

The Rhetoric of Blame and Bluster: An Analysis of How Donald Trump Uses Language  
to Advance His Political Goals

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## 1. Introduction

In the aftermath of Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential elections, a question that many news outlets in the US asked of themselves was how this could have happened. All the polls and pundits agreed that Trump was the underdog, with Hillary Clinton enjoying a considerable lead in the polls. Some blamed the mainstream media of the US of being out of touch with the rural population that voted for Trump. Others pointed out that Trump was given a considerable amount of free airtime during the early months of his campaign, when most news outlets did not yet take him seriously, but instead saw an opportunity to get more viewers by having him live on their shows. Considerable blame was also placed on FBI director James Comey, who announced just one week before the elections that new emails of Hillary Clinton had surfaced, and that she was back under investigation. Finally, some suggested that Clinton, her campaign strategists, and the Democratic Party establishment, should do some self-reflection regarding their own shortcomings. What was given considerably less attention in my opinion, was the effectiveness of Trump's own campaign and rhetoric. In fact, the general consensus among political pundits seemed to be that Trump won the presidency *despite* his colorful rhetoric and unconventional campaign, and not *because* of it. The main aim of this paper then, is to examine what the typical rhetoric of Trump is like in different forms of media, what makes it so effective, what possible shortcomings it has, and what its purpose is. To accomplish this, I will examine Trump's tweets, a debate between him and Clinton, as well as Trump's inauguration speech

## 1.1 Background

Trump announced his intention to run for president on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2015 in New York. He is the first president of the United States without any kind of background in politics or military service, although he did consider running for president in 2000 as a candidate of the Reform Party. Trump inherited a fortune in real estate from his father, and build a business empire and turned his name into a brand. Trump was an easily recognizable character even prior to his candidacy, thanks to his hosting role in the reality TV-show *The Apprentice*, where he honed his showmanship, as well as the *New York Times* bestseller *Trump: The Art of The Deal* from 1987. As one of the seventeen Republicans running for president, Trump quickly become one of the favorites to win the candidacy, competing with the likes of Jeb Bush, Ben Carson, Marco Rubio, and Ted Cruz in different stages of the primaries for the spot of the front-runner. Trump garnered much media attention with his colorful statements and disdain for political correctness, most famously calling for a border wall to be built on the US-Mexico border to keep illegal Mexican immigrants out of the country. Trump's rhetoric was fiercely anti-establishment and his fellow Republicans found themselves to be under just as much fire as the Democrats, especially during the early days of the elections. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 2016, The Republican National Convention named him the official nominee, with Mike Pence as his running mate. Trump and the Democratic Party's candidate Hillary Clinton waged an unprecedentedly toxic presidential race where policy issues were often forgotten in favor of mudslinging and personal attacks. Trump won the presidency on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November with 304 electoral votes against Clinton's 227 with the states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin proving especially important in securing Trump's victory, although Clinton won the popular vote. Trump officially became the 45<sup>th</sup> president of The United States on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2017. During the first one hundred days of his presidency, Trump has failed to achieve many of the legislative goals that he promised he would see to as the first thing in office. These include Trump's and the GOP's failure to repeal and replace Obamacare, bans on immigration from Muslim countries that were largely blocked by the judiciary branch, and his turnaround on deciding not to name China a currency manipulator. At the same time, Trump has succeeded in deregulating the energy markets and getting Neil Gorsuch chosen as the new member of the Supreme Court. Trump has used his executive powers many times: Most notably he ordered a missile strike on Syria on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April. During his time in office, Trump has become increasingly critical of the established media, accusing them of unfair coverage and partiality, and

has taken to the habit of calling them “fake news”. There is also an ongoing bi-partisan investigation into alleged Russian involvement in the 2016 elections with the assumption being that Trump’s campaign had been aided by a foreign power.

## 1.2 Previous Research

It is safe to say that every minute detail of Trump, his campaign, and rhetoric, will be carefully studied by future scholars. Despite having only recently arrived in the White House, many aspects of him and his campaign are already under scrutiny by a wide variety of researchers, and much research has already been done as well. Matthew MacWilliams provides evidence of the effectiveness of some aspects of Trump’s rhetoric in his study “Who Decides When The Party Doesn’t? Authoritarian Voters and the Rise of Donald Trump”. MacWilliams argues that unlike in the previous elections, in 2016 the selection of the Republican nominee was decided by authoritarian voters who were swayed by Trump’s us-versus-them rhetoric, combined with fear of terrorists and other threats (716). Sarah Oates and Wendy Moe examined Trump’s social media behavior in the early days of his campaign in their study “Donald Trump and the ‘Oxygen of Publicity’: Branding, Social Media, and Mass Media in the 2016 Presidential Primary Elections”, noting that Trump “owned” the discourse that had to do with immigration (17), as well as that Americans themselves tweeted mostly about the candidates’ personality and character, with policy issues gaining much less attention (13). They also pointed out the fact that Trump had gained unprecedented amounts of free media coverage (18), thanks to his showmanship and outrageous statements. Trump’s tendency to portray the establishment, his political opponents, and much of the rest of the world as enemies, as well as the general lack of focus on concrete policy issues during the elections are both points I will be addressing in this paper as well.

## 2. Definitions and discussion of rhetoric

Here I will provide a definition of political discourse analysis, my main approach to analyzing Trump’s rhetoric, as well as the term rhetoric itself, and contrast Trump’s rhetoric to its more typical kind used by other politicians.

## 2.1 Political discourse analysis

Political discourse analysis (PDA) is an approach interested in the usage of language in politics. Ariadne Vromen (2010) highlights three areas that the analysis can focus on, based on the framework of Fairclough. The first approach involves the analysis of vocabulary and structures of text with the intention of uncovering the different meanings that are attached to certain words, such as *liberal*, *refugee*, or *green energy* (264). The second area is concerned with “the meso interpretation on the social production of texts” (Vromen 264). Here, the focus lies with power and the ideological and political contexts in which the texts are produced. van Dijk (1997), for instance, considers the concept of power to be of utmost importance to the practice of PDA, and sees the approach as a form of critical discourse analysis where political “power, power abuse or domination through political discourse” (1) is especially important. In other words, political discourse analysis can be seen as a form of critical discourse analysis aimed at politics. The third part of the framework involves “macro analysis associated with social theory” (Vromen 264), with the analysis closely connected to the social sciences. In my analysis of Trump’s rhetoric, I will be mostly relying on the first two approaches of PDA, namely analysis of vocabulary and structures of text, as well as the critical approach advocated by van Dijk. The traditional critical approach to discourse is interested in, among other things, how language is used to control or discriminate, both of which are typical features of Trump’s rhetoric. For instance, when waging a war against the mainstream media in order to control the people’s perception of what information is correct, he is (ab)using his position of power, first as a popular candidate and later as the president. Discrimination is also a vital part of Trump’s rhetoric: Most notably he and many of his supporters consider illegal immigrants, Mexicans, Muslims, and the Chinese to be threats to their country in one way or another, and this is constantly brought up by Trump, no matter what form of media he is using.

## 2.2 Rhetoric

Merriam-Webster defines rhetoric as “the art of speaking or writing effectively”, including “a means of communication or persuasion [...] skill in the effective use of language” as well as “insincere or grandiloquent language” (Merriam-Webster 2017). Andrew Heywood defines rhetoric in his book *Politics* as “the art of using language to persuade or influence (Heywood 457).

He also notes that rhetoric can “imply high-sounding, but essentially vacuous speech”. It is safe to say that in the context of politics, rhetoric is a somewhat loaded, or even “dirty” word, much in the same way as politics itself (Heywood 4). Today, many people are inherently suspicious of politicians, and consider them to be self-serving individuals mostly concerned with their own agendas. Empty political speech or rhetoric filled with vagueness and evasion is something we are all used to hearing from elected politicians. On the other hand, during elections many politicians shift gears and start promising all sorts of things to their electorate in order to be re-elected. The dissonance between the two is what has led to cynicism among voters, and is the reason why typical political rhetoric is met with such hostility by many these days. Is it any surprise then, that Donald Trump’s presidential campaign turned out to be such a success? His rhetoric was everything that Hillary Clinton’s, Marco Rubio’s or Jeb Bush’s was not: Apolitical, unapologetic, and exceedingly incorrect. Take for instance his assertion that he could shoot someone without repercussions:

“I could stand in the middle of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn’t lose voters.” (Trump during a rally in Iowa on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2016).

In another case, Trump suggested that senator Ted Cruz’s father was involved with the man generally considered to have murdered John F. Kennedy:

“His father was with Lee Harvey Oswald prior to Oswald's being — you know, shot. I mean, the whole thing is ridiculous. What is this, right prior to his being shot, and nobody even brings it up. They don't even talk about that. That was reported, and nobody talks about it [...] I mean, what was he doing — what was he doing with Lee Harvey Oswald shortly before the death? Before the shooting? It’s horrible.” (Trump interviewed by FOX News on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 2016).

And finally, in what is probably Trump’s most infamous utterance, he criticized Mexicans during his announcement speech to run for president in 2015:

“When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” (Trump during his presidential announcement speech on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2015)

What all these snippets have in common is Trump’s utter refusal to be politically correct in what he says. Arguably Trump’s lack of political correctness is the exact reason why he was so popular

amongst so many conservatives. During the last eight years, the US has had a very liberal president in Barack Obama, and during his presidency, there has been a dramatic shift in what is considered acceptable or normal: Better healthcare and social security, gay rights, climate change, federal aid to immigrants, the spreading of non-Christian religions and values. These are all things that have become “main-stream”, whereas opposing them has been considered racist, old-fashioned, or otherwise unacceptable by the media that is overwhelmingly liberal. What Trump did was provide an opportunity for all the people who felt that their opinions had been marginalized a way to get their voices heard. And most importantly, Trump was not part of the old establishment that was being represented by many of the other candidates, like Hillary Clinton, Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, and Chris Christie. At the same time, the fact that many unconventional and anti-establishment candidates such as Ted Cruz, Ben Carson, and Bernie Sanders managed to garner as many followers as they did, speaks volumes of how voters with different values also felt that the current political establishment was in need of a shakeup. Trump’s campaign promises and policy priorities were considered absurd by many but they appealed to voters on an emotional level, which might ultimately be more important. This is something noted by Andrew Stark in his article "*Political-Discourse - Analysis and the Debate over Canada's Lobbying Legislation*" (1992). He writes that according to the “school of political discourse”, the popularity of policies cannot be explained “rationally in terms of their empirical validity, nor instrumentally in terms of the interest they serve” (515). What is more important is the “ideological assumptions and appeal, and their rhetorical structure and persuasiveness” (Stark 515). In other words, in the case of Trump, it did not matter that Trump’s hate speech against Mexicans, or Muslims, or the Chinese, or the entire political establishment was not based on facts. He managed to appeal to the irrational, emotional, side of people and this was accomplished with persuasive rhetoric.

### 3. Research material

The material, that I will be using for the purpose of analyzing Trump’s rhetoric, will include some rather informal tweets from his Twitter account “@realDonaldTrump”, followed by his more deliberate performance in the first presidential debate between him and Hillary Clinton, and finally the carefully planned and teleprompted inauguration speech. I will be using tweets from both 2016 while he was running for president, and from 2017 after becoming the president. The debate I will be analyzing is from the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2016. It was the first one to be held between the two candidates. The focus will be mainly on what Trump’s usage of language is like



and what kind of rhetorical devices he employs in his attempt to promote his agenda during a live event, as well as how his approach changes depending on whether he is, for instance, on the offensive in accusing his opponent, or on the defensive after being accused of something. Trump's inauguration speech provides examples of his rhetoric at its most refined, along with hints of his stances on policy issues, as well as different attempts at building consensus amongst the American people.

#### 4. Analysis

Next I will begin my analysis of Trump's rhetoric in different medias. I will generally provide excerpts of what Trump said and then highlight notable features of his words while paying special attention to whatever means Trump uses to relay his agenda or to exert control and manipulate people's perception of him.

##### 4.1 Trump's Twitter

One of the most characteristic features of Trump's political career is his willingness to embrace the instant communication opportunities of social media, most notably Twitter. The publicity provided by Twitter, combined with the rather short word limit of 140 characters, offer Trump an ideal tool for sharing his opinions in the conversational and often "shouty" manner that he is known for, without having to delve into reasoning and evidence that his speeches often lack. Other politicians in the US have certainly used Twitter as well as a means of communicating with the public: Obama embraced the usage of social media and wrote on Twitter in a relatively casual style. However, his tweets were still mostly about promoting different government programs, national holidays, or meetings with politicians and activists. And more importantly, Obama appeared to understand the weight that his word as a president had, and tried to remain as neutral as possible in both style and content when discussing more subjective or important matters. For instance, even during the heat of the 2016 presidential race, Obama did not use Twitter to directly attack Trump despite supporting Clinton. He simply praised Clinton's performance in debates and indirectly implied that the opposing party was not doing so well or was stepping too low in their mudslinging:

“Outstanding 3 for 3 debate sweep for @HillaryClinton! Nobody has ever been more prepared to be @POTUS.” (Barack Obama, @POTUS44, 6:31, 20 October 2016)

“Just like Michelle says, when they go low, we go high. @HillaryClinton went high and showed why she’ll be a POTUS for all Americans.” (Barack Obama, @POTUS44, 9:06, 10 October 2016)

Trump in comparison has continued to use Twitter in much the same way as he did as a civilian, and more notably, he continues to use his own private Twitter account “@realDonaldTrump” actively instead of the official POTUS account that Obama often used, especially in his later years. He offers his opinions on a wide range of issues without much filtering or thought given to political correctness. Everything from his language and style to the contents of his tweets have been widely ridiculed, especially by the left-wing US media, and by comedians, but I am of the opinion that much like Trump’s campaign rhetoric, his tweets are worth examining not just for what is questionable about them, but what Trump might be doing right as well in reaching out to the US citizens and promoting his opinions. It is also worth mentioning that although Trump’s tweets are often atypical and incendiary for a politician, he has adopted his predecessor’s habit of promoting diplomatic meetings, legislation issues, and other things that have to do with his administration in an informative way, often simply linking pictures and images of White House events. For example, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, Trump tweeted about his meeting with members of Atlanta’s emergency service in the Oval Office:

“It was a great honor to welcome Atlanta’s heroic first responders to the White House this afternoon!” (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 12:21, 13 April 2017)

Tweets such as this are worth acknowledging as the more professional side of Trump’s Twitter usage, but I won’t be going into them much further in my analysis since sharing them is mostly just a part of Trump’s job. I also won’t be analyzing Trump’s POTUS Twitter account seeing how he has publicly stated that he will continue using his personal one instead, and therefore the former one is most likely maintained by White House aides instead of Trump himself.

During the primaries, Trump used Twitter to attack other Republican candidates countless times. In early 2016, he especially focused on criticizing and making fun of Marco Rubio, who had become the candidate supported by most of the traditional Republican establishment:

“Lightweight Marco Rubio was working hard last night. The problem is, he is a choker, and once a choker, always a choker! Mr. Meltdown.” (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 8:38, 26 February 2016)

“Little Marco Rubio, the lightweight no show Senator from Florida, is set to be the "puppet" of the special interest Koch brothers. WATCH!” (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 8.07, 28 February 2016)

“Don't believe the millions of dollars of phony television ads by lightweight Rubio and the R establishment. Dishonest people!” (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 8.50, 7. March 2016)

The recurring theme in all of the above tweets is Trump’s attempt at portraying Rubio as “the choice of establishment”: He is not to be trusted because he is backed by rich people and he spends a lot of money on ads. He calls him a “choker”, i.e. a person being led by a choker by the people with money, and a “lightweight” and “Little Marco Rubio”, referring to his youth. With the general opinion among the voters being that the old politicians have failed the American people, Trump attempted to distance himself from the establishment as much as possible, all the while pointing out the other candidates’ connections to those in power. This was the foundation of Trump’s campaign during the primaries and it proved very effective in setting himself apart from all the other Republican candidates.

Two tweets by Trump from the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2017 provide an example of Trump’s egregious attempts at controlling the public discussion and the perception of whose word should be trusted:

“My statement as to what's happening in Sweden was in reference to a story that was broadcast on @FoxNews concerning immigrants & Sweden.” (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 13:57, 19 February 2017)

“Give the public a break - The FAKE NEWS media is trying to say that large scale immigration in Sweden is working out just beautifully. NOT!” (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 6:15, 20 February 2017).

For context, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February Trump held a rally in Florida. During that rally, he reiterated the importance of keeping America safe from terrorism and highlighted what he thinks is a link between open immigration policies in Europe and terrorist attacks:

"You look at what's happening in Germany. You look at what's happening last night in Sweden. Sweden, who would believe this? Sweden. They took in large numbers. They're having problems like they never thought possible.”

The Swedish Embassy was confused by Trump’s remarks and asked the US officials for an explanation, seeing how there had been no dramatic events, let alone terrorist attacks, in Sweden

on that Friday. Trump's first response the next day was on Twitter, clarifying that he had been referring to a FOX News story on Sweden and the effects of immigration. The questionability of Trump using FOX News as his sole source of information aside, the fact remains that Trump clearly said that something dramatic had happened in Sweden on Friday, which was quite simply not the case. Instead of addressing this or offering an apology, he moves on to blaming the media and how they are portraying the effects of immigration in Sweden in a dishonest way. This is something that could definitely be the case; Sweden has had a fair share of its problems with immigrants after all. It is not relevant in anyway, however, to what Trump said and what did not happen in Sweden on that Friday. This is a prime example of Trump pushing the discussion towards something else, namely the effects of immigration in Sweden, instead of addressing the main problem, i.e. his false claims during the rally. "The Fake News", highlighted in all capitals by him on Twitter, has become one of Trump's main scapegoats during the early days of his presidency, having replaced the establishment, that Trump is now part of, and Hillary Clinton, who has become irrelevant having lost the presidential race. The beginning of his tweet, "Give the public a break", portrays the mainstream media as an enemy of the US citizens, with Trump trying to establish that he is speaking for everyone in dismissing them. Trump is effectively using his position of power to try and change people's perception of reality: What is true and what is false and who to trust, no matter what the facts are.

Trump took even more drastic measures on Twitter on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, when he accused the former president Barack Obama of spying on him prior to the elections in four tweets:

"Terrible! Just found out that Obama had my "wires tapped" in Trump Tower just before the victory. Nothing found. This is McCarthyism!" (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 3:35, 4 March 2017).

"Is it legal for a sitting President to be "wire tapping" a race for president prior to an election? Turned down by court earlier. A NEW LOW!" (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 3:49, 4 March 2017).

"I'd bet a good lawyer could make a great case out of the fact that President Obama was tapping my phones in October, just prior to Election!" (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 3:52, 4 March 2017).

"How low has President Obama gone to tapp my phones during the very sacred election process. This is Nixon/Watergate. Bad (or sick) guy!" (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 4:02, 4 March 2017).

Trump failed to, and continues to refuse to, provide any evidence to back up his claims. The most likely source of these claims appears to be talk show host Mark Levin, who made similar claims on

his Thursday night radio show on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March, followed by reports by Breitbart News. It seems safe to say that Trump is once again trying to build a narrative of “them against us”, that worked for him so well during the elections as highlighted by MacWilliams (716), as well as possibly draw attention away from the embarrassing investigation of Russian ties inside his administration that were gaining much media attention at the time of the tweets. After winning the presidency, and during the early period of transition of power in the White House, Trump was considerably more diplomatic in his comments towards Obama and his administration. The shift back to portraying them as “enemies” could be considered an attempt by Trump to go back to what made him popular in the first place, i.e. blaming others and building a narrative of them-against-us. Obama and his administration are possibly a better target for this from Trump’s perspective, seeing how they are no longer in power and are easy to pinpoint, whereas the “Fake news” for instance is a somewhat wide term with no single entity to blame, along with the fact that the media still has the power to harm Trump’s plans. These tweets are also a good example of the kind of loaded terms that Vromen (264) mentions: “wire tapping”, “McCarthyism”, and “Watergate” are all words that most people associate with the dark side of US politics, and by using them in reference to Obama, Trump tries to depict the old establishment as just as immoral, paranoid, and questionable as it was during Nixon’s era, or after World War II.

While it is easy to point out the flaws and negatives in many of Trump’s tweets, it is also worth acknowledging the more positive or otherwise effective elements in them. For instance, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, Trump commented on China’s role in dealing with North Korea:

“China is very much the economic lifeline to North Korea so, while nothing is easy, if they want to solve the North Korean problem, they will.” (Donald Trump, @realDonaldTrump, 6:04, 21 April 2017)

I found this tweet to be an effective compromise between the more diplomatic or presidential approach that is expected of Trump and the critical stance towards China that he advocated during his campaign. Instead of directly attacking the Chinese for their part in supporting the North Korean regime, he points out the fact that the North Korea relies on China and that it is ultimately up to them to do something, while also acknowledging that “nothing is easy”, i.e. China has its own reasons for doing business with North Korea. From a purely rhetorical standpoint, both Trump’s supporters who dislike China, and those who prefer Trump to have a more diplomatic approach in dealing with such issues, will find something to like in this tweet. It could be

considered to be a compromise between the more typical rhetoric of traditional politicians, and Trump's tendency to blame certain parties.

#### 4.2 Debate

The first presidential debate of 2016 between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2016. The debate was moderated by the NBC news anchor Lester Holt, and it was held at the Hofstra University in New York. The debate lasted for ninety minutes and it was divided into six segments, each lasting approximately fifteen minutes. The focus of the debate was on three main topics that were considered most pressing according to Holt. They were "achieving prosperity," "America's direction", and "securing America". Both candidates were given two minutes to answer the lead-off question of each segment, which was followed by open discussion. I watched the video of the debate from NBC News' Youtube channel.

The first part of the debate handled trade. This was arguably the part where Trump was at his strongest: Creating new jobs, preventing investors and manufactory from leaving the US, and holding China and Mexico accountable for taking advantage of the US had been some of the most important and popular points that Trump had made during his campaign. Trump was obviously in his element when he was allowed to bemoan the state of the economy and the employment rates, all the while pointing out that Clinton had been a part of what he considered a failed establishment for almost thirty years. Trump excelled at blaming others for what is wrong with the economy, but when asked by Holt to provide concrete policy decisions that would bring back jobs, Trump had considerably less to say, and even then he started with the same litany of blaming China and the establishment. His main solution was to cut taxes on American business and implement new taxes for foreign business. Overall, what I thought was a notable difference between the rhetoric of the two candidates, was how Clinton focused on what should be done and how things can be better, while Trump spent most of his time on the negatives. Trump's approach no doubt appealed more to those who were already unemployed and had a negative view of things, whereas Clinton's message was more hopeful, which appealed to a different group of people. The following two quotes demonstrate this quite well:

"Our country's in deep trouble. We don't know what we're doing when it comes to devaluations and all of these countries all over the world, especially China. They're the best, the best ever at it. What they're doing

to us is a very, very sad thing. So we have to do that. We have to renegotiate our trade deals. And, Lester, they're taking our jobs, they're giving incentives, they're doing things that, frankly, we don't do.”

Contrasted to Trump, Clinton’s message is more hopeful and arguably constructive with concrete proposals of what should be done:

“The central question in this election is really what kind of country we want to be and what kind of future we'll build together. Today is my granddaughter's second birthday, so I think about this a lot. First, we have to build an economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top. That means we need new jobs, good jobs, with rising incomes. I want us to invest in you. I want us to invest in your future. [...] We also have to make the economy fairer. That starts with raising the national minimum wage and also guarantee, finally, equal pay for women's work.”

Trump’s most notable failing in the first part of the debate was the fact that he immediately started defending himself for having been given a million-dollar loan by his father, and was not able to let Clinton’s barbs aimed at him go in general. He came across as somewhat thin-skinned in the way how he could not resist Clinton’s baits. As a result, he spent considerable time defending and explaining himself instead of addressing the actual policy issues that were the topic and probably his strong point considering his background in business.

The second part of the debate was called “America’s direction”, and it was largely about issues of race and police violence in America, as well as “birtherism”. This was more unfamiliar and uncomfortable territory for Trump when compared to the financial issues. Whereas Clinton focused on issues of equality and her proposal of criminal justice reform, Trump stressed the importance of “law and order” in America, and instead of addressing the police who had been shooting unarmed black men, he blamed gangs and parts of big cities of being too dangerous, all the while not forgetting to mention that many of the gang members and criminals were illegal immigrants. Trump was asked by Holt to explain his support of the so-called “stop-and-frisk” practice of police officers in New York, where the police stop, question, and search people on the streets for guns. This practice had been ruled unconstitutional and it had mostly affected young non-white men. Trump disagreed that it was a form of racial profiling and insisted that the practice was justifiable:

“The argument is that we have to take the guns away from these people that have them and they are bad people that shouldn't have them. These are felons. These are people that are bad people that shouldn't be...”

This is an excellent example of Trump ignoring the actual question and issue being discussed (racial profiling) and instead focusing on the irrational and emotional side of things, vaguely referring to everyone involved as “bad people” and “felons” and ignoring the other side of things i.e. normal African-American and Latino people being harassed by police because they are perceived as more likely to have illegal guns with them. After saying that “these are people that are bad people”, Trump himself apparently realizes that his argumentation is flawed and moves on to another typical rhetorical tool of his: Backing his opinions with convincing sounding, but often unrelated, numbers: “You have 3000 shootings in Chicago from January first [...] you have 4000 people killed in Chicago by guns”, “we had 2200 murders (in New York)”. Trump also mentioned in a seemingly off-handed way that the shootings in Chicago had happened during Obama’s presidency and that it was “his (Obama’s) hometown”, his intention being to blame the establishment as usual, although in this case indirectly. At this point Holt’s original point of stop-and-frisk practices being a form of racial profiling had already been forgotten, the focus being on the usual bemoaning of things: “It’s terrible. I have property there. It’s terrible what’s going on in Chicago”. This particular quote also highlights another typical trait of Trump’s rhetoric: He likes to bring up his business background, his wealth, and all the buildings he owns and the people he knows. Even when asked to explain how he intends to heal the divide between the white and black communities in two minutes, Trump first spends time discussing his investments and the endorsements he has gained, both of which are unrelated:

“And when I look at what's going on in Charlotte, a city I love, a city where I have investments, when I look at what's going on throughout various parts of our country, whether it's -- I mean, I can just keep naming them all day long [...] I just got today the, as you know, the endorsement of the Fraternal Order of Police, we just -- just came in. We have endorsements from, I think, almost every police group, very -- I mean, a large percentage of them in the United States.

Trump has spent his entire life doing business and promoting his image to investors, and run-on sentences like this show that he cannot help but do it, no matter the occasion. Although some might consider such tendency egoistic, it does make Trump seem more genuine. He doesn’t simply



focus on the issue at hand as a normal politician would do, but instead has a more conversational style to his monologues. Trump comes across as more informal and familiar, when he says things like “as you know”, “we have to be strong”, “we have to take a look at” and “let me tell you”. He reinforces the perception among his supporters that they are “in this together” and makes his image softer despite what is often a harsh message, all the while highlighting his apparent success in business life, which should translate into success in the White House as well according to him.

The final main topic of the debate handled the candidates’ proposals of securing America. ISIS, terrorist attacks on US soil, the role of NATO, and cyber-attacks were all discussed. Trump and Clinton continued in much the same way as before: Clinton presented her proposals of what should be done and what her stance on foreign policy would be, all the while pointing out that she has the experience and Trump does not. Trump kept bringing up the fact that Clinton had been the secretary of state when ISIS was born and growing in numbers. This would have made a good basis for Trump to present his own plans, but instead he ended up spending considerable time insisting that he had never supported the Iraq war, a conflict he vocally criticized during his campaign, despite there been clear evidence that he did support it in 2002, as pointed out by both Clinton and the moderator. Trump’s refusal to admit the existence of his earlier stance, even in the face of overwhelming evidence is quite unusual; usually when confronted with accusations of inconsistency that can be proven, a politician is forced to admit his or her mistake one way or another, as pointed out by Corina Andone in her study “Argumentation in political interviews: Analyzing and evaluating responses to accusations of inconsistency (2013):

“In the cases in which the accusation is clearly justified, the politician can only respond to the charge by accepting it as correct and retracting one of the inconsistent standpoints” (Andone 127)

Yet, as noted by political pundits again and again during the elections, Trump seems to defy traditional conventions such as being held accountable for what he has said earlier. Andone notes that inconsistencies like these can have “damaging consequences for the politicians” (127), which simply did not seem to apply to Trump.

The matter of war in Iraq was followed by what was probably Trump’s biggest mistake in the debate, as well as the most discussed moment of it, when he was asked by Holt why he has supposedly better judgement than Clinton:

“Well, I have much better judgment than she does. There's no question about that. I also have a much better temperament than she has, you know? I have a much better -- she spent -- let me tell you -- she spent hundreds of millions of dollars on an advertising -- you know, they get Madison Avenue into a room, they put names -- oh, temperament, let's go after -- I think my strongest asset, maybe by far, is my temperament. I have a winning temperament. I know how to win. She does not.”

Trump's rant was followed by laughter from the audience, and there's no denying that Trump miscalculated his answer. Instead of staying on the topic of judgement, and what kind of decisions he would have made in terms of Middle East policy, he went overboard by stating that he has better temperament as well, a claim undermined by the very fact that he was visibly irritated by the claims that he had supported the Iraq war and was continuously talking over Clinton and Holst, as well as constantly shouting “wrong” at their claims. He also strays from the topic even more and tries to make some point by bringing up Clinton's spending on advertisement, but seems to lose his train of thought and simply concludes that he has the best temperament because he “wins”. He does not seem to know what a temperament actually is: It has to do with a person's typical mood, emotional status, or irritability, and has nothing to do with their success in life.

Overall, most of the media outlets thought that Clinton handled the debate better than Trump. Yet, Trump did manage to bring up the failures of the Obama administration, Clinton's role as part of the old establishment, and the usual them-and-us rhetoric aimed at China, illegal immigrants, and ISIS for instance. Ultimately what matters is the voter's perception of who is telling the truth (Andone 127), and in this case it is safe to say that enough of Trump's supporters believed him over Clinton and the moderator.

#### 4.3 Inauguration speech

Trump assumed the position of the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2017. Although the speech that he gave during the inauguration ceremony lacks some of the more aggressive and direct methods he usually employs in furthering his agenda, it is still well worth examining for the purposes of identifying some of Trump's main goals for his presidency, as well as recognizing who exactly the speech is mainly aimed at. Jonathan Charteris-Black defines a political speech in his book *Analysing Political Speeches: Rhetoric, Discourse and Metaphor* (2014) as “a coherent stream of spoken language that is usually prepared for delivery by a speaker to an

audience for a purpose on a political occasion”(xiii). Charteris-Black differentiates between two types of political speeches: Ones involving political decisions and ones that are about “establishing shared values” and are motivational. Charteris-Black calls the former a policy-making speech and the latter a consensus-building one (xiii-xiv). Speeches in general can have elements of both in them; the main distinction between them is that a policy-making speech must point towards or advocate a decision that must be made, while a consensus-building speech is meant to be inspirational and to make people feel that they are “in this together”, so to speak. As an inauguration speech, Trump’s address is mostly about building consensus but it also has elements of his future policies in it.

As was the case with Trump’s victory speech after clinching the presidency from Hillary Clinton, Trump’s words and demeanor during his inauguration address are more conciliatory and presidential compared to his usual confrontational style. This is not that surprising; the whole world was watching him, and having already won the presidency, he needn’t rely on his more characteristic approach any longer, but instead focus on making himself seem a respectable and believable head of state in the eyes of the media, business world and other politicians. Most importantly, Trump had to somehow address the gaping chasm between the conservatives that voted for him and the liberals who were horrified by his election. In Charteris-Black’s terms, Trump had to build consensus amongst the Americans somehow. He tries to deal with this by declaring that “what truly matters, is not which party controls our government, but whether our government is controlled by the people”, while also advocating unity: “We will rediscover our loyalty to each other [...] When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice”. Another rhetorical device he employs is an allusion to the Bible, something extremely common amongst American politicians: “The Bible tells us, ‘how good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity”. Somewhat contradictively, Trump declares that the American people should “speak [their] minds openly, debate [their] disagreements honestly, but always pursue solidarity”, which is something he himself has been actively working against by lambasting any news outlets that are critical of him, calling them “fake news”.

One of the common threads of Trump’s address is his assertion that he will be a president to all Americans, and that power has been given back to the people after being ignored and trampled by political elite: A message that no doubt sounds appealing. He declares that power is being transferred “from Washington DC” back to “The American People” and paints a contrasting picture

where “Washington flourished” and “politicians prospered” while “mothers and children were trapped in poverty” and “rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape”. The image is bleak but then Trump moves on to promising a brighter future: He declares that America will “start winning again”, that the country’s infrastructure will be rebuilt, and that he will help the currently unemployed in getting back on their feet. Trump is hardly the first elected politician that bemoans the state of things in the aftermath of the previous leadership of the old establishment, while at the same time promising a better tomorrow following his own election. The mental image of America as a graveyard of abandoned factories and poor families that Trump evokes is most likely aimed at the people that overwhelmingly voted for him and secured his presidency: The unemployed, and those with uncertain futures, especially the people from rural areas and the so-called Rust Belt area in the Midwest, that has for a long time now been struggling as a result of manufacturing jobs moving further west or to Asia, and otherwise suffering from the results of globalization and automation. The states of Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan played a crucial role in securing Trump’s victory and these parts of his inauguration speech seem to be addressing the hopes and fears of the people from these areas above all others.

Probably the single most notable message in Trump’s speech was his vision of a new set of priorities: America first. This is in line with Trump’s campaign rhetoric, where he accused other countries and international organizations of taking advantage of the US, most notably China in trading and NATO when it comes to defense expenses. He makes it abundantly clear that he blames dealings with the rest of the world for America’s current problems:

For many decades, we’ve enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry;

Subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military;

We've defended other nation’s borders while refusing to defend our own;

And spent trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay.

We’ve made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of our country has disappeared over the horizon.

Trump relies on his usual rhetorical devices here: A confrontative “them and us” mindset, where America is the noble but naïve party that has been helping others at the expense of its own wellbeing, while the rest of the world has been cheating and taking advantage of it.

Despite focusing on typical consensus building elements and promises of how everything will be better now that he is the president, Trump's speech also includes much evidence of what Trump's policies are going to be like. The above mentioned "America first" -rhetoric is a clear signal of where Trump's priorities will lie during his presidency. He states that "every decision on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families". "Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength", he later adds. Based on the speech, and Trump's considerable critique of most of the rest of the world during his campaign, it is safe to assume that the Trump administration's policy decisions will follow a protectionist ideology where the wellbeing of Americans will be the number one priority, even at the expense of the rest of the world. In his speech, Trump provides a long list of infrastructural improvements that he intends to provide, including new roads, bridges, airports, and railways. Bringing back jobs was one Trump's bedrock campaign promises and he says as much during the speech as well. This is followed by the more ambiguous promises of "bringing back our borders", "our wealth", and "our dreams". The latter two fall more in line with general consensus-building, based on the rhetoric of hope, while the promise regarding "bringing back our borders" undoubtedly caused many raised eyebrows, considering how there have been no notable changes to US borders since the 80s. This is likely a case of intentionally unclear wording, most likely referring to Trump's promise of a border wall between the US and Mexico, but not mentioning it explicitly due to its divisive nature. In terms of foreign policy, Trump promises to maintain friendly relationships with "the nations of the world" while at the same time declaring that "it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first" – a reasonable enough assessment but not something most heads of state would start their career with. Those worried that Trump seeks to isolate the US from its allies and responsibilities abroad probably found the protectionist stance of the speech worrying. At the same time, Trump does declare that "old alliances will be reinforced" and that the US would "unite the civilized world against Radical Islam Terrorism", which they will "eradicate". The threat of radical Islam terrorism is an issue that most everyone agrees on, and common enemies tend to bring people together, no matter what their ideological differences might otherwise be. Overall Trump does not focus on the rest of the world in his speech so much as he does on domestic issues.

Although Trump is considerably more official and presidential in his inaugural address compared to his usual, often rambling, speeches, there are still many elements to the speech that are unmistakably typical of him. "Winning" has always been a big part of Trump's image, and during

his presidential campaign he promised again and again that he is used to winning and that America would start winning too. He says as much during his speech as well: "America will start winning again, winning like never before". Again, he jabs at the previous administration, implying rather clearly that America has been "losing" under their rule, which will only now change since he has been elected. Another typical element in Trump's speeches is his tendency to list and repeat things for effect. There are numerous examples of this in his inaugural address: He lists a whole litany of infrastructure that will be rebuilt. He keeps starting his sentences with "we", to build a sense of unity, and towards the end of his speech, he makes a litany of promises based on his campaign slogan:

"Together, we will make America strong again. "

"Together, we will make America wealthy again."

"We will make America proud again."

"We will make America safe again."

"And, yes, together we will make America great again."

## 5. Conclusion

There is no denying the effectiveness of Trump's rhetoric. The results speak for themselves after all, and Trump now sits in the Oval Office. No matter what form of media he is using, or whether he is fighting for the Republican nomination or explaining his policies on Twitter, Trump seeks to alter the public's perception of what is happening in the US and the world. He attempts to impose the world view of him and his supporters: That America is being threatened, disrespected, and abused by the rest of the world, and that the previous political establishments have allowed this to happen. One clear conclusion that can be drawn from Trump's rhetoric throughout his short political career is the fact that he thrives when he has someone to blame: An adversary or opponent of some kind that he can use to contrast his ideology to, as well as accuse of foul play and divert attention to whenever he himself is being criticized. During the early days of the primaries, it was the political establishment itself that Trump targeted, both Democrats and Republicans, but most notably the favorites of the GOP. After gaining the nomination, Trump

unleashed an unprecedented barrage of criticism on Clinton, seeking to paint a picture of her as the personification of everything wrong with typical politicians and the old establishment. And finally, after becoming president and finding himself under fire by critics for his policy decisions, Trump diverts the attention elsewhere by blaming the liberal media and Obama. In short, Trump needs an enemy.

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