FREE MEDIA:

**AN ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
AND THEIR ROLE IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

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"People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not communicated with each other."

- **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze President Trump's rhetorical strategies and communicative behavior as a candidate for office, and in doing so make sense of the 2016 American Presidential Election as a function of these phenomena. In short, I seek to determine what worked, why, and whether or not it could work again, by focusing primarily on the impact of free media exposure.

I construct my analysis by further investigating 1) this campaign's relationship to a broader political, social, and historical context; 2) political news and other media consumption, distribution, etc. and the evolution thereof; 3) the specific communicative tactics and strategies Mr. Trump regularly employed; and 4) the evaluative criteria by which the voting public considers candidates for office and the ways in which candidates literally speak to each of those evaluative criteria.

This type of analysis is important because it affords both academic researchers and the broader public a means of evaluating the abstract civic space they occupy. By analyzing Mr. Trump's rhetorical strategies and communicative behavior, we can better understand our political process as a whole, as well as the individual behavior of the candidates, voters, and institutions within it. We can use what we learn here to confirm or deny what we think we already know about political communication – and possibly lend credence to what many consider to be universal political constants. Furthermore, these analyses allow us to better anticipate the actions and intentions of future candidates for office as they respond to what has already occurred.

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INTRODUCTION

A. Rhetoric & Civics (The War of Words)

The military tactician Carl von Clausewitz proposed that we could understand war simply as the continuation of politics by other means. As an accomplished military commander and strategist, he was intimately familiar with the grander political motivations that made his expertise both convenient in advancing civic interests and instrumental in defending them. But his argument isn't as simple as recognizing that where there is a political problem, there is often a military solution.

His definition strikes at a grander, deeper understanding of civics. War isn't something we understand through the lens of politics, they are one and the same. Democratic politics is civil conflict – the advancement of ideas and public interests as in war – absent the use of arms. And it's no small thing either. Universal adherence to a set of rules that organizes and places rational limitations on civic conflict – rather than permits the violent struggle of many citizens against one another - is a great societal burden; what some might call the mark of civilization.

Where a war of arms stops, the war of words begins. Whereas the ultimate utility of war is in restructuring the terms of the subsequent peace, the ultimate utility of rhetoric is in shifting the balance of public opinion to the same end. Today's politics demands that candidates compete nearly as fiercely for the electorate's attention as they do for the electorate's support – so by taking advantage of free media exposure, candidates can substantially bolster their campaign's reach and influence. Candidates who compel free media exposure as a function of novelty, charisma, controversy, or any one of a host of other means, can wage the war for public opinion much more effectively than those who fail to fully exploit free media's benefits.

B. Rhetoric & The American Political Tradition

"In this age, in this country, public sentiment is everything. With it, nothing can fail; against it, nothing can succeed. Whoever molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes, or pronounces judicial decisions."

-   *Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States*

The promise of self-government is that each citizen is afforded equal opportunity to represent their own interests, equal opportunity to solicit the support of others, and equal opportunity to evaluate the candidates for public office who might later represent them. The very basis of a democratic institution is the undertaking of a constant struggle, the initiation of a war that will be persistently waged, for the hearts and minds of the people. Wielded skillfully, rhetoric is the means with which public sentiment is molded – the means which empowers each citizen to speak compellingly on his own behalf, and the means with which the elected official might compellingly move his constituents to action. Effective orators and rhetoricians thrive in democracies; poor ones rarely do. For those who aspire to leadership in a government of, by, and for the people, a talent for effective communication is all but prerequisite. The innate power of rhetoric is not so much in its ability to make an argument's meaning clearer as it is in its ability to make even poor arguments significantly more compelling than they would otherwise be. Plainly, rhetoric is just as much *what* is said as it is *how* it's said.

Since the earliest days of the Republic, this nation's leaders have struggled to wage the war of public opinion by making use of their individual talents. Washington epitomized the role of "Commander-in-Chief" and often allowed his public actions to speak louder and more forcefully than his words. Jefferson, a die-hard anti-federalist, refused to deliver his State of the Union address in person (instead delivering it to Congress as a physical manuscript) because he

"was concerned that the practice of appearing before the representatives of the people was too similar to the British monarch's practice of addressing each new Parliament with a list of policy mandates."[1] Benjamin Franklin editorialized in newspapers, Thomas Paine wrote *Common Sense*, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote the *Federalist Papers*, and so on and so forth.

Political leaders are both masters of and subject to the means of communication at their disposal. As times and technology have changed, so too have our leaders. The advent of radio is as closely linked to the success of Franklin Roosevelt as the advent of television is to the success of John F. Kennedy. Without one, it's almost impossible to imagine the other. In fact, to use President Kennedy as an example,

> It's now common knowledge that without the nation's first televised debate… Kennedy would never have been president. But beyond securing his presidential career, the 60-minute duel between the handsome Irish-American senator and Vice President Richard Nixon fundamentally altered political campaigns, television media and America's political history. "It's one of those unusual points on the timeline of history where you can say things changed very dramatically — in this case, in a single night."[2]

The American political narrative is especially rich with these anecdotal developments in part because it has been within the relatively short lifetime of our nation that the most drastic technological and social changes that have altered political communication have come about.

C. The Modern Infrastructure of American Political Discourse

The "infrastructure of discourse" in this country is best understood as an extension of what James Madison and the other framers of the Constitution intended of the First Amendment – the

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[1] "State of the Union Addresses of the Presidents of the United States," The American Presidency Project, , accessed March 2018, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sou.php.

[2] Kayla Webley, "How the Nixon-Kennedy Debate Changed the World," Time, September 23, 2010, , accessed March 2018, http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2021078,00.html.

creation and defense of the public sphere. The right to peaceably assemble, the right to free speech, the freedom of the press, and the right of the people to petition the Government for a redress of grievances were the basic protections needed to ensure that free and open political discourse could occur among citizens, within communities, and across the several states.

Political discourse on the whole (much like the success of individual politicians) is largely a function of the available mediums of communication. While public addresses, written statements, and a host of other traditional means still play a substantial role in the campaigning and day-to-day political process – the new and exciting digital realm is proving to be more of a factor than nearly anyone a decade ago could have possibly imagined. Candidates, public office holders, reporters, constituents, pundits, and policy experts all interact very differently today than they used to. The same sources that used to deliver breaking news perhaps once daily are now racing to compete in a world where news is always reported on in real time.

The modern U.S. Presidential Election is the most intense, demanding, and comprehensive exercise in self-representation that has ever been undertaken by candidates for public office. Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent, thousands of professionals employed, and countless hours labored to ensure one individual's rise to the highest office in the Free World.

So in a world with ever-fewer smoky back rooms, what separates the winners from the losers?

D. The Purpose of This Thesis

<u>The "What?"</u>

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze President Trump's rhetorical strategies and communicative behavior as a candidate for office, and in doing so make sense of the 2016 American Presidential Election as a function of these phenomena.

In short, I am seeking to answer these questions: 1) What worked and why? and 2) Will it work again? I'll be constructing my analysis by further investigating 1) this campaign's relationship to a broader political, social, and historical context; 2) political news and other media consumption, distribution, etc. and the evolution thereof; 3) the specific communicative tactics and strategies Mr. Trump regularly employed; and 4) the evaluative criteria by which the voting public considers candidates for office and the ways in which candidates literally speak to each of those evaluative criteria.

<u>The "Why?"</u>

This type of analysis is important because it affords both academic researchers and the broader public a means of evaluating the abstract civic space they occupy. Presidential elections are some of the best subjects for this kind of study for several reasons: they reveal broader (national) political truths rather than isolated (local) ones, command so much attention from press, academic institutions, etc. that there is plenty of primary documentation and supporting material to allow for a detailed, insightful, and grounded analysis, and shape the political landscape in this country far more than any other single election. This election in particular is a perfect case study because rhetoric played such an enormous role in defining it.

By analyzing Mr. Trump's rhetorical strategies and communicative behavior, we can better understand our political process as a whole, as well as the individual behavior of the

candidates, voters, and institutions within it. We can use what we learn here to confirm or deny what we think we already know about political communication – and possibly lend credence to what many consider to be universal political constants. Furthermore, these analyses allow us to better anticipate the actions and intentions of future candidates for office as they respond to what has already occurred.

1. *The Limitations of This Thesis*

Despite this analytic exercise, this thesis cannot do everything. So before proceeding I need to outline several of its major limitations:

First, as far as this analysis is concerned, any consideration for the evolution of news and other media consumption is primarily limited to traditional periodicals, major cable news networks, and online news outlets – the three communicative mediums that are most widely used by voters today. Additionally, because the means that enable and/or enhance political communication are clearly relevant to our understanding of the messages, meanings, etc. that are propagated through them – this analysis seeks to answer secondary questions concerning the role new media, internet distribution of print material, etc. actually played in this election (as opposed to other media types), Americans' evolving consumption of political news and punditry, etc.

Second, while this analysis does include a section that aims to consider the holistic context in which the election occurred – it is limited to only the issues and events that are directly relevant to specific points of interest in this particular discussion.

Finally, here are the topics this analysis will specifically, actively avoid:

- "How was Mr. Trump, as a candidate for office, different from Mr. Trump as the sitting President?" and/or "Do good campaigners make good presidents?"

- "Was either candidate right, wrong, justified or not, etc. in having done or said anything they did?" (Instead, we will only consider whether or not specific campaign tactics were or were not *effective.)*

E. The 2016 American Presidential Election

Well before 2016, Hillary Clinton was seen as a heavy favorite to receive both the Democratic nomination and eventually the presidency in 2016. By mid-summer 2016 when each party gathered to anoint their nominees at the conventions, the overwhelming majority of experts, pundits, statisticians, media personalities, political consultants, academics, and public officials were ready to agree that she was the odds-on favorite come November. Even as polls were closing on the east coast, the overwhelming majority of Americans were thoroughly convinced that Secretary Hillary Clinton was poised to become the 45th President:

> Around 7:22 p.m. on November 8, the night of the 2016 presidential election, a member of Republican candidate Donald Trump's campaign team told CNN reporter Jim Acosta: "It will take a miracle for us to win." The Trump campaign was not alone in this view. Most political observers also expected a win by Trump's Democratic rival, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton. The Clinton campaign staff certainly did: They were "all smiles" at 5 p.m., when a Boston Globe reporter arrived at the scene of their anticipated victory party.[3]

Several hours later, viewers everywhere were shocked when the battleground states of Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin were all called for Mr. Trump, thus securing one of the most improbable electoral victories in American history.

So how, come November, did a decidedly unorthodox candidate with no formal military or government experience manage to ascend to the highest office in the free world?

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[3] John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck, "How Trump Lost and Won," Journal of Democracy 28, no. 2 (2017): , doi:10.1353/jod.2017.0022.

CHAPTER 1: The Political and Social Context of the 2016 Election

Any attempt to examine the 2016 election in good faith must include some consideration for the holistic context in which it occurred. This particular analysis requires that I expand on the context of partisanship and partisan division leading up to the election, the political logistics that may have exaggerated or altogether altered the effectiveness/success of certain communication strategies, and several drastic changes in media consumption habits among the voting populace.

A. Partisanship and Narrative

1. Partisan Division

In the years and months leading up to the 2016 election, political analysts and scholars were already becoming aware of shifts in partisan allegiance and of growing partisan division. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014 concluded that, compared to 1994 and 2004 data, Republican voters had become more consistently conservative in their beliefs while Democratic voters had similarly become more consistently liberal in their beliefs. As a benchmark, in 1994 only 64% of Republicans were considered more conservative than the median Democrat, while only 70% of Democrats were considered more liberal than the average Republican – by 2014 those figures had risen drastically to 92% and 94% respectively.[4]

I should note that these statistics were compiled using an issue-based survey, so the researchers perhaps also unfairly assumed that various stances on pertinent political issues were the most telling measure of a person's partisan affiliation (loyalty, steadfastness, etc.) and could afford us an accurate measure of partisan division. More importantly (and to the point), researchers also concluded that each party's perception of their opposition had soured

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[4] Paul Taylor, "The Demographic Trends Shaping American Politics in 2016 and beyond," Pew Research Center, January 27, 2016, , accessed March 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/27/the-demographic-trends-shaping-american-politics-in-2016-and-beyond/.

considerably over the same period of time. In what researchers deemed "a rising tide of mutual antipathy," the percentage of *highly* negative perceptions in each camp had more than doubled during this twenty year span; and by 2016, just two years later, that figure had risen an additional 10%.[5]

Figure 1: Partisan Shifts 1994-2014[6]

Figure 2: Partisan Antipathy 1994-2014
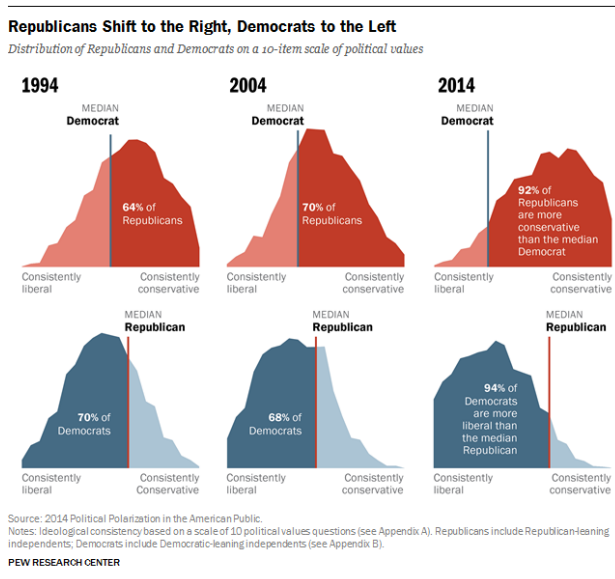

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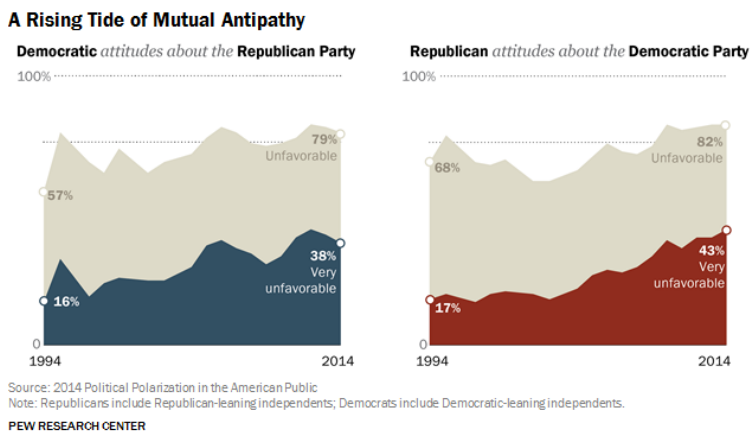
[5] Jonathan Haidt and Ravi Iyer, "How to Get Beyond Our Tribal Politics," The Wall Street Journal, November 10, 2016, , accessed February 2018, https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-to-get-beyond-our-tribal-politics-1478271810.
[6] Paul Taylor, "The Demographic Trends Shaping American Politics in 2016 and beyond," Pew Research Center, January 27, 2016, , accessed March 2018.

While there may be a temptation to attribute increased partisan division to the actions of each party's leading candidates in 2016 (and while to some lesser extent those claims may be factual), in reality the seeds of extreme partisan division had already been sown long before Mr. Trump or Secretary Clinton even declared their candidacy.

2. *Party Loyalty & Tribal Politics*

Despite the fact that Mr. Trump was an "outsider" candidate with no previous government experience, and his advertised political ideology was not widely considered to be traditionally Republican, party affiliation still played an enormous role in shaping his incremental success and eventual victory, as "the power of party identification held approximately 90% of Republicans in Mr. Trump's camp."[7]

While party affiliation has historically been the most accurate predictor of a person's voting behavior, this was undoubtedly an unusual case and should be viewed as such. From the beginning, Mr. Trump's status as a political outsider and his unorthodox behavior set him apart from the rest of the Republican field, yet he was still able to secure the Republican nomination and eventually the presidency.

3. *Divisive Issues of Particular Importance & Familiar Narratives*

A 2016 Gallup poll revealed that there were four common issues of "extreme importance" to members of both parties: terrorism/national security, the economy, employment/jobs, and healthcare (especially as it related to the Affordable Care Act). In addition to those common four, Republicans considered the budget deficit, foreign affairs, the

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[7] Brendan Nyhan, "Is the Slide Into Tribal Politics Inevitable?" The New York Times, November 17, 2016, , accessed March 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/18/upshot/is-the-slide-into-pure-identity-politics-inevitable.html?_r=0.

size/efficiency of government, taxes, and immigration to also be of extreme importance, while

Democrats highlighted wealth inequality and education.[8]

While some of these issues are consistent with those noted by polling data during

previous elections, some were new additions. To a certain extent, this had to do with the political

and social context in which the election occurred; to what is likely an equal or greater extent this

had to do with the issues that were actively promoted by the candidates throughout the campaign,

and therefore brought to the forefront of a more temporary civic discourse.

In the public eye, "terrorism and other matters of national security" were likely viewed as

a top priority because of extremist terrorist attacks in the months leading up to and during 2016,

as well as ISIS's growing territorial gains and influence in the Middle East over the same period.

As photos and expert analysis of the Syrian refugee crisis entered widespread popular

consciousness, and in the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks in January 2015, November

2015,[9] and June 2016,[10] issues of immediate consequence in European nations started fueling

domestic debate about how well the United States was managing its security interests abroad.

Healthcare, on the other hand, had been at the center of domestic policy debate for almost

a decade. During President Obama's eight year White House tenure, the House of

Representatives voted to repeal the Affordable Healthcare Act more than 50 times.[11] The

Republican majority (secured in the House during the 2010 midterms, then in the Senate in 2014)

first pledged to repeal "Obamacare" outright, but later modified its official stance to "repeal and

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[8] Gallup, Inc, "Democrats, Republicans Agree on Four Top Issues for Campaign," Gallup.com, February 01, 2016, , accessed March 2018, http://news.gallup.com/poll/188918/democrats-republicans-agree-four-top-issues-campaign.aspx.
[9] CNBC, "Major Global Events That Shook 2015," CNBC, December 31, 2015, , https://www.cnbc.com/2015/12/31/major-global-events-that-shook-2015.html?slide=3.
[10] "The Top News Stories of 2016," U.S. News & World Report, , https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/slideshows/top-news-stories-of-2016?slide=17.
[11] Berenson, Tessa. "AHCA: The House Voted to Repeal Obamacare More Than 50 Times." Time. March 24, 2017. Accessed November 2017. http://time.com/4712725/ahca-house-repeal-votes-obamacare/.

replace" the program. Because the repeal of Obamacare required either a supermajority in Congress to override a presidential veto or the election of an anti-Obamacare president who wouldn't veto a repeal attempt in the first place, any chance of "repealing and replacing" essentially hinged solely on a Republican presidential victory.

Gun violence, police brutality, and race were also at the forefront of our national discourse leading up to the election in a way they had not been in previous elections, as indicated by additional polling data.[12] Among many other events that contributed to escalating tensions, two of note might offer a somewhat representative sample: On May 23, 2016, Edward Nero, a Baltimore police officer, was acquitted of all charges in relation to his role in the 2015 death of Freddie Gray – major protests ensued as part of a larger national conversation about police brutality and race. And on June 12, 2016, more than 50 people in an Orlando nightclub were shot and killed– which sparked a discussion about gun violence as well as discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Nationally organized movements, widespread public demonstrations, and more comprehensive and intentional reporting on these events fueled a discourse that is still ongoing about gun violence, responsible law enforcement, and race.

One additional development bears mentioning. On February 13, 2016, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died, thus opening up a seat on the bench.[13] President Obama then promptly selected Merrick Garland as his nominee to replace Justice Scalia. In response, the Republican leadership, who oversaw a majority in the Senate, decided to employ the so-called "Biden Rule" to block the nomination long enough that the next administration would have the opportunity to fill the vacancy. While political issues being considered by the Supreme Court are often relevant to election rhetoric and public opinion, this circumstance forced voters to consider

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[12] Gallup Polling Center – Policy Issues 1990-2015
[13] "The Top News Stories of 2016"

that their vote for either presidential candidate would have a direct impact on the judicial branch as well. In other words, if Secretary Clinton was elected but Republicans maintained control of Congress, then either Merrick Garland or a more liberal justice would likely be nominated and confirmed as before, but if Mr. Trump was elected instead, then a staunch conservative justice would replace Justice Scalia.

As such, voters were cognizant that the presidential ballot was even weightier than usual. Every ballot cast for a new Commander-in-Chief was also a ballot cast for a new Supreme Court Justice and the fate of Obamacare – in one-to-one terms.

4. *Populism, Nationalism, and Protectionism as Global and Domestic Phenomena*

In October 2014, the following was said about the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in an article detailing the rise of populist and anti-globalist sentiments around the globe:

> The rising popularity of UKIP is a case in point. What started out as a rather straightforward but effective anti-EU campaign has extended into a far bolder and more explicit drive to defend "Britishness" from the threat of foreign influence, metropolitan political correctness, and in particular immigrants. The fears and frustrations associated with internationalism have been turned inward and outward simultaneously, into an embrace of national nativist identities.[14]

Similarly in Hong Kong, Catalonia, and Scotland, independence movements threatened the stability of a global order they felt had neglected them – and eventually led to political action. What would become abundantly clear during the 2016 US election, and especially after Mr. Trump's victory, was that these same sentiments (defense of "Americanism" from the threat of foreign influence, a rejection of "metropolitan political correctness," and resolute anti-immigrant-fueled xenophobia) were already held or readily adopted by millions of Americans, especially working-class white voters.

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[14] Peter Bloom, "As Anti-globalisation Politics Fail, Nationalism Sweeps the World," The Conversation, May 04, 2018, , accessed May 05, 2018, https://theconversation.com/as-anti-globalisation-politics-fail-nationalism-sweeps-the-world-33102.

While responses to the ills of economic globalism had long been part of our domestic political discourse, this rebuffing of globalism included factors and sentiments that treated globalism as an affront to national or communal identity as well. The long-understood consequence of globalism is that some domestic jobs are lost overseas, but this new narrative further rejected globalism on the grounds that complicity in a global political, social, and economic community necessarily entailed domestic compromise and sacrifice in all respects.

5. *Mr. Trump's Pre-Election Political Stature*

In October 1987, Mr. Trump delivered a speech to a rowdy conservative crowd in New Hampshire in which many predicted he would announce his candidacy for the Presidency. He did not announce any such intention, but did spend nearly half an hour lamenting about an America failing on the world stage – one in which leaders' incompetence was to blame for America's many ills.[15] A year later, at the Republican National Convention in 1988, Mr. Trump made a surprise appearance on the convention floor and gave a brief interview with NBC's Chris Wallace regarding his own political aspirations and his support for the soon-to-be Republican nominee George H.W. Bush. Mr. Trump had also previously sponsored full-page, politically-charged advertisements in the *New York Times, Washington Post, and Boston Globe*, made regular appearances on television programs to speak on issues of public policy, and contributed enormous sums of money to political campaigns. As a business magnate, celebrity, and high-profile Republican donor, he had access to office-holders and decision-makers at the highest levels of Republican politics, and was seen by many in the party and beyond as a viable, serious, even invaluable candidate for high public office.

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[15] Michael Kruse et al., "The True Story of Donald Trump's First Campaign Speech-in 1987," About Us, February 05, 2016, , accessed December 2017, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/02/donald-trump-first-campaign-speech-new-hampshire-1987-213595.

While much of the talk of Mr. Trump's viability in that regard subsided amidst personal and professional scandals throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, his grand resurgence onto the national political stage came in 2011 when he began mentioning publicly that he had "serious doubts"[16] about President Obama's proclaimed place of birth. Thereafter, he became the standard bearer for the birther conspiracy, which claimed that President Obama's short form birth certificate (citing Honolulu, Hawaii as the President's place of birth) was fraudulent – a revelation that, if true, would have disqualified President Obama from holding the nation's highest office.

After President Obama released his long-form birth certificate in April 2011, Mr. Trump still touted the document's release as a substantial personal victory, indicating that his efforts constituted a "great service"[17] in the name of government transparency. Whether the effort was a bona fide attempt in the service of transparency or a reckless attempt to delegitimize Mr. Obama's Presidency and stir public debate, it catapulted Mr. Trump into the political limelight. At the 2012 White House Correspondent's Dinner, President Obama dedicated several full paragraphs of jokes to striking back at Mr. Trump, who was in attendance. Whatever his rationale, whatever his initial intentions, Mr. Trump successfully cast himself as an enemy of the sitting president and re-entered American political consciousness as a personality worth mentioning.

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[16] Anthony Zurcher, "The Birth of the Obama 'birther' Conspiracy," BBC News, September 16, 2016, , accessed November 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-37391652.
[17] Ibid.

B. Political Logistics

1. The Crowded Republican Primary

The first thing to note here is the sheer number of candidates that initially sought the Republican nomination – and vied for some time thereafter to command limited fundraising dollars, limited media coverage, limited attention, and (most importantly) limited support from Republican primary voters. In a hypothetical field of two candidates, for example if only Mr. Trump and Governor Jeb Bush had sought the nomination, it seems intuitive to think that Mr. Trump may not have fared as well as he did because moderate, traditionalist, and institutional support wouldn't have been split among a throng of other candidates. All in all, 17 Republicans ran for President in 2016[18] – but it was the biggest outsider, someone who had never held elected office, who secured the party's nomination.

2. The Rise of Republican Populism

In late October 2016, less than two weeks before the general election, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article detailing populist shifts within the Republican Party, as well as demographic and ideological trends that could help explain the phenomenon. In it, authors Gerald F. Seib and Patrick O'Connor suggested:

> The GOP that carried Mr. Trump to the presidential nomination was formed by waves of new voters who washed onto Republican shores in the last four decades: George Wallace Southerners, Ronald Reagan Democrats, Pat Buchanan pitchfork populists and tea-party foot soldiers.
> The Republican establishment was happy to have the votes of these newcomers, many from America's working class, and accommodated their cultural preferences on social issues from guns to abortion to gay marriage. What the establishment didn't do was adjust the GOP's economic approach to match the populist impulses—or even seem to consider such a shift necessary.
> Mr. Trump did. After entering the presidential race with just 3% to 5% support in national polls, he amplified the belief among millions of Republican newcomers that free-trade deals did more harm than good. He defended Social

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[18] The New York Times, "Who Is Running for President?" The New York Times, January 30, 2015, , accessed October 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/elections/2016-presidential-candidates.html?_r=0.

Security and Medicare benefits. He relentlessly voiced the fear that immigration shreds the economic and cultural well-being of the middle class.[19]

The article later explained, as you might expect, that the seismic demographic shifts in Republican support were already well underway even 10-20 years before the 2016 election. What they also contend is that Mr. Trump excited and mobilized these particular groups in a way no previous candidate had – primarily by fueling and lending credence to their economic angst, as well as their unique social and cultural sensibilities.

C. Social Media, Internet Content, and Online News

With the rise of the internet, media consumption habits have drastically shifted even since President Obama launched his first bid for the White House in 2007. A detailed study conducted by the Pew Research Center concluded, "As of August 2017, 43% of Americans report often getting news online, a share just 7 percentage points lower than the 50% who often get news on television. The gap between the two news platforms was 19 points in early 2016, more than twice as large."[20] Furthermore, two-thirds of American adults reported getting news from social media, a figure which increased 5% from the previous year alone.

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[19] Gerald F. Seib and Patrick O'Connor, "Republicans Rode Waves of Populism Until They Crashed the Party," The Wall Street Journal, October 26, 2016, , accessed November 2017, https://www.wsj.com/articles/republicans-rode-waves-of-populism-until-it-crashed-the-party-1477492356.

[20] Kristen Bialik and Katerina Eva Matsa, "Key Trends in Social and Digital News Media," Pew Research Center, October 04, 2017, , accessed March 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/04/key-trends-in-social-and-digital-news-media/.

Figure 2: Social Media News Consumption[21]

In 2017, two-thirds of U.S. adults get news from social media

% of U.S. adults who get news from social media sites …

	2016	2017
	62%	67
Hardly ever	18%	20
Sometimes	26%	27
Often	18%	20

Source: Survey conducted Aug. 8-21, 2017.
"News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2017"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

About a third say they often see made-up political news online; 51% say they see inaccurate news

% of U.S. adults who often/sometimes/hardly ever or never come across political news online that is …

	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever/ never
Completely made up	32%	39%	26%
Not fully accurate	51	27	19

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 1-4, 2016.
"Many Americans Believe Fake News Is Sowing Confusion"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Facebook, a site which proudly boasted its millionth user in 2004, reported in 2017 that over 2 billion people used the site on at least a monthly basis.[22] Additional data from the Pew study revealed that 68% of all Americans were regular Facebook users and 21% were Twitter users – a substantial number of whom solicited or otherwise consumed political news via one of these social media platforms.[23]

Whereas in television news broadcasting various substantial barriers limit entry, including government oversight, significant cost barriers, and licensing, the internet has no such barriers. Producing and distributing content is as easy as subscribing to it – all anyone needs is a

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ami Sedghi, "Facebook: 10 Years of Social Networking, in Numbers," The Guardian, February 04, 2014, , accessed March 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/feb/04/facebook-in-numbers-statistics.

[23] Shannon Greenwood, Andrew Perrin, and Maeve Duggan, "Social Media Update 2016," Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, November 11, 2016, , accessed March 2018, http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/11/11/social-media-update-2016/.

laptop and internet access to be easily connected to billions of other users. Whereas in years past mainstream media outlets were the only ones capable of reporting on news as it occurred in real time (because they managed the means of news distribution), in the internet age, videos of events are shared in real time from personal phones, witness accounts provided via Facebook statuses, and statements made by public officials via Twitter. More and more, we find television news outlets migrating to online content, and constantly monitoring online channels so they can report on the news as speedily as it develops.

The same infrastructure that hosts treasure troves of human knowledge, allows us to instantly connect with loved ones a world away, and stay in touch with friends by subscribing to a digital community, also empowers people to pursue less wholesome behavior. False information can be easily and regularly crafted, distributed, and propagated by malicious trolls, ideological extremists, or internet pranksters, among a host of other agents. Individuals who subscribe to radical ideologies can easily seek out and belong to communities of other like-minded ideologues who live hundreds or thousands of miles away in real life.

CHAPTER 2: The Trump Campaign

A. First Impressions (The Advent & Rise of the Trump Campaign)

1. The Announcement

On the morning of June 16th, 2015, Donald Trump descended the escalator at Trump Tower in New York and announced his candidacy for President of the United States. After being introduced by his daughter Ivanka, he proceeded to deliver a speech that broadly focused on his business expertise, political outsider status, the policy issues he thought were most important, and his central campaign theme: "Make America Great Again." And while the broad themes may have been predictable, it didn't sound or feel like an ordinary campaign speech. For one thing, it was off the cuff, unscripted, and strangely passionate; Mr. Trump talked about anything and everything, in what seemed to be no particular order, and avoided political correctness with fervor. And for another, many of the soundbites that made their way into mainstream media coverage were provocative in the most objective sense (they sparked debate and public intrigue across the country within a matter of hours). Most notably, a quip loosely pertaining to immigration and border security: "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."[24] The controversial statements, unconventional speaking style, celebrity status, and bizarre escalator entrance were enough to earn him almost a week of virtually uninterrupted media coverage.

At the time, especially in such a wildly crowded field of Republican candidates, Mr. Trump's candidacy was perceived by many as a peculiar, but ultimately innocuous vanity

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[24] "The Most Controversial Quotes from Trump's Campaign," Newsday, January 20, 2017, , accessed March 2018, https://www.newsday.com/news/nation/donald-trump-speech-debates-and-campaign-quotes-1.11206532.

exercise that would only distract from the "serious candidates" for a short time longer. Late night

hosts and political commentators alike celebrated the welcome treasure trove of new material,

most without a serious second thought.

2. *The Trump Phenomenon*

The following excerpt is from a Politico Article written less than two weeks after Mr.

Trump's announcement in New York:

> Real estate tycoon Donald Trump has been gleefully calling attention to a Suffolk University poll showing him in second place among the large 2016 Republican primary field, and whispers of a Trump surge are making the rounds. It might be wise to take a deep breath. The poll, released Tuesday, showed former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush in the lead in New Hampshire, with 14 percent, followed by Trump with 11. The Trump victory dance, or tweet, quickly followed: "the highly respected Suffolk University poll just announced that I am alone in 2nd place in New Hampshire, with Jeb Bust (Bush) in first." It's true that Trump did indeed take second place in that poll. But it's also true that nationally Trump's polling has been on the decline, and that his favorability numbers aren't hot in New Hampshire. The poll also comes far in advance of the New Hampshire GOP primary, to be held early in 2016. Pollsters and GOP consultants in the state chalked up Trump's bump to a mixture of his recent candidacy announcement and the high name recognition that comes from his notoriously flamboyant personality, not to mention his reality-show fame. **"Everybody should calm down," Andy Smith, the director of the University of New Hampshire's Survey Center, said. "What you're seeing is real in the sense that people who are paying any attention to this in the last week or so have seen Donald Trump on TV. That doesn't mean they're going to vote for him."[25]** Right now, the early polls don't reflect how many hands have been shaken by a candidate or how much money has been spent on advertising or how many staffers are on the ground there. **"When you're asking people about who they're going to vote for in the New Hampshire primary, what you're asking is, 'All right, it's months from the primary now: Who have you seen in the newspaper lately?' And that would be Donald Trump,"** Smith added. A deeper look at the Suffolk poll results also cast doubt that this really is some kind of Trump surge. On favorability, the poll found Trump underwater among New Hampshire Republican primary voters, with 37 percent saying they had a favorable view of him, while 49 percent have an unfavorable view. A much smaller 13 percent said they were undecided on him, and just 6 percent said they hadn't heard of him.[26]

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[25] In this instance and in several instances hereafter, I've bolded sections of the text that are of particular note - they were not, however, bolded by the original author or the original publishing body.

[26] Daniel Strauss et al., "Are Trump's Poll Numbers Too Good to Be True?" About Us, June 25, 2015, , accessed March 2018, https://www.politico.com/story/2015/06/donald-trump-poll-numbers-gop-2016-119387.

Mr. Smith's claims are well made. Early polling data can be very misleading and often, especially that early in the campaigning process, is a better measure of a candidate's name recognition or recent press coverage than their actual electability. What neither he nor anyone else anticipated was that Mr. Trump's press coverage wouldn't start to wane after his announcement, as it had for all other candidates. While the other 16 Republicans jostled for fractions of points in the polls, Mr. Trump was feeding the 24-hour news machine exactly what it craved so desperately: something different, something compelling, something entertaining, something newsworthy.

This Trump Phenomenon of continued and uninterrupted coverage continued week, after week, after week. And why not? It's extraordinarily hard to fault cable news networks, producers, and executives for putting what people actually want to watch on TV. If you don't fault them for interrupting your regularly scheduled programming with breaking coverage of a high-speed chase, you certainly shouldn't fault them for broadcasting Republican primary coverage in equal proportion to public interest. Especially to viewers outside of Iowa and New Hampshire, because the primary voters in those states, who consider the responsibility of shaking candidates' hands, hearing their speeches, and hosting them in their homes before anyone else a birthright – aren't making decisions based solely on mainstream media coverage. By and large, they take it upon themselves to participate in the process firsthand – while the rest of the country awaits their verdict.

So how exactly did Mr. Trump manage to stay in the spotlight long enough to get elected?
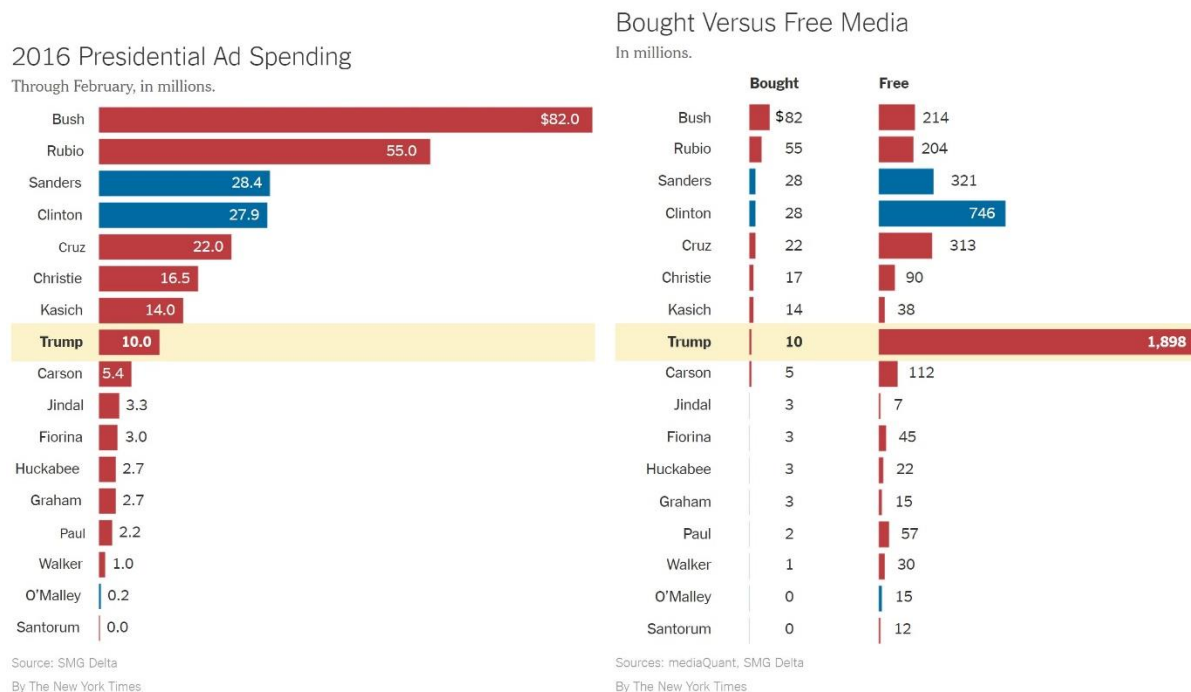
B. Earned (Free) Media

Fast forward from the end of June 2015 to just less than a year after the announcement of

his candidacy in March 2016. At that time, the *New York Times* reported that Mr. Trump had (in

essentially record-breaking fashion) cashed in on the equivalent of nearly $2 billion in "Earned

Media" coverage:

> Like all candidates, he benefits from what is known as earned media: news and
> commentary about his campaign on television, in newspapers and magazines, and
> on social media. Earned media typically dwarfs paid media in a campaign. **The
> big difference between Mr. Trump and other candidates is that he is far
> better than any other candidate – maybe than any candidate ever – at
> earning media.** No one knows this better then mediaQuant, a firm that tracks
> media coverage of each candidate and computes a dollar value based on
> advertising rates. The mentions are weighted by the reach of the media source,
> meaning how many people were likely to see it. The calculation also includes
> traditional media of all types, print, broadcast or otherwise, as well as online-only
> sources like Facebook, Twitter, or Reddit. Its numbers are not quite an apples to
> apples comparison to paid advertising. But they do make one thing clear: **Mr.
> Trump is not just a little better at earning media. He is *way* better than any
> of the other candidates.** Mr. Trump earned $400 million worth of free media last
> month, about what John McCain spent on his entire 2008 presidential campaign.
> Paul Senatori, mediaQuant's chief analytics officer, says that **Mr. Trump "has
> no weakness in any media segments" – in other words, he is strong in every
> type of earned media, from television to Twitter.** [27]

The numbers really do speak for themselves, and the charts below are a very good

representation of the disproportionate earned media payout each candidate received. Governor

Bush's $82 million in paid media spending, which dwarfed the rest of the Republican field, looks

simply ridiculous when you realize that Mr. Trump capitalized on more than twenty times the

media value without spending even an eighth of the money.

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[27] Nicholas Confessore and Karen Yourish, "$2 Billion Worth of Free Media for Donald Trump," The New York
Times, March 15, 2016, , accessed March 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/16/upshot/measuring-donald-
trumps-mammoth-advantage-in-free-media.html.

Figures 3 & 4: Presidential Ad Spending (Earned vs. Free Media)[28]

2016 Presidential Ad Spending
Through February, in millions.

Bush	$82.0
Rubio	55.0
Sanders	28.4
Clinton	27.9
Cruz	22.0
Christie	16.5
Kasich	14.0
Trump	**10.0**
Carson	5.4
Jindal	3.3
Fiorina	3.0
Huckabee	2.7
Graham	2.7
Paul	2.2
Walker	1.0
O'Malley	0.2
Santorum	0.0

Source: SMG Delta
By The New York Times

Bought Versus Free Media
In millions.

	Bought	Free
Bush	$82	214
Rubio	55	204
Sanders	28	321
Clinton	28	746
Cruz	22	313
Christie	17	90
Kasich	14	38
Trump	**10**	**1,898**
Carson	5	112
Jindal	3	7
Fiorina	3	45
Huckabee	3	22
Graham	3	15
Paul	2	57
Walker	1	30
O'Malley	0	15
Santorum	0	12

Sources: mediaQuant, SMG Delta
By The New York Times

The actual broadcasted context of purchased media coverage as it compares to earned (free) media coverage reveals an important consideration. In a *Washington Post* opinion piece published just after the aforementioned revelation entered popular consciousness, author Jennifer Rubin expounded:

> While anti-Trump forces have dropped millions in the past month, understand that is a drop in the bucket of the flood of free air time Trump has received for months. **Moreover, the difference between essentially free air time during the programming and a sprinkling of 30-second ads is tremendous. Trump was the show — for months — on all the cable and network news outlets**. The excuse that "Trump made more news" does not fly when one considers the dozens of interviews Trump was allowed to do by phone and nonstop coverage of campaign rallies that did not differ all that much from one another. This leads to a few conclusions. First, when analyzing "how Trump happened," TV talking heads should be honest and acknowledge their unprecedented role....[29]

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Jennifer Rubin, "Opinion | The Media's $2 Billion Gift to Trump," The Washington Post, March 15, 2016, , accessed March 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2016/03/15/the-medias-2b-gift-to-trump/?utm_term=.b0c8ea9a2db8.

Although the temptation may be to conclude that "all press is good press" (a claim I wholeheartedly hold as sheer fallacy, and feel there is more than enough anecdotal evidence to dispel), the only political axioms we can draw from this with absolute certainty are: some press is better than none at all, being newsworthy is what gets you in the news, and (fittingly in his own words) "nobody, *nobody,* understands 'the game' better than [Trump]."[30] The political logistics alone may have been enough to create this unforeseen window of opportunity, but you simply cannot deny that President Trump is easily one of, if not the best, manipulators of media in our time.

This kind of conception of newsworthiness is not particularly new either. One traditional adage I came across while researching has been a favorite of newspaper editors for some time: "If it bleeds, it leads." Which is to say that, newsworthiness is commonly evaluated using three unfortunate criteria: "rarity, unusualness, and badness." New information has to inspire intrigue to merit sharing. Anything that is either too expected or too ordinary to concern everyday people, even things that are objectively horrible, aren't worth wasting column inches or airtime on.

Thus, in a very crowded field of similar (even somewhat indistinguishable) candidates, some press was better than none at all. Mr. Trump simply got so much, there was barely any left to go around. While a discussion about what role the "fourth estate" should responsibly play in future elections and how current practices could be adapted to better serve the electoral process is probably merited, the truth remains that a 24-hour press machine is constantly hungry. And at some level, it has a responsibility to provide readers/viewers with the content they most want to consume, not necessarily the content that best represents the process or that equally represents all candidates.

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[30] Donald Trump, Sh*t Trump Says: The Most Terrific, Very Beautiful, and Tremendous Tweets and Quotes from Our 45th President (United States: Castle Point Publishing, 2017).

C. Mr. Trump's Communication Strategy

1. Control the Conversation

President Lyndon Johnson was well known for his fierce, sometimes accusedly less than decent, campaigning tactics. "One story (possibly apocryphal) has Johnson once telling his aides to accuse his congressional opponent of sleeping with barnyard animals. When he was questioned as to the veracity of this claim, Johnson reportedly said, 'I know it's not true; I just want to hear him deny it!'"[31] President Johnson, a master of political communication in his own time, was an imposing, dominating, and commanding physical presence who used every means at his disposal to advance that same degree of control beyond physical space. The aforementioned anecdote is at least one good example of the way he craftily manipulated public discourse to his strategic advantage.

Today, this brazen tactic is commonly referred to as "The Dead Cat Strategy" or as "'throwing a dead cat on the table'. As in, if you don't like the way a political debate is going, you hurl the dead cat on the table and suddenly everybody is talking about the cat."[32] It requires no relevant context (in fact, it works better if whatever is used as the "dead cat" bears no relation whatsoever to the previous topic of conversation), no grounded basis in fact (as additional time and energy must then be spent in response, evaluating not only the claim itself but its veracity and possible origins), and can be performed over and over again with relatively consistent results.

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[31] Ross Rosenfeld, "Clinton Should Give Trump the Lyndon Johnson Treatment," TheHill, June 06, 2016, , accessed March 2018, http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/presidential-campaign/282298-clinton-should-give-trump-the-lyndon-johnson.

[32] Dana Milbank, "Opinion | Don't Get Distracted by Trump's 'dead Cats'," The Washington Post, January 25, 2017, accessed March 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2017/01/25/e59a8ab6-e34a-11e6-ba11-63c4b4fb5a63_story.html?utm_term=.914bc6155abd.

While politicians since time immemorial have perfected the art of what we call "pivoting" (answering the question they wish had been asked, rather than the one actually posed to them) in order to avoid giving straight answers, this is decidedly different than that. Whereas pivoting usually has to do with cautious avoidance and a strategic refocusing of attention on issues more in line with a candidates intended message, the "Dead Cat Strategy" is inherently far less intentional, and problematically destructive. It easily derails legitimate, constructive, revealing debate and leaves in its place only whatever frantic, shell-shocked response everyone else can muster in its immediate aftermath:

> "Donald Trump, we have long known, is **a weapon of mass distraction**. He detonates daily, or more often…Distraction has long been Trump's modus operandi. He dominated coverage during the primaries with outrageous pronouncements, thereby depriving his opponents of the media spotlight… It's a constant use of the "dead cat" strategy: throw a dead cat on the table, and prior conversation on any other topic ceases."[33]

And although it is a strategy commonly used by losing candidates as part of a desperate last-ditch effort – its merits certainly speak for themselves. Mr. Trump benefitted from his constant "Dead Cat" proclamations in at least two major capacities: 1) For better or for worse, he controlled the day's topic of conversation almost without interruption from the time he announced his candidacy until the day he was sworn in as the 45th President. And, 2) controversy yields intrigue, which in turn yields attention. This tactic is hugely responsible for Mr. Trump's earned media coverage, which not only put Mr. Trump in the spotlight but also gave a small army of experts, pundits, and other party officials the chance to spin and fill in the gaps every time a new shocking headline or breaking story centered around the Trump Campaign became that day's news.

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[33] Ibid.

You may remember that a 2016 Gallup poll revealed that there were four, common issues of "extreme importance" to members of both parties: terrorism/national security, the economy, employment & jobs, and healthcare. In addition to those common four, Republicans considered the budget deficit, foreign affairs, the size/efficiency of government, taxes, and immigration to also be of *extreme importance.* Interestingly, that perceived degree of importance is inconsistent with affiliated polling data from just a few years prior. This can be largely attributed to the fact that certain issues were actively promoted by the candidates throughout the campaign, and therefore brought to the forefront of a more temporary civic discourse. Let's use Immigration as an example:

In Governor Jeb Bush's campaign announcement, he said "As a candidate, I intend to let everyone hear my message, including the many who can express their love of country in a different language," and then proceeded to address the Spanish speakers who were listening, saying: "Ayúdenos en tener una campaña que les da la bienvenida. Trabajen con nosotros por los valores que compartimos y para un gran futuro que es nuestro para construir para nosotros y nuestros hijos. Júntense a nuestra causa de oportunidad para todos, a la causa de todos que aman la libertad y a la causa noble de los Estados Unidos de América."[34] He was, as the data clearly suggests, poised to stand with the majority of voters who had softened on immigration since the early 1990s – and could have feasibly drawn millions of Hispanic voters into the Republican fold. According to historical Gallup polling data, by and large, anti-immigrant sentiment seems to have faded in the years between 1990 and 2015, and the electorate's interest and/or passion concerning immigration issues waned substantially during the same period. [35]

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[34] Jack Shafer et al., "Full Text of Jeb Bush's Presidential Announcement," About Us, June 15, 2015, , accessed March 07, 2018, https://www.politico.com/story/2015/06/jeb-bush-2016-announcement-full-text-119023.
[35] Gallup, Inc, "Immigration," Gallup.com, , accessed March 2018, http://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx.

We just noted, however, that despite these decades-long trends, immigration was still considered an issue of "extreme importance" to Republican voters in 2016 despite not meriting the classification of "extremely important" in either of the two previous Presidential campaigns.

2. The Propagation of Mr. Trump's Personal Brand

To a fairly extreme degree, Mr. Trump's previously mentioned controversial statements concerning Mexican immigrants were responsible for bringing immigration issues and policy so wholly back into the political mainstream at the beginning of the campaign. Not long after his initial campaign announcement, Mr. Trump announced an even more controversial immigration solution: "I will build a great wall — and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me —and I'll build them very inexpensively. I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words."[36] His pledges to "build the wall" and "make Mexico pay for it" became centerpieces of his campaign, and were almost always among his talking points. Why?

Mr. Trump's proposal to build a border wall and have Mexico pay for it had little if anything to do with immigration policy. Instead, Mr. Trump used the broad context of immigration as a policy issue to highlight the two most important features of his personal brand: "Mr. Trump the Builder" and "Mr. Trump the Deal Maker." He brought to the forefront of our national dialogue perhaps the only broad policy issue that Mr. Trump, given his professional background, was uniquely qualified to act on immediately. Furthermore, the border wall represented nativism, protectionism, American elitism, and an emphasis on law enforcement that were at the heart of Mr. Trump's political ideology. Simply, it was the perfect intersection of the

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[36] Anu Joshi, "Donald Trump's Border Wall -- An Annotated Timeline," The Huffington Post, March 01, 2017, , accessed March 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/donald-trumps-border-wall-an-annotated-timeline_us_58b5f363e4b02f3f81e44d7b.

personal brand/professional expertise (builder, deal-maker, etc.) he needed to make sure everyone understood, and the political ideology he was championing – "America First". The essence of Mr. Trump's communicative genius is the silent advancement of message and vision via incessant, aggressive, unapologetic, captivating, and controversial statements that efficiently shepherd that message and vision into mainstream consciousness.

3. "Attack, Attack, Attack – Never Defend"

Roger Stone is a long-time Washington consultant, lobbyist, and strategist who advised President Trump while he developed his early campaign strategy. While it's unclear exactly how much of Mr. Trump's behavior can be attributed to Mr. Stone's council, this much is sure: Mr. Stone's controversial political philosophy includes a collection of truisms that he's dubbed "Stone's Rules" – among them "Attack, Attack, Attack – *Never* Defend", a tactic Mr. Trump has employed without fail since the initiation of his campaign.[37]

In a sense, it's a take on the old adage "the best defense is a good offense". Wars aren't won without offensive campaigns, games aren't won if neither team scores, and so on and so forth. But in a political context, it has more to do with expanding the range of possible outcomes in any given situation. If one candidate attacks another, for instance, the best case defensive outcome is face-saving or damage control, but the best case offensive outcome is political point scoring.

Throughout the campaign, it seemed no individual or group would go unnoticed, and uncommented on by Mr. Trump. He attacked nearly every other Republican candidate during the primary, every Democratic candidate throughout the entire process, nearly every mainstream

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[37] Manohla Dargis, "Review: 'Get Me Roger Stone' Profiles a President Whisperer in Peacock Mode," The New York Times, May 11, 2017, , accessed February 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/11/movies/get-me-roger-stone-review-donald-trump.html.

media outlet, a multitude of other lawmakers and celebrities, and the list goes on and on. But two specific examples help illustrate how effective this strategy really was.

First, in early October 2016, about a month before the election, a previously unaired Access Hollywood tape from 2005 was released in which Mr. Trump made several especially vulgar comments. In particular, the standout "grab 'em by the pussy" instantly made headline news (especially in light of other comments attributed to Mr. Trump during the campaign and elsewhere, that led many to question Mr. Trump's treatment of and attitudes towards women). Instead of responding with a denial (which realistically would have been impossible given the nature of the video), or a formal apology (in which he might have clarified that he did not harbor misogynistic views and was sorry for having made the comments in the video), Mr. Trump and the rest of his campaign team went on the offensive by touting the whole episode as nothing more than "locker room talk". Then, they began pivoting to a more familiar Trump talking point: President Bill Clinton's sexual misconduct. The gist of their message was essentially: "Amazing that *Crooked Hillary* can do a hit ad on me concerning women when her husband was the WORST abuser of woman in U.S. political history!" (Trump Twitter post, May 17, 2016). Whereas the revelation could have been a campaign-ending scandal, Mr. Trump's refusal to stop playing offense effectively minimized the damage and allowed him to score a few political points on his opponent.

The second example is Mr. Trump's relentless claims that he would only consider the results of the election fair, uncompromised, and accurate if he was named the victor. During the presidential debate in Las Vegas on October 19, 2016, Mr. Trump was asked to clarify his position, which he did: "I would like to promise and pledge to all of my voters and supporters and to all of the people of the United States that I will totally accept the results of this great and

historic presidential election. *IF I WIN*."[38] While it's not exactly clear what this type of message was intended to accomplish, it had the effect of firing up his most ardent supporters and capping off a campaign absolutely fueled by anti-establishment, anti-corruption sentiment. Rather than accept the defensive position of a candidate likely to lose, he continued taking jabs at everyone and everything in sight (including the process itself) up until the eleventh hour.

Campaigns unsurprisingly reward fighters, and Mr. Trump was nothing if not a fighter to the bitter end.

4. Negativity & "Punching Upward"

In an article titled *Twitter Taunts and Tirades: Negative Campaigning in the Age of Trump,* researchers were able to systematically prove a long-held political theory that negative campaigning was largely proportional to a campaign's perceived success, a phenomenon they deemed, "Punching Upward: Asymmetric Negativity by Relative Standing":

> Even a casual observer of the 2016 primaries will hardly be surprised that eventual nominee Donald Trump dominates the field as both author and target of negative tweets. His legendary social media vitriol has even been immortalized in the New York Times, which has published a "complete list" of "people, places, and things Trump has insulted on Twitter." And yet, despite issuing some of the more jaw-dropping tweets, Trump has in fact remained on the receiving end of more barbs than he doles out, consistent with our expectation that front-runners should be attacked more than they themselves attack opponents. Altogether, 72% of negative tweets are directed from a lower polling candidate toward a higher polling opponent.[39]

"Going Negative" is a common turning point in political campaigns, and it's usually something of an unofficial benchmark representing the realization by a campaign team that negative campaigning may be their only means of closing the gap and ensuring their own

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[38] *The Most Terrific, Very Beautiful, and Tremendous Tweets and Quotes from Our 45th President*
[39] Justin H. Gross and Kaylee T. Johnson, "Twitter Taunts and Tirades: Negative Campaigning in the Age of Trump," PS: Political Science & Politics 49, no. 04 (2016): , doi:10.1017/s1049096516001700.

victory. Like a distressed swimmer grasping at the lifeguard who's trying to save them, sometimes it's just easier to try bringing others down than to lift yourself up.

Mr. Trump was considered an underdog from the very beginning – experts early on called a Trump presidency not just highly improbable, but simply impossible. He acted, as the ultimate underdog might, by "punching upward" from the day he announced his candidacy on. Interestingly though, it didn't take long for Mr. Trump to assume the role of frontrunner as far as negative campaigning was concerned. He certainly dealt out more than his fair share of negative comments, tweets, etc. but was also the recipient of other candidates' negativity to an even greater degree.

Leading candidates, by these researchers' analysis, are likely to face two to three negative comments from a major political personality for every one they dole out. By this measure, Mr. Trump was being treated like a frontrunner just days after announcing his candidacy. Every time a high profile Democrat went on television and denounced one of Mr. Trump's statements, it only had the effect of elevating Mr. Trump's viability as a candidate among Republican primary voters. Later in the campaign, while Mr. Trump was still "punching upward" with the same relentless fervor he had maintained for over a year, these seemingly petty conflicts still had the effect of elevating Mr. Trump's political stock – and more importantly, his standing in the polls.

5. Expect the Unexpected

It may go without saying, but Mr. Trump's uncanny ability to continue delivering shock value was a cornerstone of his media success. While some of his controversial statements were far less popular than others (and reflected far more poorly on him than others), his off-the-cuff speaking style and unfailingly outrageous proclamations made him impossible to ignore. No one was immune to Mr. Trump's criticism (he even criticized Senator John McCain's status as a war

hero, saying "I like people who weren't captured"[40]), his campaign narrative never grew boring

or redundant, and as his momentum grew (first with his primary victories, then by securing the

party nomination, and so on) so too did his viability. In short, it was the exact opposite of the

ideal, traditional political campaign where everyone can anticipate in advance what will happen.

In this case, no one knew what to expect – it was "like watching a man walk on a tightrope."[41]

D. Mr. Trump's Rhetorical Toolkit

1. Brevity

At the consecration of Soldiers' National Cemetery, which would later become

Gettysburg National Cemetery, Edward Everett delivered a two-hour address – a 13,508 word

behemoth of a speech – that he felt aptly praised and memorialized the thousands of dead Union

soldiers who would claim the cemetery as their final resting place. Mr. Everett, an extremely

accomplished orator who had served as the president of Harvard University, a member of the

U.S. House of Representatives, a U.S. Senator, the Governor of Massachusetts, and the U.S.

Secretary of State, was to be succeeded in the program by President Lincoln who was slated to

deliver only brief "dedicatory remarks."[42] Following the hours-long keynote, President Lincoln

arose to deliver an address that lasted no longer than three minutes. In a letter to the President the

following day, Mr. Everett remarked "I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as

near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes."[43] In return,

President Lincoln gifted Mr. Everett one of only five original copies of his Gettysburg Address,

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[40] *The Most Terrific, Very Beautiful, and Tremendous Tweets and Quotes from Our 45th President*
[41] *Get Me Roger Stone*
[42] Bob Greene, "The Forgotten Gettysburg Addresser," The Wall Street Journal, June 21, 2013, , accessed March 2018, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323566804578553273901847386.
[43] Ibid.

and humbly responded that he was "pleased to know that, in [Mr. Everett's] judgment, the little [he] did say was not entirely a failure."[44]

Brevity is as much a rhetorical tool as it is a courtesy to the listening audience. If a person is capable of delivering in two minutes the same zeal, affection, reverence, and meaning as takes his colleague two full hours – surely he is the better orator of the two. Common sense and research alike tell us that when meaning is conveyed briefly listeners remember, understand with clarity, and are able to repeat with accuracy far better than when it is not. [45] [46]

The means of communication at his disposal further enhance the effectiveness of Mr. Trump's brief statements. Twitter for instance, an outlet Mr. Trump utilizes with such frequency and ferocity that he has earned the unofficial title of "Tweeter in Chief," isn't intended to be a forum for nuanced debate. Instead it limits every user (regardless of stature or following) to 140 characters per post in an intentional effort to limit content to its most essential elements. It is purposefully void of any opportunity to expand beyond a messages' most basic, critical sentiment. And, as Mr. Trump himself has said, "Many people have said I'm the world's greatest writer of 140 character sentences." (Trump Twitter post, July 21, 2014). [47]

It makes sense that the first real "social media President" excels at perfecting brief, un-nuanced content, commonly targets other high-profile figures to draw attention to that content (colloquially deemed "@-ing" another user), and incorporates controversial subject material that immediately fuels widespread public response (guarantees his content will be "trending"). Simply put, and I mean this in the most respectful and objective terms, President Trump is

[44] Ibid.

[45] Luntz, Frank. (2007). *Words that work: It's not what you say, it's what people hear.* New York: Hyperion. (pages 1-33).

[46] Lehrman, Robert. (2010). *The political speechwriter's companion.* Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press. (pages 71-110).

[47] *The Most Terrific, Very Beautiful, and Tremendous Tweets and Quotes from Our 45th President*

human clickbait – all at once sensationalist, outlandish, controversial, transparently self-promotional, but ultimately really good at drawing and keeping people's attention. For all of these reasons, we may well conclude that Mr. Trump's 2016 bid will undoubtedly inspire other candidates in the future to act more intentionally in accordance with what will draw internet traffic to their campaigns.

2. Binaries and Antithesis

All politicians aim to boil down their complex policy stances into easier to swallow soundbites. It's unreasonable to ask every voter to become an expert on every policy issue, so traditionally, policy positions are reduced to their value proposition. ("For this much additional tax revenue, your quality of life stands to benefit this much," etc.) Usually, it's the Spark Notes version of a plan or policy we can understand in plain English – and then are afterward constantly assured has been reviewed by experts – portrayed in either the best or worst possible light.

Mr. Trump excels at framing issues in even simpler, binary terms – in "Trump terms" everything is either one thing or its opposite. In doing so, he is able to frame not just the presentation of a complex position as simpler than it actually is in order to market it, but also to portray the issue itself as simpler than it really is.

Unsurprisingly, both social media and cable news are particularly conducive to this tactic. Grounded exaggeration is crucial to establishing an effective binary construction, and these two media are notorious for their ability to amplify. Binaries shape dialogue differently, and are especially attractive to candidates in political campaigns because they needn't be any one thing in particular, they need only be the ambiguous antithesis to any negatively perceived thing. President Obama's 2008 "Change" campaign is a good example. He benefitted from a genuine

public perception that he would and could deliver "change", it didn't need to be more specific than that – because at the time, President Bush's approval rating was so low that even the Republican candidates were doing everything they could to distance themselves.

While undeniably an effective communication tactic, especially in the internet age it is also a very divisive force. This is the phenomenon that forces millions of people to the unfair conclusion that everyone who voted for Mr. Trump was racist, or that everyone who voted for Secretary Clinton only did so because she was a woman. These arguments are not at all fair, but within the context of a binary construction, they are logical.

We can also attribute the advent of the term "fake news" to this tactic. Conservative candidates have long lamented the "liberal media bias" – claiming that, whether an explicitly intentional practice or not, facts are commonly distorted by mainstream media outlets somewhere between where/when events happen and where/when they are reported on to a wider audience in a fashion that unfairly disadvantages them. If we reduce the term "liberal media bias" (as it's usually used) to its most basic elements, construct a binary, and then exaggerate– voilà, "fake news". The heart of the argument is exactly the same – "what the reporters are telling you doesn't represent exactly what happened", and the train of thought from one to the other is pretty easy to follow (news that isn't biased is impartial, impartial news is grounded in facts rather than opinions, facts represent what really happened, if it's not factual it must be fictional, fiction = fake), but "fake news" does the job better. It's direct, to the point, unapologetic, simple, a statement of fact, easy to remember, and catchy. Therefore, it makes sense that if a candidate doesn't think they are being reported on fairly, rather than say "the facts were distorted by a liberal media bias", they ought to instead just call it like they see it – "its fake news". And then elevate the sources they perceive to be the opposite – "real news".

While a full-fledged discussion of "fake news" is decidedly outside the purview of this analysis, this example is extremely illustrative of how this tactic can be used to change the framework of a conversation and effectively force people to adopt a simpler, but more extreme position than they originally held.

3. *Caricatures*

A caricature is "a picture, description, or imitation of a person or thing in which certain striking characteristics are exaggerated in order to create a comic or grotesque effect." It's the bread and butter of cartoonists, satirists, and comedians everywhere. Often harmless, they help us identify and make light of public figures out of context. A good example is the comic enlargement of President Obama's ears, or the painful elongation of his "long pauses", every time he was portrayed in a political cartoon or on Saturday Night Live.

However, outside the context of satire this practice can be employed to far different ends. Rather than calling attention to a person's most recognizable physical features or idiosyncrasies to identify or poke fun at them, a caricature can be crafted, disseminated, and then exploited to limit a person's public image only to the confines of that caricature. A caricature of this type takes advantage of existing beliefs or perceptions, exaggerates a handful of them, and then quietly (but very effectively) makes everything else a person says, does, or believes in some way a function of that caricature. Plainly, it can replace total reality with total perception.

In politics, candidates' (especially Presidential candidates') flaws are exploited by their opposition as a means of revealing, aggrandizing, or otherwise commenting on, flaws they perceive in the opposing party as a whole. During President Obama's 2008 bid for the Presidency and during his eight year tenure in the White House, his opponents constantly called attention to his youth, relative inexperience, naiveté, perceived elitism and haughtiness, etc. as a

way of commenting on the those same features in the Democratic Party. For a little under a decade, President Obama embodied the Democratic Party – his failings were party failings, his mistakes were party mistakes, his vices perceived as Democratic vices – and the same has been true of every sitting President and major party candidate since Washington. However, before this election, no individual candidate had ever so plainly and explicitly conceived, shaped, and disseminated as damaging a caricature of his opponent as President Trump did throughout his 2016 campaign.

In April 2016, after piloting the language in a few minor campaign speeches, Mr. Trump took to Twitter and put a name on the caricature of his Democratic opponent that had seemingly been just beneath the surface all along: "*Crooked Hillary* Clinton is spending a fortune on ads against me. I am the one person she doesn't want to run against. Will be such fun!"[48] For better or worse, the name stuck and became a centerpiece of Mr. Trump's incessant attacks on Secretary Clinton. It perpetuated, and brought to the forefront again and again, the scandals that plagued Secretary Clinton throughout her candidacy (the emails, Benghazi, etc.). Furthermore, it made her out to be a typical, corrupt, Washington insider who had already fallen victim to the compromising pressures of special interests and government bureaucracy. By virtue of antithesis, Mr. Trump used this perception to bolster his appeal to the many disgruntled Americans who felt left behind by what they perceived to be "business as usual" in the Nation's capital.

Mr. Trump's employment of this especially successful communicative strategy didn't start or end with Secretary Clinton, or even with his election to the Presidency. Since 2015, President Trump has assigned similar reproachful nicknames to his rivals in every sphere. Among them, "Crooked Hillary" (Secretary Hillary Clinton), "Al Frankenstein" (Senator Al

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[48] *The Most Terrific, Very Beautiful, and Tremendous Tweets and Quotes from Our 45th President*

Franken), "Pocahontas" (Senator Elizabeth Warren), "Sloppy Steve" (Senior Advisor Steve

Bannon), "Little Rocket Man" (North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un), "Little Marco" (Senator

Marco Rubio), "Lyin' Ted" (Senator Ted Cruz), "Low Energy Jeb" (Governor Jeb Bush), and

"The Failing New York Times",[49] just to name a few.

In a similar vein, members of both parties advanced rather unfortunate caricaturizations

of their opponent's bases as well. In September 2016, nearly 60 days before the election was to

take place, Secretary Clinton said the following: "You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you

could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the *basket of deplorables*….The racist,

sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamaphobic—you name it. And unfortunately there are

people like that. And he has lifted them up."[50] This sweeping, unnuanced claim became a major

point of resentment for many voters, especially those who considered themselves to be casually

among Mr. Trump's supporters, and widened a partisan gap that had already been broadening for

some time. This notion of the archetypal Trump supporter (uneducated, willingly ignorant,

resolutely intolerant, overtly bigoted, etc.) also became a focal point of the campaign narrative,

both before and after the election actually took place – and was an objectively unfair way to

represent the overwhelming majority of the 62 million Americans who eventually voted for the

President. On the other side, Mr. Trump advanced a stigma against "liberal *elites*" – a title that at

one time probably would have been used to describe Mr. Trump (a New York billionaire) – but

was instead twisted and used to refer to a broad swath of especially urban-dwelling, left-leaning

Americans who were allegedly "looking down on" the heartland, the less educated, and the more

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[49] Kaitlyn Schallhorn, "Trump's Nicknames for Rivals, from 'Rocket Man' to 'Pocahontas'," Fox News, April 17, 2018, , accessed April 2018, http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/04/17/trumps-nicknames-for-rivals-from-rocket-man-to-pocahontas.html.
[50] Katie Reilly, "Hillary Clinton Transcript: 'Basket of Deplorables' Comment," Time, September 10, 2016, , accessed March 2018, http://time.com/4486502/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables-transcript/.

traditional. Plainly, "liberal elites" were people like President Obama, or people who supported President Obama, and who had seen their views and beliefs represented in the White House for a full eight years to the perceived detriment of many "ordinary, working Americans" who were still struggling at the end of President Obama's tenure in the Oval Office.

4.   Word Association & Redundancy

A post-election study of Mr. Trump's public remarks found that the most commonly used words/phrases throughout his candidacy were: "win/winning", "stupid", "weak", "loser", "we", "they", "politically correct", "moron", "smart", "tough", "dangerous", "bad", "lightweight", "amazing", "huge", "tremendous", "terrific", "zero", "out of control", "classy", "M.A.G.A.", "total disaster", "many – many", "millions and millions", "billions and billions", and "believe me."[51] These characteristic words and phrases, as well as the caricature-inspired nicknames just discussed, were repeated ad nauseam. While other candidates approached each new speaking engagement or public statement by focusing on a newly adapted collection of relevant talking points, Mr. Trump employed these simple words and phrases with such relentless frequency that they quickly entered the public lexicon and started informing voter's perceptions of the election, the candidates, and the policy issues being discussed. In no time at all they were cornerstones of pro-Trump punditry, the rallying cries of his most fervent supporters, and the universal constant linking every water-cooler Trump impersonation from sea to shining sea.

Partly as a function of Mr. Trump's off-the-cuff speaking style, but more as a function of his intentional brevity, redundancy, and plainness, another analysis of Mr. Trump's public remarks found that his dialogue with the American electorate was being conducted at what the

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[51] "Donald Trump's 20 Most Frequently Used Words," One-dimensional Dictionary Definition | One-dimensional Defined, , accessed March 15, 2018, http://www.yourdictionary.com/slideshow/donald-trump-20-most-frequently-used-words.html.

researchers deemed "a fourth grade level". By comparison, the research team concluded that President Obama (who ranked third highest of the last 15 Presidents according to the same measure) had conducted his dialogue with the American people at, on average, "a ninth grade level".[52] While this may seem a rather unusual measure by which to evaluate a President's rhetoric, the crux of their findings is still easily understood – the difference between a 4th grade level and a 9th grade level is substantial, and that difference says something important about how much each president values nuance.

Over a relatively short period of time, Mr. Trump was able to alter the connotation of already common phrases by simply repeating his characteristic taglines over and over again. But more importantly, he was able to alter public perception in his favor by conditioning voters to hear one thing and immediately think of another. The effectiveness of this particular tactic became strikingly clear when, just several months before the November election, "Americans interviewed by Gallup associated Trump most with the words "speech," "president," and "immigration." Meanwhile, the most dominant words associated with Clinton were "emails," "lie," and "scandal," suggesting voters had heard the most about the FBI investigation into her use of a private email server while she was Secretary of State."[53]

5. Relativism

"Moral relativism is the position that moral or ethical propositions do not reflect objective and/or universal moral truths, but instead make claims relative to social, cultural, historical or personal circumstances." Relativism in a political context, on the other hand, is

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[52] Nina Burleigh, "Trump Speaks at Fourth-grade Level, Lowest of Last 15 U.S. Presidents, New Analysis Finds," Newsweek, January 11, 2018, , accessed March 2018, http://www.newsweek.com/trump-fire-and-fury-smart-genius-obama-774169.

[53] Rebecca Harrington, "What Americans Said They'd Heard about the Candidates May Hold the Key to Donald Trump's Big Upset," Business Insider, November 10, 2016, , accessed April 2018, http://www.businessinsider.com/gallup-candidate-word-clouds-donald-trump-hillary-clinton-emails-2016-11.

essentially the idea that things in the public sphere (candidates, legislation, etc.) are functionally judged only in accordance to their relative standing to other things of the same type. In the simplest possible terms, candidates don't really need to be good, they don't even need to be not bad, they just need to be better than each other.

During particularly nasty campaigns, terms like "the lesser of two evils" get thrown around a lot. Voters feel a duty to participate in the democratic process or to support policies they believe in, but are disillusioned by the names on the ballot. Once a candidate's moral high ground (or at least the public perception of their character) starts to wane, they commonly respond by calling their opponent's character into question as well, thus minimizing the damage that otherwise could have been done in terms of relative standing.
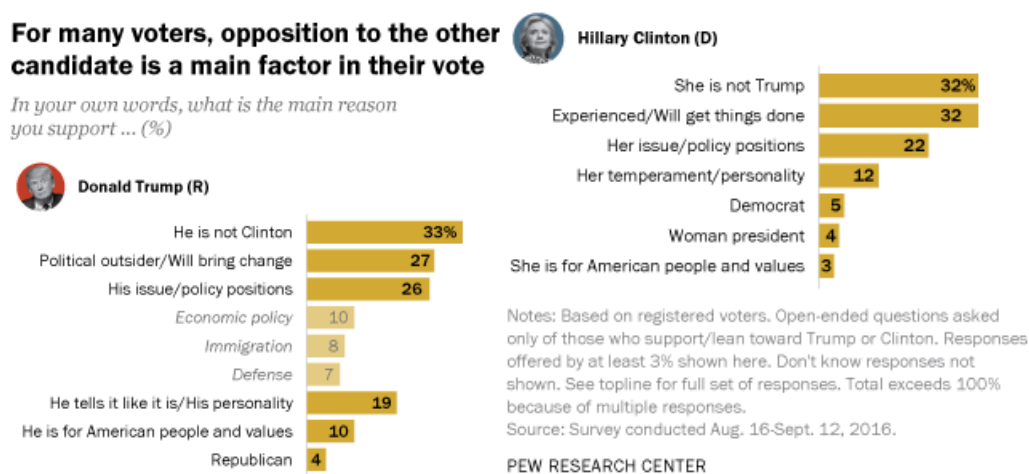
The difference between absolute statements of fact and comparative statements of fact is essentially this: One might say that an act is "bad" but in doing so must necessarily formulate or assume some system whereby acts can be interpreted according to their inherent, absolute "goodness" or "badness". Alternatively, one might limit the scope of their interpretation only to deciding whether an act is better or worse than other acts, thus using only relative standing and comparison to decide what should or should not be considered "good" or "bad". As an instrument of political rhetoric, the latter allows candidates to absolve themselves of responsibility for past grievances by contextualizing their actions within the only framework that seems to matter – relative to their opponent.

A perfect example of Mr. Trump's employment of this tactic was his response to the Access Hollywood scandal we already discussed. Rather than defending himself by claiming what he said and did was objectively defensible, or apologizing (thus admitting that what he said and did was *not* objectively defensible), he immediately went to work contextualizing his actions

in relative terms by calling attention to President Bill Clinton's controversial history of sexual misconduct. In doing so he re-framed the question in voters' minds. What was at first a question of right or wrong soon became instead a question of better or worse.

This tactic works because the fundamental issue in any campaign is "Which candidate is best?" After all, the whole point of having an election in the first place is to give the people an opportunity to answer that exact question. While, as with all other types of "negative campaigning", a campaign dialogue that relies on only relative comparison is virtually guaranteed to force the quality of campaign discourse into a downward tailspin, relativism's effectiveness as a rhetorical tool cannot be denied. By employing this strategy, Mr. Trump not only recovered from a host of scandals throughout his campaign but was also able to use the questions they raised and narratives they fostered to attack his opponents. Despite his own vices, scandals, and improprieties, he cast Secretary Clinton as such a villain that by the end of the campaign, the leading, named factor that informed voters' preference between Mr. Trump and Secretary Clinton was active opposition to the other candidate:

Figure 5: Voters' Decision Making Criteria (September 2016)[54]

For many voters, opposition to the other candidate is a main factor in their vote

In your own words, what is the main reason you support ... (%)

Donald Trump (R)

He is not Clinton	33%
Political outsider/Will bring change	27
His issue/policy positions	26
Economic policy	10
Immigration	8
Defense	7
He tells it like it is/His personality	19
He is for American people and values	10
Republican	4

Hillary Clinton (D)

She is not Trump	32%
Experienced/Will get things done	32
Her issue/policy positions	22
Her temperament/personality	12
Democrat	5
Woman president	4
She is for American people and values	3

Notes: Based on registered voters. Open-ended questions asked only of those who support/lean toward Trump or Clinton. Responses offered by at least 3% shown here. Don't know responses not shown. See topline for full set of responses. Total exceeds 100% because of multiple responses.
Source: Survey conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016.

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[54] Hannah Fingerhut, "In Their Own Words: Why Voters Support – and Have Concerns About – Clinton and Trump," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, September 21, 2016, , accessed April 2018

CHAPTER 3: Voters' Unspoken Evaluative Criteria

The last major consideration I'll include as part of this analysis is the evolution of voters' unspoken evaluative criteria in the years and months leading up to the 2016 election, especially as they relate to voters' personal identities. Let's begin with this insight:

A. Identity Crisis

> To understand Trump's victory in the Electoral College, one must look at developments that occurred well before 2016. More precisely, we should look back about eight years, to the initial election of Barack Obama. Many hoped that Obama's election would inaugurate a "post-racial" America. Instead, Obama's candidacy and then presidency made race matter more. As Obama said in his 10 January 2017 farewell address: "After my election, there was talk of a post-racial America. Such a vision, however well-intended, was never realistic. For race remains a potent and often divisive force in our society." **Divisions over race were palpable throughout Obama's presidency. Surveys revealed that opinions on virtually every issue connected to Obama became associated with people's race and, among white voters, with attitudes toward African Americans.[55]**

But it's not just the attitudes or perceptions of voters that changed along racial lines, it was their allegiances as well. The demographic constitution of each party – each party's racial alignment – shifted in accordance with these divisions over identity.

> To understand how Trump won the Electoral College, we must consider…increasing racial and ethnic polarization in the Democratic and Republican party coalitions. Particularly during Obama's presidency, voters increasingly sorted themselves by party on the basis of identities and views related to race and ethnicity. This shift transformed both parties well before Trump's 16 June 2015 ride down the escalator in New York's Trump Tower to announce his candidacy. The shift also set the stage for…**the centering of both campaigns on issues that tapped into Americans' racial, ethnic, and social identities and attitudes. An identity-focused framing of the election heightened Trump's appeal to white voters, and particularly those without a college education—demographics with a strong presence in key swing states. The presidential election thus also became a referendum on who Americans believed they were, and how they felt about those who were different from them.**

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[55] John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck, "How Trump Lost and Won," Journal of Democracy 28, no. 2 (2017): , doi:10.1353/jod.2017.0022.
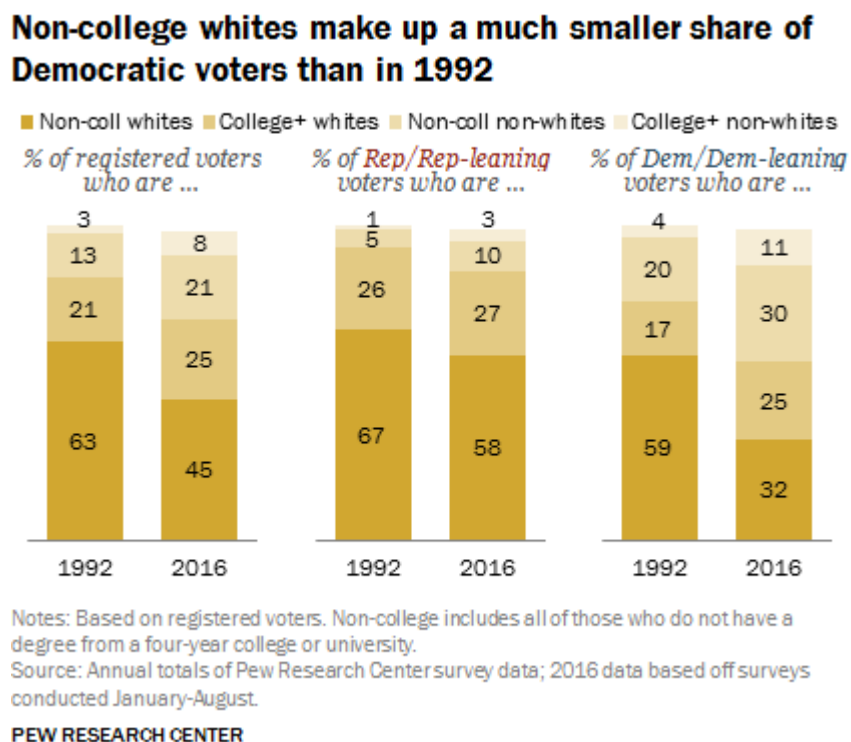
Certainly race was not the only issue in this election, and our earlier discussion of the economic,

social, and political context in which the election occurred can be used to further inform our

insights to that end. But it is interesting that we can so readily identify correlations between

voters' racial identities and their political decision making.

Figure 6: Race and Party Identification[56]

Racial and ethnic profile of voters
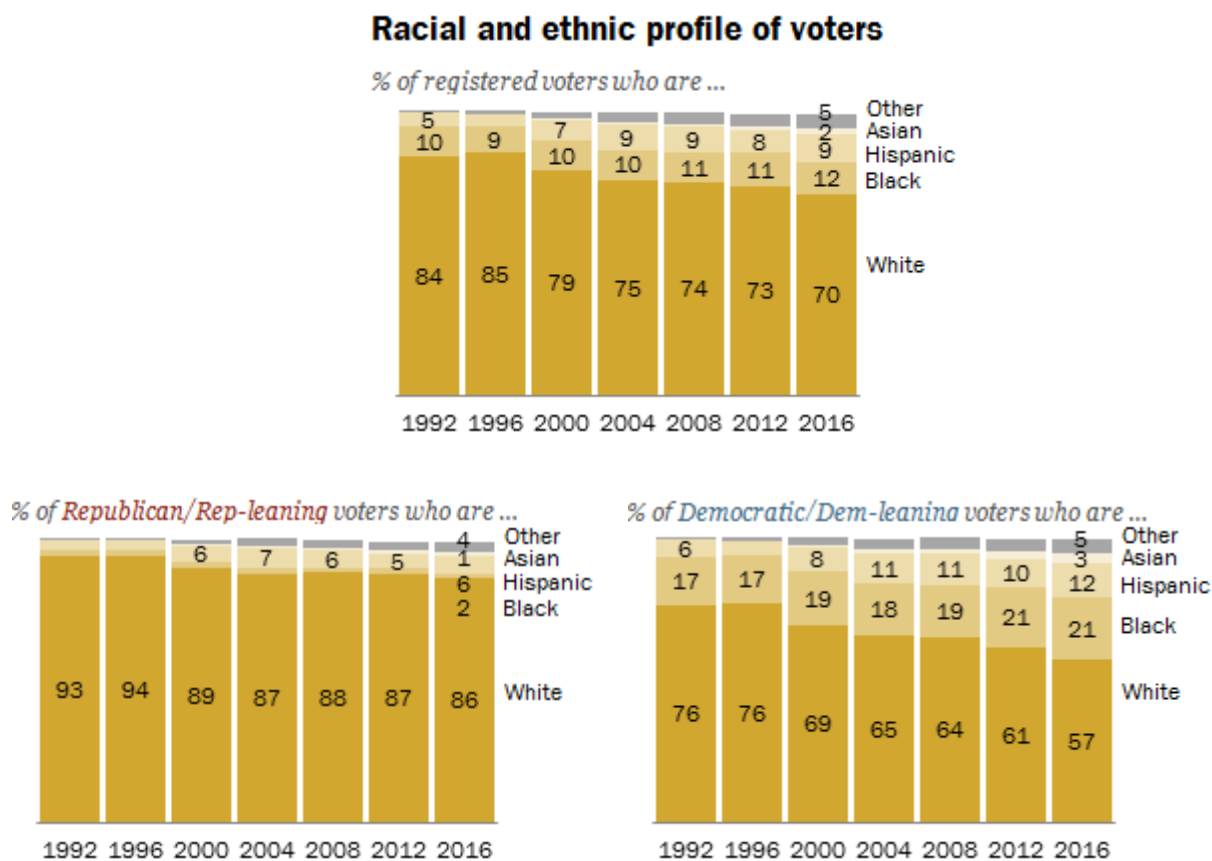
Alongside drastic, long-term demographic shifts in the racial constitution of our electorate, so

too have there been profound shifts in partisan allegiance along racial lines – most profoundly of

all among white voters.

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[56] D'Vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont, "10 Demographic Trends That Are Shaping the U.S. and the World," Pew Research Center, March 31, 2016, , accessed April 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/.

Figure 7: Partisan Shifts Among White Voters (1992-2016) [57]

Non-college whites make up a much smaller share of Democratic voters than in 1992

■ Non-coll whites ■ College+ whites ■ Non-coll non-whites ■ College+ non-whites

% of registered voters who are ...

	1992	2016
College+ non-whites	3	8
Non-coll non-whites	13	21
College+ whites	21	25
Non-coll whites	63	45

% of Rep/Rep-leaning voters who are ...

	1992	2016
College+ non-whites	1	3
Non-coll non-whites	5	10
College+ whites	26	27
Non-coll whites	67	58

% of Dem/Dem-leaning voters who are ...

	1992	2016
College+ non-whites	4	11
Non-coll non-whites	20	30
College+ whites	17	25
Non-coll whites	59	32

Notes: Based on registered voters. Non-college includes all of those who do not have a degree from a four-year college or university.
Source: Annual totals of Pew Research Center survey data; 2016 data based off surveys conducted January-August.

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These demographic and partisan shifts are what made President Trump's message so functionally successful. The white working-class voters in key swing states who made the difference in the election responded extremely favorably to what Mr. Trump said and how he said it.

Their growing discontentment with globalist policy-making, which had compromised their job security and economic well-being, understandably predisposed them to the same nativism Mr. Trump championed. The societal constructions that historically offered them elevated status on the basis of race, regardless of profession or class, seemed to be under siege – which made Mr. Trump's profoundly conservative message, "Make America Great Again" all the more appealing. And assurances from Mr. Trump that in the event of his victory, a champion

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[57] Shiva Maniam, "2. Party Affiliation among Voters: 1992-2016," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, September 13, 2016, , accessed March 2018, http://www.people-press.org/2016/09/13/2-party-affiliation-among-voters-1992-2016/.

of conservative values would be nominated to replace Justice Scalia had the effect of making a

vote for any other candidate irreconcilable with many people's deeply held religious beliefs.

> Ultimately, the election was a manifestation of the country's broader identity crisis. As the United States changes demographically, socially, and culturally, Americans' political identities are increasingly driven by competing understandings of what their country is and ought to be—a multicultural society that welcomes newcomers and embraces its growing diversity, or a more provincial place that recalls an earlier era of traditional gender roles and white Christian dominance in economic and cultural life.[58]

To say these voters' decision making wasn't forward thinking is to drastically misrepresent their

intentions. They cast their votes not out of some misplaced yearning to recall a time gone by, but

instead to promote a specific vision of our nation's future: Mr. Trump's.

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[58] John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck, "How Trump Lost and Won," Journal of Democracy 28, no. 2 (2017): , doi:10.1353/jod.2017.0022.

CHAPTER 4: What's Next?

Having developed some understanding of both the context in which the election took place, and the strategies/tactics that were most effective in stewarding even controversial positions into mainstream consciousness, we may now be able to make some grounded predictions.

A. The 2020 Presidential Election

As surely as Spring follows Winter, no sooner have the ballots in one presidential election been cast than speculation about the next election begins. However, without getting overly speculative or too far away from disciplined analysis, there are several conclusions we can reasonably draw about what the 2020 election is likely to look like based on the trends we've already discussed.

1. Social Media

Let's begin by briefly recalling the changes that have occurred in news media consumption and several of the trends that are likely to continue shaping its evolution. As of 2017, two-thirds of American adults reported regularly getting at least some of their news from social media sites like Facebook or Twitter – which represented a 5% increase over the year before.[59] This trend is likely to continue for at least the next three years, which means that by November 2020, social media is likely to play an even larger role in our democratic processes than it already does. Although sites like Facebook aren't sworn to protect free speech or ensure an unbiased presentation of content, they have come under fire since the 2016 election for not doing enough to prevent the rapid dissemination of falsified information, and for not doing

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[59] Facebook Fact Sheet.

enough to protect their users from people and institutions capable of maliciously exploiting social media platforms to achieve political ends.

In response to these criticisms, Facebook and others have already started making changes that limit the propagation of false information and provide users with the tools they need to distinguish propaganda pieces from real journalism. Even if the number of people who get their news from social media sites continues to increase, the hope is that these safeguards will drastically reduce the instances of misconduct.[60] While internet content could never be regulated like television, radio, or newspaper content – more and more people agree that the sites/platforms themselves have a responsibility to promote well-intentioned fact sharing, implement reasonable security measures to safeguard users' information, etc. and, by and large, the sites have accepted that responsibility. Unfortunately, as far as the 2020 election is concerned, all we can say with certainty is that these changes are likely to make an impact – but there's no telling yet what the exact nature or scope of that impact will be.

2. *The Curse of The Sitting President*

In the immediate aftermath of the 2016 Presidential Election, especially in the first 24 hours or so after the results were announced, one prevailing public sentiment was uncertainty. One unusual though fairly telling and quantitative measure of this was the sudden stock market depreciation that occurred on election night. "…As the results started indicating an increasing likelihood of a Trump victory, markets went haywire. Near midnight, futures for the benchmark S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average indexes fell by over 4%."[61] The market quickly

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[60] Market Realist, , accessed April 2018, https://marketrealist.com/2018/01/looking-facebooks-growing-focus-artificial-intelligence.
[61] Andy Kiersz, "Here's Why Stocks Have Been on a Tear since Trump's Election," Business Insider, December 12, 2016, , accessed April 2018, http://www.businessinsider.com/stock-markets-after-trump-election-2016-12#stocks-have-climbed-to-a-record-but--1.

rallied back and ascended to near record highs within several weeks, but only after President

Obama had a chance to invite then President-elect Trump to the White House and publicly

confirm his steadfast commitment to a civil and cordial transition between their administrations.

Perhaps even more importantly, Secretary Clinton delivered her concession and President-Elect

Trump had the opportunity to make several speeches that laid out a vision for the next four years,

engage with the press to answer some of their pressing questions, and call for national

reconciliation after a hard-fought and divisive campaign, softening his tone substantially in the

process.

  Much of this initial uncertainty revolved around how much of Mr. Trump's campaign

rhetoric would really be translated into policy priorities once he took office (Would he continue

to press for the construction of a southern border wall? Would he continue to demand further

investigations or seek to imprison Secretary Clinton? etc.). Many wrote off several of his

campaign points (policy initiatives) as simply unrealistic, but were willing to pursue new

dialogue on the issues Mr. Trump had emphasized the most (immigration chief among them).

Simultaneously, there were also others who had come out of the woodwork to support these

initiatives and who hoped to see them swiftly enacted once Mr. Trump took office. But

regardless of who wanted what, the simple fact remains that nobody could be totally sure – an

enormous number of Americans cast ballots for a person in which they perceived a capacity to

enact change, but were ultimately unsure of what kind change he would bring.

  As we look forward to the 2020 election, at least as far as Mr. Trump is concerned, the

unusual benefit of public uncertainty will no longer be on President Trump's side. Mr. Trump

has now served as President for nearly a year and a half, and when he begins his reelection bid he

will have served for almost double that time. The American electorate won't need to guess what

a Trump Presidency might look like as it did in 2016, instead Mr. Trump will be judged (as all

sitting presidents are) according to the merits of his tenure in office. Having taken up the mantle

of the institution he railed so boldly against, and now having the kind of insider experience he

exploited in his opponent so ferociously, we are sure to see him transition to a new message. In

fact, we already have:

> President Donald Trump on Saturday offered a preview of his 2020 campaign, announcing his new slogan will be "Keep America Great!" because 'Make America Great Again' is now outdated.
> "Our new slogan when we start running in, can you believe it, two years from now, is going to be 'Keep America Great' exclamation point," Trump said from a Pennsylvania rally.
> Trump had previously told the Washington Post in January of 2017 that he decided on the "Keep America Great" slogan for a reelection bid and instructed his lawyer to trademark the phrase with and without an exclamation point.[62]

The "Keep America Great" motto represents a necessary, though still shockingly

uncharacteristic messaging shift by Mr. Trump. For one thing, given everything we know about

Mr. Trump's communicative strategy in the last election, it's rather unusual that the action word

is defensive, rather than offensive ("keep" vs. "make"). It's also unusual that "Keep America

Great" implies that a positive standard has already been reached, and leaves little room for heavy

doses of Mr. Trump's characteristic negativity and/or punching upward.

These may seem like small, nitpicky, innocuous points but they are realistic

considerations President Trump will face when he runs for reelection. He will no longer be a

Washington outsider, he won't have the opportunity to "punch upward" because he's in a

position where there's nowhere left but down to punch, and he will have some trouble attacking

his opponents with the same ferocity he displayed last time because now he speaks with the

authority of the presidency, not just as an underdog candidate.

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[62] Eli Watkins, "Trump: 2020 Slogan Will Be 'Keep America Great!'" CNN, March 11, 2018, , accessed April 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/10/politics/trump-campaign-slogan/index.html.

B. Beyond the 2020 Election

1. Continuing Demographic Shifts

Figure 8: Racial Demographic Shifts in the United States[63]

The changing face of America, 1965–2065

% of the total population
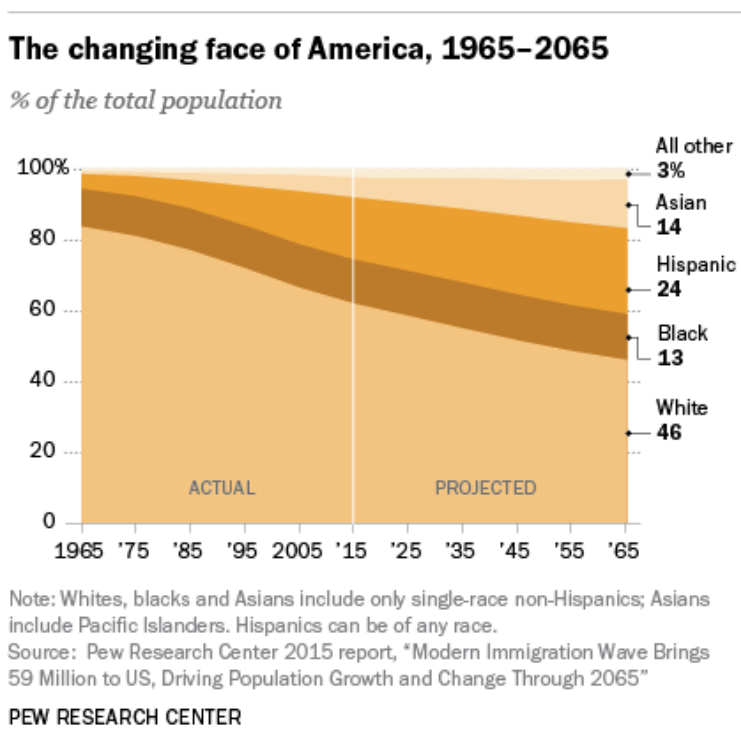
As the graph above clearly depicts, within the next 50 years the United States is poised to become a minority-majority country (one in which the largest racial demographic doesn't constitute more than 50% of the people).

> Americans are more racially and ethnically diverse than in the past, and the U.S. is projected to be even more diverse in the coming decades. By 2055, the U.S. will not have a single racial or ethnic majority. Much of this change has been (and will be) driven by immigration. Nearly 59 million immigrants have arrived in the U.S. in the past 50 years, mostly from Latin America and Asia. Today, a near-record 14% of the country's population is foreign born compared with just 5% in 1965. Over the next five decades, the majority of U.S. population growth is projected to be linked to new Asian and Hispanic immigration. American attitudes about immigration and diversity are supportive of these changes for the most part.

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[63] Paul Taylor, "The Demographic Trends Shaping American Politics in 2016 and beyond," Pew Research Center, January 27, 2016, , accessed March 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/27/the-demographic-trends-shaping-american-politics-in-2016-and-beyond/.

> More Americans say immigrants strengthen the country than say they burden it, and most say the U.S.'s increasing ethnic diversity makes it a better place to live.[64]

America's blossoming diversity will drastically shape the political landscape over the course of the next half-century and beyond. The majority of Americans believe that increasing diversity is a benefit, and that immigrants strengthen our nation when they make a new home for themselves here. But as we continue to grapple with the challenges of living in a more diverse, globally informed society, age old questions about protectionism, security, assimilation, etc. are all going persist in our public discourse.

2. *Strategic Captivation of Free Media*

Inevitably, candidates for office at every level of government will attempt to replicate Mr. Trump's remarkable success by strategically employing the tactics we've just discussed. While it would be impossible to mimic every nuanced component of Mr. Trump's campaign, there will undoubtedly be copycats who, after reviewing all the same information we have in this analysis, will reach the conclusion that there is a compelling advantage to be gained by adapting their communicative behavior to better engage with, or otherwise capitalize on, free media exposure. Campaign managers, communication strategists, and public relations professionals from coast to coast will be using Mr. Trump's campaign as a model of truly effective free media engagement for years to come. Mr. Trump's candidacy will serve as a watershed moment in American political history for many reasons, but most immediately in the political strategy realm, it will inform a new generation of candidates about how to command media attention, and in doing so command the narrative of the campaign.

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[64] D'Vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont, "10 Demographic Trends That Are Shaping the U.S. and the World," Pew Research Center, March 31, 2016, , accessed April 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/.

CONCLUSION

A. Modern Political Rhetoric & Communication Strategies

Clearly, as this thesis has described, modern political rhetoric is both a product of and response to a much larger political context, the evolution of communicative technologies and practices, and candidates' individual strengths. No two elections are the same, nor are any two candidates, but that doesn't mean we can't translate what we learn in one election into a better understanding of our political process as a whole, as well as the individual behavior of the candidates, voters, and institutions within it.

B. The 2016 Election & President Trump

What I hope I've made clear is that the 2016 election was a unique moment in America's political history, and that the conditions that informed the context of this election were remarkably favorable for Mr. Trump. However, while the political logistics alone may have been enough to create this unforeseen window of opportunity, you simply cannot deny that President Trump is easily one of the best media manipulators in our time.

1. What Worked & Why?

The essence of Mr. Trump's communicative genius is the silent advancement of message and vision via incessant, aggressive, unapologetic, captivating, and controversial statements that efficiently shepherd that message and vision into mainstream consciousness. Furthermore, his unique ability to exploit mainstream media and online news channels to the tune of literally multiple billions of dollars opened up a host of remarkable possibilities. The impact of free media in this election, and of Mr. Trump's ability to manipulate those primary communicative means to his full benefit, cannot be overstated.

Mr. Trump's communicative strategy focused on four key elements: controlling the conversation, propagation of a personal brand, always attacking rather than defending, and "punching upward." He achieved these goals by wielding a rhetorical toolkit that favored brevity, binaries/antithesis, caricatures, word association/redundancy, and relative comparison. These strategies and tactics were particularly effective not only because they were employed in a uniquely (even surprisingly) favorable context, but also because they were bolstered by social media, cable news, and internet periodicals.

2. *Will it Work Again?*

Without getting overly speculative, there are some reasonable predictive conclusions to be drawn based on this analysis. While President Trump may not be in a position to reprise some of these rhetorical strategies when he seeks reelection in 2020, other candidates are certainly going to use what they have learned from the 2016 election to make decisions about their own campaigns moving forward. Mr. Trump made the possibilities of social media campaigning and free media engagement known to the whole political world – it would appear that any candidate who proceeds without the benefit of that insight would find themselves at a significant disadvantage.

PARTING THOUGHTS

This thesis was solely intended to serve as an evaluation of specific rhetorical and communicative tactics employed by President Trump so that we might better understand the narrative of his improbable victory, the electorate he captivated, and the current state of our political institutions. On the whole, it was not intended as a vessel for personal sentiment or biased dialogue – instead I attempted at every opportunity to cement all claims in fact-based rationale, and limit the scope of my analysis only to the *effectiveness* of certain practices rather than their other possible merits or lack thereof. However, having performed this analysis, I can't help but share these parting thoughts.

I commented in the introduction that the innate power of rhetoric is not so much in its ability to make an argument's meaning clearer as it is in its ability to make even poor arguments significantly more compelling than they would otherwise be. While this is true, the foremost leaders in our history have married their rhetorical mastery with reason, vision, and character. While rhetoric alone may have the effect of perfuming that which is worst, rendering it kin to that which is palatable, rhetoric alone cannot render it equal to that which is best. While many of these tactics are, as we've proven, extremely effective – we have to ask ourselves "to what end?"

Scorched earth campaigns only work if the conqueror has no responsibility to reap the harvests of a place after he has conquered it – in other words, destroying something may make it easier to take, but at the cost of the thing itself. Likewise, candidates who undermine the processes that may elect them, inspire grave distrust in the institutions they aspire to lead, and insult those who depend most on those institutions to defend them from injustice and oppression should not be surprised, upon taking up the mantle of power – to be at once undermined, distrusted, and insulted in return. Cursing a conquered place by salting the earth may make it

uninhabitable to all who lived there before, but at the cost of making it uninhabitable for anyone who should wish to live there after. I say that to say this:

In this nation, affronts to the institution of a government of, by, and for the people ought to rightfully be considered an affront to the people themselves. Our government, unlike many that have gone before, has, more often than not, succeeded in representing and addressing public interests that otherwise would have fallen victim to greed or tyranny. Though its efforts are never perfect, and its stewards never without their own faults and failures, it has over the grand arc of our history at least managed to prove to its own people and the people of the world that self-government can be a remarkable force for good. Functionally, to dismantle collective trust in that institution is to deprive millions of the most vulnerable citizens of protections, opportunities, and freedoms that are rightfully theirs. The greater sin though, even more contemptible than turning a people against their own democratic institutions, is in turning a people against each other.

Hate and fear are powerful motivators; they are universal, accessible, and manipulable, they come cheap and are all too easily employed. Our electoral system, like our legal system, is inherently and intentionally adversarial – but the whole of the people are not meant to be adversaries themselves – instead they, like Lady Justice, are meant to be the beneficiaries of an adversarial process; a process that elevates worthy ideas and fine leadership above those of lesser degree. Civility, honor, respect, decency, and dignity – a strong sense of personal and collective propriety – these are the values and virtues of true statesmen; the ones our forebearers permitted to temper their well-founded contentions.

It's easy to hate, and nearly as easy to move others to hatred. But love is a far greater power than all others man has known. If we continue to challenge bastions of hate and fear with

more hate, we damn ourselves with a fool's errand. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."[65]

Our politics of late has entrenched us, all of us, and absent a concerted effort to the contrary it will continue to entrench us even further. Political communication can be – *can be* – so much more than what we've allowed it to become. We have serious disagreements in this country, and we face hard times and grapple with tough issues, but the fact that we can't be bothered to seek the common ground, that we have become so convinced of our own blamelessness and righteousness that our perspectives have been torn so irreparably from one another's, seems asinine. We live in the most interconnected, information-rich time in our nation's history. Our public dialogue should be more versatile, more empowering, more representative, more productive than it has ever been before – not less.

The world is getting much, much smaller, but that doesn't mean we should respond with small-mindedness. In this unique historical moment, if we are to do right by ourselves, it is essential that each of us take pains to escape from the echo chambers that have so impaired our public discourse. We may continue, despite the clear and present benefit of alternative action, to isolate ourselves and in so doing find cause to hate each other more. Or we may choose instead to bravely imperil our own ignorant bliss, and in so doing reap the fruits of a public discourse that informs, instructs, and inspires – a public discourse that encourages people in each small part of the world to exchange ideas with those who are different from them in every way imaginable, except that they pledge allegiance to the same flag.

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[65] Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. *(Collected Writings & Speeches)*

APPENDIX A: Supplementary Data

Figure 8: Gallup Polling Data (Importance of Campaign Issues, By Party)[66]

Importance of Campaign Issues, by Party

Now I am going to read a list of some of the issues that will probably be discussed in this year's presidential election campaign. As I read each one, please tell me how important the candidates' positions on that issue will be in influencing your vote for president -- extremely important, very important, somewhat important or not important.

% Extremely/Very important

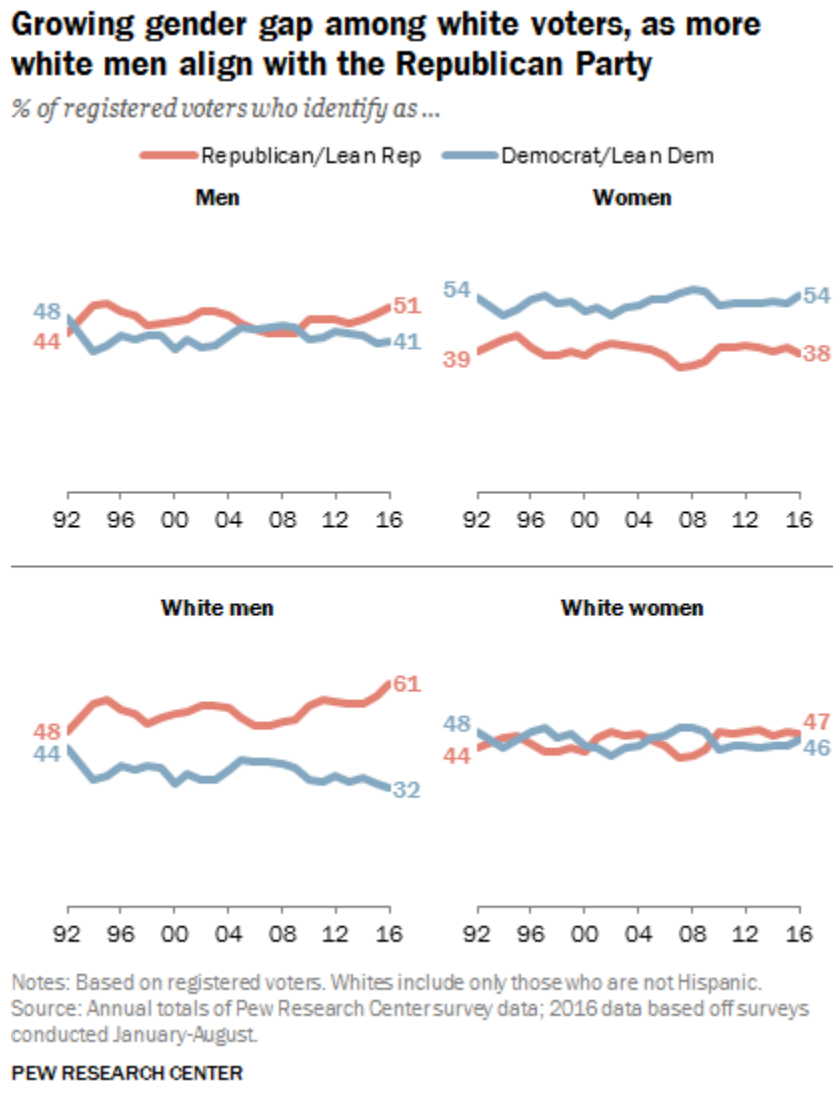|	Republicans/ Republican leaners	Democrats/ Democratic leaners
ABOVE AVERAGE IN IMPORTANCE TO BOTH PARTIES		
Terrorism and national security	92	82
The economy	92	85
Employment and jobs	80	88
Healthcare and the Affordable Care Act	75	83
ABOVE AVERAGE IN IMPORTANCE TO REPUBLICANS ONLY		
The federal budget deficit	83	62
Foreign affairs	77	65
The size and efficiency of the federal government	77	49
Immigration	76	62
Taxes	74	66
ABOVE AVERAGE IN IMPORTANCE TO DEMOCRATS ONLY		
Education	67	90
The distribution of income and wealth in the United States	49	75
BELOW AVERAGE IN IMPORTANCE TO BOTH PARTIES		
Gun policy	61	70
Government regulation of Wall Street and banks	47	69
Social issues such as gay marriage and abortion	34	46
Climate change	21	69

Jan. 21-25, 2016

GALLUP

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[66] Gallup, Inc, "Democrats, Republicans Agree on Four Top Issues for Campaign," Gallup.com, February 01, 2016, , accessed March 2018, http://news.gallup.com/poll/188918/democrats-republicans-agree-four-top-issues-campaign.aspx.

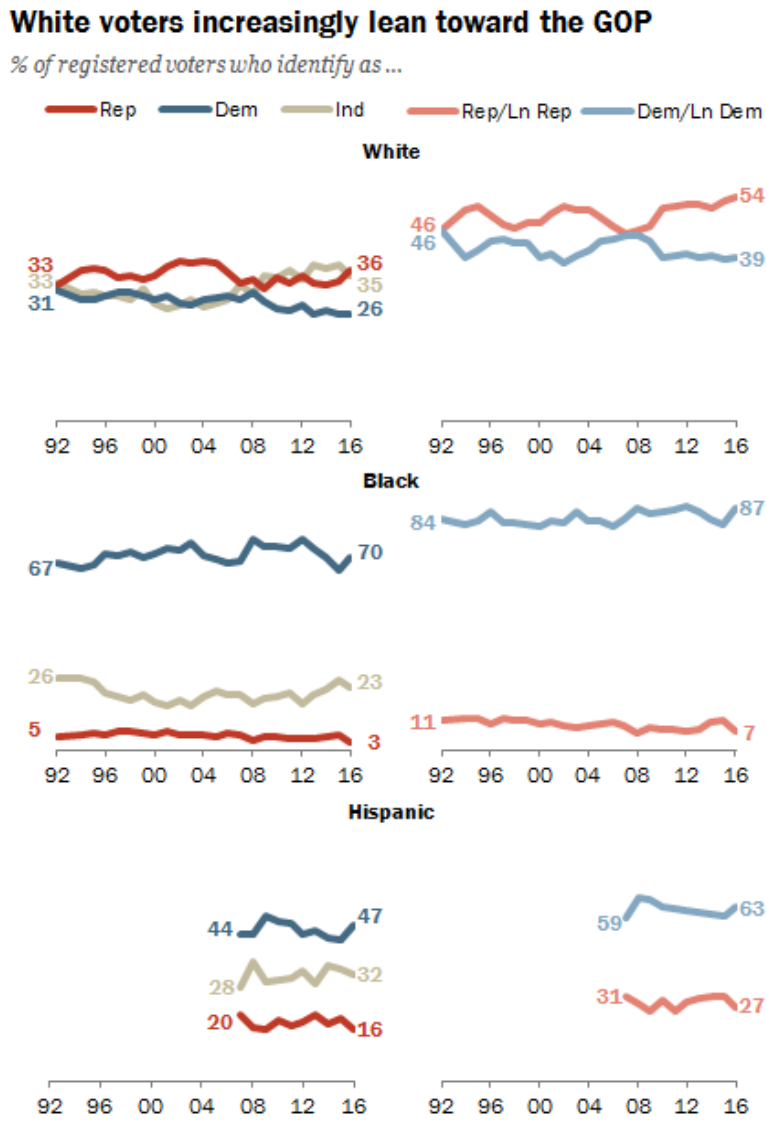Figure 9: Trump vs. Clinton Poll Average Timeline (July 2015 – November 2016)[67]

Figure 10: Growing Gender Gap Among White Voters[68]

Growing gender gap among white voters, as more white men align with the Republican Party

% of registered voters who identify as ...

Republican/Lean Rep   Democrat/Lean Dem

Notes: Based on registered voters. Whites include only those who are not Hispanic.
Source: Annual totals of Pew Research Center survey data; 2016 data based off surveys conducted January-August.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[68] Paul Taylor, "The Demographic Trends Shaping American Politics in 2016 and beyond," Pew Research Center, January 27, 2016, , accessed March 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/27/the-demographic-trends-shaping-american-politics-in-2016-and-beyond/.

Figure 11: White Voters Increasingly Republican[69]

Notes: Based on registered voters. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Data for Hispanics shown only for years in which interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.
Source: Annual totals of Pew Research Center survey data; 2016 data based off surveys conducted January-August.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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[69] Ibid.

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Preliminary Research: Books & Academic Journals

Dionne, E. J., Ornstein, N. J., & Mann, T. E. (2017). One nation after Trump: a guide for the perplexed, the disillusioned, the desperate, and the not-yet deported. New York: St. Martins Press.

This book discusses the public's response to the Trump Campaign's largely unanticipated victory and offers a predictive evaluation of our political climate. This supports several of my extrapolative arguments and serves as a basis for commentary regarding what comes next.

Lindgren, E., & Naurin, E. (2017). Election Pledge Rhetoric: Selling Policy with Words. International Journal Of Communication, 11, 22. Retrieved from http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/6847

This article discusses how candidates and public office holders endow words and promises with greater (or lesser meaning) – and analyzes how candidates "sell" policy points by speaking about them in certain (very intentional) terms. As it supports some of my larger claims about political rhetoric and strategy in general, this is a useful resource.

Mann, Thomas E. (Author),& Ornstein, Norman J. (Author). It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism Paperback – September 3, 2013

This article, which discusses the "new politics of extremism", draws conclusions about how our current political discourse fits into a much larger national, historical narrative of American political change, controversy, and conflict. Any claims I make about "high-altitude issues" or the "bigger picture" are likely evaluated against or in support of some arguments presented here.

Patterson. In Campaigns, Elections & Parties, Papers, Politics & Government, Research. (2016, December 07). Pre-Primary News Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Race: Trump's Rise, Sanders' Emergence, Clinton's Struggle. Retrieved November 07, 2017, from https://shorensteincenter.org/pre-primary-news-coverage-2016-trump-clinton-sanders/

This article discusses the role and importance of pre-primary news coverage, the circumstances that led to an extremely crowded republican field of primary candidates, and how candidates can command and/or take advantage of free media coverage to bolster their standing. It lends credence to my discussion about the "Trump Phenomenon" – being the most aggressive, most interesting candidate at any given time to command the discourse.

Patterson. In Campaigns, Elections & Parties, Papers, Politics & Government, Research. (2016, December 07). News Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Primaries: Horse Race Reporting Has Consequences. Retrieved November 07, 2017, from https://shorensteincenter.org/news-coverage-2016-presidential-primaries/

This article similarly discusses the impact of Horse Race Reporting and the clear impact this type of coverage has on candidates' behavior, early campaign strategies, and ability to advance past the early stages of party consideration. It will advance my discussion of media coverage and consumption, as well as my discussion of Trump's unique "appeal" to both local and remote television audiences.

Patterson. In Campaigns, Elections & Parties, Papers, Politics & Government, Research. (2016, December 07). News Coverage of the 2016 National Conventions: Negative News, Lacking Context. Retrieved November 07, 2017, from https://shorensteincenter.org/news-coverage-2016-national-conventions/

This article discusses mainstream coverage of both major parties' national conventions – the takeaways, public response, and relevant tone shifts that accompanied each party's nomination process. As far crafting a timeline to draw conclusions from polling data, this analysis will be particularly insightful.

Patterson. In Campaigns, Elections & Parties, Journalistic Practice, Papers, Politics & Government, Research. (2017, June 13). News Coverage of the 2016 General Election: How the Press Failed the Voters. Retrieved November 07, 2017, from https://shorensteincenter.org/news-coverage-2016-general-election/

This article discusses both general media coverage of the year+ long election process and specific media coverage of the election itself (literal balloting). The points raised in the article support several of my hypotheses regarding the early impact of disproportionate media coverage, the electorate's media consumption habits as they relate to eventual voting behavior, etc.

Patterson. In Government Institutions, Journalistic Practice, News Business & Practice, Papers, Politics & Government, Research. (2017, August 08). News Coverage of Donald Trump's First 100 Days. Retrieved November 07, 2017, from https://shorensteincenter.org/news-coverage-donald-trumps-first-100-days/

This article discusses mainstream media coverage of Trump's first 100 days in office. This article supports tenants of my forward-thinking theory that future candidates will not employ some of Trump's rhetorical strategies (though effective) because they make governing after victory substantially more difficult.

Preliminary Research: Internet Articles

1. **Voters "Confused" and Unhappy with Rhetoric in Election 2016**
   Link: http://www.pbs.org/weta/washingtonweek/web-video/voters-confused-and-unhappy-rhetoric-election-2016
   This article summarizes voter's immediate reactions to specifically the rhetoric of the election, rather than the result of the election.

2. **The 2016 Rhetoric is Getting Out of Control**
   Link: http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/28/politics/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-2016-election-political-hits/index.html
   This CNN Article is one of many from during the campaign that documents analysists' disgust that more intense and aggressive campaign rhetoric was being so ubiquitously employed.

3. **Trump Ramps Up Rigged Election Rhetoric…**
   Link: https://www.today.com/video/trump-ramps-up-rigged-election-rhetoric-clinton-moves-up-in-the-polls-787360835812
   Trump's claims that if he were to lose, then the election was certainly rigged caused many to wonder what might happen if he did and contested the result – this article documents that.

4. **16 Insults That Redefined Acceptable Political Rhetoric**
   Link: https://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/2016-election-best-insults-230794
   This article considers "political insults" that redefined the boundaries of acceptable rhetoric from throughout American political history – including those from the 2016 presidential election.

5. **Fears Mount on Trump's Rigged Election Rhetoric**
   Link: https://www.politico.com/story/2016/10/donald-trump-rigged-elections-republicans-229846
   Similarly to article #3, this politico piece dives further into the possible consequences of a major party candidate undermining the trustworthiness of a US presidential election.

6. **US Election 2016 – The Politics of Fear**
   Link: http://www.bbc.com/news/av/election-us-2016-37547861/us-election-2016-the-politics-of-fear
   An interesting BBC take on the "politics of fear" as they related to party and candidate messaging in 2016.

7. **Trump's Rhetoric is Harsher than Previous Nominees**
   Link: https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/06/23/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-rhetoric/86293780/
   An interesting article comparing Trump's rhetoric during the campaign to others who had come before.

8. **Experts Warn Against "Dangerous" Rhetoric Surrounding Election**
   Link: http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/experts-warn-dangerous-rhetoric-surrounding-election/story?id=42748882
   Claims that destructive language poses a temporary benefit to a candidate but causes more harm than good in the long term.

9. **Why the 2016 Election Won't Go Away**
   Link: https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-the-2016-election-wont-go-away/
   A take on why the election didn't fade out of our collective interest after occurring, from a source well known for supporting its claims with up-to-the-minute data.

10. **These Are the Bogus Ads Russia Planted on Facebook**
    Link: http://nymag.com/selectall/2017/11/house-democrats-release-russian-troll-facebook-election-ads.html
    A little away from the points I make about media consumption, but an interesting tidbit for discussion about the perceived vs. actual trustworthiness of certain forms of media.

Supplementary Research/Cited Information:

These resources either informed a holistic understanding of the subject material but were not attributable to any one noted finding, or are otherwise relevant only because they included a specific data set, graphic, statistical analysis, etc. that was included in the final paper (these are indicated with internal footnotes):

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Additional Books:

1. *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility (Studies in Postwar American Political Development)* by Jeffrey M. Berry and Sarah Sobieraj
2. *Demagoguery and Democracy* by Patricia Roberts-Miller

Organizations with Useful Resources:

1. Smithsonian Museum of American History – Speeches Archive
2. Pew Research Center – Analysis of Media Consumption
3. Gallup – Archive of Election Polling Data

Misc Links and Resources:

http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/
http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive
http://americanhistory.si.edu/presidency/5d4.html
https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches

BIOGRAPHY

Connor is a Plan II Honors, Business Management, and History major from Dallas, Texas. While on the Forty Acres he's been actively involved in the Tejas Club, Friar Society, Student Government, Longhorn Advocates, Camp Texas, PlanTutoring, and The Spirit of Shakespeare. He also participated in the Normandy Scholar program, which allows for intensive study of the Second World War during a spring semester, followed by a summer trip to the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Poland.