

## **Abstract**

The divisive primary hypothesis suggests a „hard fought“ primary in one party harms it's prospects in the general election. However it remains unclear what exactly constitutes such a divisive primary. This thesis is a contribution to the strand of literature examining this issue. Specifically it follows the idea that divisiveness is primarily driven by the negativity of the campaign. Therefore this paper utilizes the results of content analysis of primary election debates on the framework of functional political campaign discourse as a measure of divisiveness. The results suggest, that the Democratic primary 2016 indeed ranks among the more divisive primaries studied to date. However, when those results are compared with republican debates, it is shown that it's primary elections were significantly more divisive. The party which could have been harmed more by the „hard fought“ primary, was hence the Republican party. This finding is in contrast to the traditional operationalization of divisiveness, which would have deemed both campaigns to be equally divisive. Additionally, topics of contention among the Democratic party candidates Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton were analysed.