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## **Do Issues Decide? Thematic and Partisan Ideational Strategies in Electoral Debates**

**Abstract:** The importance of ideas compared with other factors that shape social processes was a subject of controversial debate over the history of social thought. This article will focus on the influence of previous ideas towards new ideas, the influence of ideas on actions and the ideational content of electoral debates. There are many ideational strategies that can be addressed in a public debate aimed at audience persuasion, but this study will focus only on the partisan and thematic strategies. The distinction between partisan and thematic ideation is based on the addressability criterion. The main question is to what extent voters' own perceptions and their perceptions regarding party's positions on certain issues are influenced by the pre-existence of partisan orientations. The major research finding of this article that used the final British electoral debate from 2010 between D. Cameron, G. Brown and N. Clegg as a case study is that where there are clear ideological positions, candidates will rely on the path dependency of voters and will resort to partisan ideation, instead of concentrating on issue voters.

**Keywords:** political debates, content analysis, political ideation, thematic and partisan strategies