/10.1017/spq.2021.3>
- Lammers, J., & Baldwin, M. (2020). Make America gracious again: Collective nostalgia can increase and decrease support for right-wing populist rhetoric. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(5), 943–954. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2673>
- Marien, S., & Hooghe, M. (2011). Does political trust matter? An empirical investigation into the relation between political trust and support for law compliance. *European Journal of Political Research*, 50(2), 267–291. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2010.01930.x>

- Mölders, C., & Van Quaquebeke, N. (2017). When and how politicians' disrespect affects voters' trust in the political system: The roles of social judgments and category prototypicality. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 47(9), 515–527. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12458>
- Mutz, D. C. (2007). Effects of "In-Your-Face" television discourse on perceptions of a legitimate opposition. *American Political Science Review*, 101(4), 621–635. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305540707044X>
- Mutz, D. C., & Reeves, B. (2005). The new videomalaise: Effects of televised incivility on political trust. *American Political Science Review*, 99(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055405051452>
- Pew Research Center. (2023, September). *Americans' dismal views of the nation's politics*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/americans-dismal-views-of-the-nations-politics/>
- Schaeffer, K. (2023, September 27). *The data on women leaders*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/the-data-on-women-leaders/>
- Scott, D. K., Chanslor, M., & Dixon, J. (2021). U.S. presidential debates 1948–2020: An issue of formality and respect. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 57(3–4), 157–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511431.2021.1949542>
- Shea, D. M., & Sproveri, A. (2012). The rise and fall of nasty politics in America. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 45(3), 416–421. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41691355>
- Van't Riet, J., & Van Stekelenburg, A. (2022). The effects of political incivility on political trust and political participation: A meta-analysis of experimental research. *Human Communication Research*, 48(2), 203–229. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqab022>
- Young, E. A. (2015). *The Volk of New Jersey? State identity, distinctiveness, and political culture in the American federal system* (Working paper). Duke Law School. https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/faculty_scholarship/3431/