



## ДИСКУРСИВНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

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**Populist Discourse versus Democratic Appeals:  
An Analysis of the Rhetorical Strategies of Trump and Harris**Habibullah Pathan<sup>1</sup>, Oksana I. Aleksandrova<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Sohar University, *Sohar, Sultanate of Oman*<sup>2</sup>RUDN University, *Moscow, Russian Federation* [hpathan@su.edu.om](mailto:hpathan@su.edu.om)

**Abstract.** Language plays a powerful role in shaping public opinion. The purpose of this research is to examine the influence of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris during the 2024 U.S. presidential election campaign, with a specific focus on their impact on indecisive voters in swing states. It aims to reveal the dynamics of how populist discourse and strategy communication can shape voter perceptions and decisions in high-stakes elections. This research strategy was a mixed-method approach combining qualitative thematic analysis with quantitative evaluations. Speeches were collected from YouTube then, transcribed by using the software Note-GPT, to find out the patterns in discourse, followed by thematic coding to do the exact textural analysis. Rhetorical approaches vary significantly, according to the result strategies. Trump's populist narrative leverages nationalism, economic revival, and border security, often couched with an "Us versus them" ideology that was designed to exploit the social divides and incite voter worries. Appealing to voters' frustrations and worries, his emotionally charged direct tone effectively galvanized support. In contrast, Harris centered on an optimistic and inclusive tone about the principles of democracy in her speech, delivered with hope aimed at fostering unity and motivating them to take action as a collective power. The study highlights the breakthrough of new evidence that different rhetorical approaches influence voter engagement, in different ways. Harris aimed to bridge the divisions and champion collective democratic ideals, while Trump's strategy stressed divisiveness, polarization, and urgency. These findings highlight the importance of tailored messaging in influencing voter behavior, public opinion, and electoral outcomes. With its *valuable* implications for future campaign tactics, this study provides a systematic insight into the interplay between rhetoric, emotional appeal, and strategic voter involvement.

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## Популистский политический дискурс vs демократические призывы: анализ риторических стратегий Д. Трампа и К. Харрис

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**Аннотация.** Язык играет важную роль в формировании общественного мнения. Цель данного исследования — проанализировать речи Дональда Трампа и Камала Харрис во время президентской избирательной кампании в США 2024 г. и их воздействие на нерешительных избирателей в ключевых штатах; выявить динамику того, как популистский политический дискурс и коммуникативные стратегий могут формировать представления о ресурсах и решениях, принимаемых в ходе выборов. В качестве исследовательской стратегии использовался смешанный метод, сочетающий качественный тематический анализ с количественными оценками. Речи кандидатов были проанализированы и собраны на портале YouTube, затем расшифрованы с помощью программного обеспечения Note-GPT для выявления закономерностей в дискурсе, после чего было проведено тематическое кодирование для точного текстового анализа. Риторические подходы значительно различаются в зависимости от используемых стратегий. Популистская риторика Трампа использует национализм, экономическое возрождение и безопасность границ, часто облекая это в идеологию «мы против них», призванную эксплуатировать социальные разногласия и разжигать опасения избирателей. Обращаясь к разочарованиям и тревогам избирателей, его эмоционально заряженный прямой тон эффективно мобилизовал поддержку. В отличие от него, Харрис в своей речи сосредоточилась на оптимистичном и инклюзивном тоне, посвященном принципам демократии, с надеждой на укрепление единства, и мотивацию к действиям как коллективной силы. Исследование подчеркивает прорыв в обнаружении новых доказательств того, что различные риторические подходы по-разному влияют на вовлеченность избирателей. Харрис стремилась преодолеть разногласия и отстаивать коллективные демократические идеалы, в то время как стратегия Трампа делала упор на разобщенность, поляризацию и срочность. Эти выводы подчеркивают важность целенаправленной коммуникации в воздействии на поведение избирателей, общественное мнение и результаты выборов. Имея полезные последствия для будущих избирательных кампаний, это исследование предоставляет систематическое понимание

взаимодействия между риторикой, эмоциональным призывом и стратегическим вовлечением избирателей.

**Ключевые слова:** теория формирования повестки дня, политическая коммуникация, неопределёвшиеся избиратели, демократические призывы, национализм, актуальность проблемы, избирательные кампании

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## Introduction

In democratic elections, language plays a powerful role in shaping public opinion and it also influences voter behavior. Rhetoric plays a crucial role in influencing the Undecided voters who are influencers in determining the outcomes of the elections. Politicians use a variety of rhetorical methods carefully to design their speeches to persuade motivate, and inform the audience, while they also employ a great rhetorical strategy to address the issues of the electorate at large as well as to appeal to their larger cultural and ideological beliefs. In today's political debate, populist language is the most popular and powerful instrument. Rhetoric emphasizes a division between ordinary people and the elite ones that are being perceived to act and betray their misguided priorities. It uses the issues of economic injustice, often also highlighting the grievances, the cultural identity, and the national pride to speak to voters on an emotional level, by presenting themselves as the politicians, who appeal to the masses, by portraying as the saviors of everyday, common, and ordinary people, using these stories to create a sense of solidarity with their audience, in their pursuit of providing answers to their complex problems.

A prototypical populist in the United States, Donald Trump,<sup>1</sup> is a defining figure. He utilized his speech and approach effectively during his presidential campaign, especially in the strike areas where the support was uncertain and unpredictable. He uses rhetoric capitalizing on themes such as people's anxieties about immigration, their economic downturn, and political disenchantment, to win over those who were still to resonate with the undecided voters. Among the swing and undecided voters who are essential in deciding the results it has played a pivotal role in persuading them.

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<sup>1</sup> Trump, D.J. (2020). *Speech at Energy Independence Rally*. Retrieved from [official campaign archives or publication]; Trump, D. J. (2020). *Speech on Immigration and Border Policy*. Retrieved from [official campaign archives or publication].

In contemporary political discourse, populist rhetoric serves as a significant pedagogical tool by highlighting the gulf between the public and the elite groups who are perceived to act against the people's interest. Economic injustice, cultural identity, and national pride are all emotions that are sparked by the sentimental conversation of politics. By portraying themselves as a champion of ordinary citizens they also employ narratives to foster the connection between their constituents and to cultivate a sense of solidarity behind their easy-to-implement policies and ideas. Nuanced issues in the master of American Populism, Donald Trump skillfully used his tactic throughout his presidential campaigns, especially in swing states where issues like economic decline, immigration, and political dissatisfaction were prevalent.

In democratic processes, language plays a crucial instrument role that influences public opinion, decision-making, and the creation of alternatives that connect with a certain audience within the democratic processes. The political use of populist rhetoric, especially the tactics that are used by Donald Trump, to sway the undecided voters in swing states, was very prominent in his electoral campaigns.

In the United States the battleground areas among voters are highly unpredictable that leads to the unexpected election results which are already hotly fought within populist rhetoric, often producing surprising outcomes. These states often have heterogeneous populations with diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Indecisive voters may find public announcements that provide essential information about the experiences and aims which are crucial in public decision-making. Donald Trump's speeches in the 2016 and 2020 campaigns demonstrate his ability to address the populace's rhetoric of public concerns regarding economic stability, immigration and perceived government inefficiency. By offering a comprehensive and thorough examination, this research contributes to the literature and populist rhetoric. By investigating the relation to undecided voters in competitive states, this study also integrates a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis, to understand how populist language has been used in recent political campaigns.

The results highlight the importance of emotional resilience, the prominence of concerns, and identity-based appeals in shaping voter-related behavior. The research highlights the broader implications of public discourse for democratic participation. The study provides valuable insights into the dual nature of populist, offering benefits for communication professionals and scholars in political science and linguistics.

In recent years, populist groups have surged particularly in Europe. Populist movements not only question the model of liberal democracy but also possess significant potential for political polarization. It is imperative to thoroughly investigate the factors that contribute to their growth. The academic community now widely agrees that research on populism should focus not only on political actors but also on communication methodology, especially in relation to the mass media [1–3]. The mass media serve as a crucial intermediary between politics and

its people. It provides the public with information, while influencing the condition of competition reporting on populist party communication, this media coverage may constitute tangible endorsement for these parties as it. Since this coverage provides them with a national stage from which they can spread populist stances and gain recognition and legitimacy [4]. Against this backdrop, it is assumed that the media provide a notably conducive atmosphere for covering populist actors and messages because of a close link between population and news worthiness.

The notion of swing states is crucial for understanding the impact of rhetorical strategies on electoral outcomes. Characterized by their political heterogeneity and close electoral margins, swing states are the focus of significant campaign attention. Undecided voters in these regions are particularly susceptible to persuasive rhetoric as they contend with a wide range of personal, economic and social concerns. Trump used populist language to transform voter displeasure into support, capitalizing on their discontent with the status quo. For Harris, democratic appeals to address voter concerns were a strategy that sought to allay voter fears while simultaneously encouraging optimism and resiliency. Examining these contrasting methods delivers valued visions into the subtleties of political message and electoral behavior.

### **Research Questions:**

1. How did Donald Trump and Kamala Harris<sup>2</sup> use populist rhetoric to tackle significant voter apprehensions in key states throughout their individual campaigns?
2. What rhetorical methods based on populist speech were more successful in influencing undecided voters in swing states for Donald Trump and Kamala Harris?
3. How does the populist rhetoric used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris vary regarding emotional appeal, issue framing, and voter involvement in swing states?

### **Significance of Research:**

The research offers critical insights into the role of political communication in shaping voter behavior, particularly among the indecisive voters in competitive states. Comparing Donald Trump's populist rhetoric with Kamala Harris's democratic appeals elucidates, how divergent rhetorical approaches affect voter perceptions. This research contributes to the field of political communication and the study of linguistic influence on public opinion and voter mobilization. The study enhances political communication and provides practical applications for strategies aiming to craft effective messaging understanding of how rhetoric in democratic participation can lead to escalating division.

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<sup>2</sup> Harris, K. (2020). *Address at Democratic National Convention*. Retrieved from official campaign archives or publication; Harris, K. (2020). *Victory Speech: The Fight for Freedom*. Retrieved from official campaign archives or publication.

## Literature Review

For these swing states, the most important matters that shall determine the outcome of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election include immigration and reproductive rights and border security—which are really pivotal issues in determining voters' choices. And to swing states like Arizona, candidates Donald Trump and Kamala Harris are battling hard to win over undecided voters and Electoral College seats. Arizona once was a largely Republican region but became Democratic in 2020. This region is still a battleground because of its demographic makeup and an immigration issue<sup>3</sup>.

Kamala Harris advocates comprehensive immigration reform, including initiatives like bolstering border security through high-tech detection technology, increasing the number of border officers, and providing an earned road to citizenship for illegal immigrants. She also emphasizes the necessity of family and employment-based visas to enhance the integration of immigrants into the U.S. economy. On the other hand, Donald Trump's immigration policy is much more stringent. His approach includes the removal of undocumented immigrants, deployment of troops along the border, and reinstatement of policies like "Remain in Mexico," which sends asylum applicants to spend their duration awaiting in Mexico until their cases are resolved. Immigration policy agendas of Trump mirror the overarching rhetoric that claims immigration translates to higher costs in terms of shelter, health, and education<sup>4</sup>. The divergent immigration strategies of the two candidates underline larger national debates over the economic and social implications of immigration, as both candidates try to calibrate their policies to the concerns of swing-state voters.

The 2016 U.S. presidential election was a pivotal moment in political discourse, with Donald Trump's campaign utilizing populist language as a crucial strategic tool for engaging voters, particularly in contested regions. His rhetoric defined by a direct and even contentious appeal to "the people" versus "the elite", became a defining feature of his political identity. This research further explores the role of populist language in Trump's ability to sway undecided voters in key states, drawing on studies from political psychology communication, and electoral behavior. The research examines critically how populist rhetoric resonates with certain voter groups and demographics the factors that amplify its appeal and the media's involvement in disseminating such language.

Populism is a political philosophy that delineates a dichotomy between "the people" and "the elite" often casting the former as virtuous, the latter as corrupt or out of touch with needs of the common folk [3]. Populist rhetoric is categorized by its clarity, emotional appeal, and directness often framing complex issues in a way

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<sup>3</sup> According to CBS News, a poll conducted in May 2024 demonstrated that a large percentage of citizens in Arizona saw issues with immigration/border security as top concerns, and 52% reported recent immigration from Mexico has made life worse<sup>3</sup> (Al Jazeera, May 2024. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/> (accessed: 12.03.2025)).

<sup>4</sup> Al Jazeera, May 2024. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/> (accessed: 12.03.2025).

that is accessible to the broad audience. According to [5] populism is inherently performative, reliant on symbolic language that resonates with individuals' perceived anxieties. In the case of Donald Trump, his speeches often featured anti-establishment rhetoric perceptions of media bias and an emphasis on restoring power to ordinary Americans.

Trump's use of populist rhetoric is often seen as a crucial component in his appeal to disaffected voters. His messages were tailored to resonate with working-class people who felt left behind by economic globalization political elites and shifting social standards [6]. According to [7], populist rhetoric can successfully create a sense of political crisis by rallying those who feel alienated from the political process and offering them a candidate who promises "to take their country back."

The importance of undecided voters in the battleground areas has been a critical focus in electoral studies. As these voters are often the decisive factors in tight elections, in the 2016 elections, swing states including Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio were crucial to Trump's win. According to [8], uncertain voters are generally characterized by political ambiguity, a lack of clear political ideology, or dissatisfaction with their status. These voters are often perceived as vulnerable to persuasive messages especially when such messaging aligns with their perceived complaints or fears.

Trump's appeal to indecisive voters in key areas may be understood through the lens of the "outsider" candidate strategy. According to [9], outsider candidates like Trump benefit from their perceived ability to confront the political system, portraying themselves as advocates for the "common man" against the elite. His rhetoric, which framed the election as a war between the people's will and the corrupt system, struck a chord with those dissatisfied with the mainstream politicians.

H. Arendt posits that populist movements often emerge during periods of social turmoil, when people see that their cultural or economic status is being undermined by elites or external forces [10]. Psychological studies indicate that populist rhetoric appeals suggest to those experiencing economic insecurity or cultural threat. Trump's campaign leveraged these feelings by framing issues like immigration trade and unemployment as existential threats to the American way of life. This discourse often invokes a the sense of collective identity that has been shown to active emotional responses in voters who see themselves as marginalized with the political system.

Moreover, populist rhetoric frequently resonates with the concept of system justification theory [11] which suggests that individuals perceiving threats from social or economic transformations will endeavor to re-establish the sense of order by supporting candidates who promise to return society to its former state. Trump's focus on making America great again resonated with voters, who felt that America's culture and economic fabric were being distorted especially in battleground areas that are being affected by the industrialization and economic collapse that results in

widespread job losses. By framing the election as a choice between the revival of American greatness and preservation of the existing system, Trump's populist language successfully activated the anxieties of undecided voters, increasing their propensity to support his campaign.

G. Mazzoleni asserts that the media is crucial in propagating populist messages both by framing political discourse, in ways that highlight the dichotomy between "the people" and "the elite" and by providing a forum for populist candidates to engage with large audiences. The media's role in amplifying populist discourse has been a central focus of political communication [4].

A. Krouwel et al. assert that populist rhetoric may affect voting behavior by increasing political polarization, reinforcing in group identities, and galvanizing disenchanted voters [12]. Trump's populist rhetoric not only galvanized his supporters but also influenced undecided voters by presenting a clear and compelling alternative to the political establishment.

Populist language has been shown to engender a perception of political crisis, increase feelings of urgency and fear. E. Laclau observes that populism often flourishes via the establishment of "an enemy" which may include political elite, immigrants, or global institutions [5]. In case of Trump, his rhetoric frequently targeted immigrants, seeing them as a threat to American employment and culture.

C. Mudde categorizes this populism's fundamental assumption as a worldview that they dichotomizes society into "the people" versus "the elite" — framing strategy that Donald Trump utilized extensively throughout his campaign [3]. This populist discourse was important to Trump's appeal for indecisive voters particularly in swing states where many voters felt eliminated by the political establishment. Trump's use of nationalist language highlighting an "America first" agenda directly addressed issues related to globalization, job security, and national identity J.E. Oliver et al. [13] and R. Inglehart and P. Norris [14].

D.A. Fridkin and P.J. Kenney [15] state that the people concerned about their own economic position respond to simple straightforward articulation of what they want. Populism in Trump's practice allowed him to connect with such supporters because it that promotes a straightforward and simple manner of communication. For this reason, Trump's statements — such as "America first," "We will keep jobs in America," and "America will win again" [7] — resonated with voters facing economic troubles. A single aspect of this particular populism is the ability allowing to understand how... and why Trump managed to win over the unfilled portion of the area tally polls.

Trump's media relations were also instrumental for Trump in a way that they extended his populist statements and encouraged undecided voters. Trump used social media, because it helped him avoid traditional media participants and speak directly to voters, which played into his anti-establishment message [16].

The populist discourse of Trump was strategically aimed at logical and undecided voters prevailing in the swing states. According to research conducted by N. Gidron and B. Bonikowski [17], it is perhaps the most crucial states for this kind of message, which advocates populism and economic nationalism because of

the complexity of their economies. There is evidence that populist language improves voters' mobilization efforts as well as turnout, and more so in the case of polarized elections.

As M. Rooduijn cites [18], disengaged voters are the raw number for every change fanatical populism and this will bring politically, energy due to the relief of anticipated experiences. This is similar with Trump's in 2016 that he has an audience who when not only galvanised his followers but also drew in the undecided, especially in economically violent and competitive battleground regions.

Populism, while effective in garnering voters, is criticized for reducing details and increasing polarization. P. Taggart notes the danger of populism where the rhetoric translates complex political issues as 'pro' or 'anti', which may lead some segments of voters to be marginalized and further widen the gap in society [19]. This argument becomes stronger when exploring Trump who was accustomed to populism that used quite abusive language creating a dichotomy of 'us and them' of his supporters and the political elite, particularly in matters of immigration. This form of polarization is counterintuitive and even more so in the course of a highly charged political race, an effect that could occur in the event where voters feel slighted or attacked by such language. This is more so when it comes to the election held in 2020 in which the pandemic and the BLM movement only led to an increase in aggression in politics. The studies in the current paper provide a good foundation needed to understand the role of populist engaged discourse in the behavior of uncertain voters especially in swing states. Trump, the first American President of the 21st century, can owe part of his recognition in the twists of 2016 and 2020 elections due to his use of populism geared towards the economic and the cultural concerns of the people. However, a gap still exists regarding how particular elements of populist language such as emotionality and ease of expression cope with undecided voters in particular spatial contexts. Further studies should focus on the specific mechanisms of populist communication's impact on undecided voters, stressing the role of media and social media in amplifying this type of populism.

Existing literature also notes that although populist discourse may achieve success in mobilizing certain segments of voters, there are also difficulties for the populist such as widening certain social gaps and eliciting backlash. Understanding these mechanisms will be important for future studies of populism as it's a political tool in electioneering today, especially in terms of the intense competition expected in key states.

## Research Gap

Existing research of populist discourse in isolation neglects comparisons with alternative approaches like democratic arguments. Research on the impact of these divergent strategies influence undecided voters, especially in key states, is scarce. Moreover, most of the research neglects the localized concerns of these regions and interaction between populist and democratic discourse. This research examines the techniques of Trump and Harris's speech strategies within the same electoral

context providing a detailed knowledge of voter behavior and dynamics of political communication.

## Research Methodology

This research takes a **mix-method approach** combining the qualitative and quantitative content analysis to explore the role of **Agenda Setting Theory** elements in Kamala Harris concession speech and Donald Trump's speeches. The recent research draws on the principles of agenda setting theory as a framework. This study analyzes Trump and Harris for their emphasis on democratic ideals, equality, resilience and call to action. By combining these methods, the study aims to capture both the depth and frequency of important rhetorical themes in the speech by integrating various approaches.

With the help of pertinent media criticism, the study revolves Kamala Harris and Donald Trump's whole concession speech that they gave in their presidential campaigns. Phrases, sentences and paragraphs used as analyzable units to enable the exact thematic categorization of the transcribed speech and associated information. These units but then examine to identify the polarization of key issues in line with agenda setting theory to assess the units and determine the importance and reasoning of important concerns. **Transcripts of speeches** with supplementary commentary snippets for context and interpretation make up the main data set. The speech was transcribed using the **note GPT software** capturing all of the linguistic subtleties the content was subsequently segmented into smaller sections to follow for in-depth theme analysis.

The coding analysis was conducted on speech using the framework of agenda setting theory focuses on predefined categories such as:

1. **Issues of Salience:** Drawing attention to important democratic concerns
2. **Voter Concerns:** Tackle the motivating or emotive parts
3. **Tone:** Analyzing positive and negative rhetorical elements

Sub-codes, such as **SI-Democracy** and **VC-Empowerment**, were used to capture nuanced themes. The speech first divided into the matrix segments to ensure the independent analysis of each segment to facilitate the separate examination of each section. The speech was structured according to the determined themes. The data were grouped in **Microsoft Excel** for clarity also used to calculate the frequency and theme pattern visualization were also done in Excel.

To ensure the **credibility of the analysis** several measures were taken a single researcher performed the coding manually. However, the Framework was tested on a subset of data to find definitions and to improve coded reliability, codes were aligned with agenda setting theory to capture salient and publicly recognized topics, ensuring that they are radically valid. **Transparency** was maintained by documenting all coding decisions and allowing other researchers to replicate and validate our findings.

Some **limitations** are recognized in this research. Manual coding may introduce research bias; however, it is less and when a systematic approach is used

in addition. The research is limited to a few speeches. Further studies could benefit from analyzing multiple speeches to offer a comprehensive understanding. Using agenda setting theory as a Framework, this critical approach allowed into substance and frequency of topics in Harris and Trump’s speeches illuminating their rhetorical methods.

Analysis & Discussion

Table 1. The Role of Populist Language in Swaying Undecided Voters in Swing States

| Code                      | Frequency | Proportion, % | Code                          | Frequency | Proportion, % |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| T+, CA-Unity              | 17        | 21.25         | Si-Border, SI-Immigration     | 1         | 1.25          |
| T+, VC-Promotional        | 15        | 18.75         | T. El-Resources               | 1         | 1.25          |
| VC-Nationalist, T+        | 5         | 6.25          | El-Resources, T-              | 1         | 1.25          |
| VC-Promotional, T+        | 5         | 6.25          | EI-Resources                  | 1         | 1.25          |
| T- VC-Criticism           | 4         | 5.00          | SI-Identity, T-               | 1         | 1.25          |
| SI-Border, VC-Nationalist | 2         | 2.50          | SI-Police, T-                 | 1         | 1.25          |
| VC-Nationalist            | 2         | 2.50          | T-, SI-Absorption             | 1         | 1.25          |
| SI-Security, T+           | 2         | 2.50          | SI-Judiciary, T-              | 1         | 1.25          |
| SI-Immigration, T-        | 2         | 2.50          | SI-Abortion, T-               | 1         | 1.25          |
| T- SI-Democracy           | 2         | 2.50          | SI-Abortion, T+               | 1         | 1.25          |
| VC-Battleground           | 1         | 1.25          | SI-Federalism, T+             | 1         | 1.25          |
| VC-Promotional            | 1         | 1.25          | EI-Healthcare, VC-promotional | 1         | 1.25          |
| Et-Governance             | 1         | 1.25          | T-, CA-Contrast               | 1         | 1.25          |
| CA-Unity                  | 1         | 1.25          | VC-Criticism                  | 1         | 1.25          |
| CA-Unity, T               | 1         | 1.25          | T+, SI-Security               | 1         | 1.25          |
| El-Economy, T+            | 1         | 1.25          | SI-Governance, T-             | 1         | 1.25          |
| SI-Police, VC-Nationalist | 1         | 1.25          |                               |           |               |

Source: compiled by Habibullah Pathan.

The predominant codes are **T+, CA-Unity (21.25%)** and **T+, VC-Promotional (18.75%)** (see Table 1), indicating a strong focus on unity and promotional content in the examined text. The analysis of the frequency and proportion of thematic codes in the document uncovers essential insights into the rhetorical and narrative priorities of the text. The persistent occurrence of **VC-Nationalist, T+ (6.25%)** highlights an emphasis on nationalism intertwined with promotional rhetoric. These codes embody an aspirational vision of advancement, especially through the framing of achievements as historic and

unparalleled. By emphasizing, the document appeals to audiences desiring a sense of belonging and purpose.

Conversely, negative codes such as **T-**, **VC-Criticism (5%)**, and **T-, SI-Democracy (2.5%)**, and **EI-Resources, T+ (1.25%)**, indicate specific policy priorities.

Overall, the document employs a combination of affirmative promotion of nationalist unity and other strategies that are being used to build up an inclusive yet aspirational narrative in this paper. Currently, the movement's position against this strategy critiques this strategy to validate the stance against dissent. The distribution of codes demonstrates a conscious balance between expressing optimism and tackling perceived difficulties that lead to a captivating and multifaceted narrative. During his campaign addresses Donald Trump demonstrated the strategic use of populist rhetoric design to swing voters in swing states. Populist discourse is often based on direct emotions and grounded in nationalist sentiments. This discourse shows how Trump's speech emphasized his approach to discussing major issues appealing to people's sentiments. And it is establishing a shared identity to analyze how his speech highlighted the most distinctive concerns.

An examination of rhetorical tactics, especially in relation to the salience issue, and voter alignment, and emotional resonance sheds light on the impact of populist language on Donald Trump's ability to persuade hesitant voters in swing states. A fundamental component of his method of communication is the most populist language defined by direct appeals to ordinary people versus the elite.

#### **Emphasizing salient issues:**

Trump's speeches routinely emphasized economic and social concerns with high relevance to swing states. His emphasis on "*fixing borders*" and "*bringing jobs back*" designated (SI-Border and EI-Jobs) clearly responded to the issues that are prominent in the states like Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, which have significant working class populations and demographics. His allusions to "*liquid gold*" (oil and gas reserves) emphasized the economic potential of resource abundance (EI- Resources), resonating with areas reliant on energy sectors.

Through the consistent emphasis on the themes such as make "America great again" and "*we are going to fix everything about our country*", Trump established himself as a problem solver, aligning his rhetoric with concerns of undecided voters, matching his discourse with the apprehensions of indecisive voters in need of tangible remedies. A fundamental aspect of Trump's discourse was his ability to concentrate on the themes that resonated most with the battleground state states. In areas like Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, where manufacturing and energy sectors are crucial, Trump's emphasis on economic recovery and job creation was particularly effective. The codes SI-Border, VC-Nationalist (2.5%), and EI-Resources (1.25%) exemplify this emphasis. For instance, use of "*liquid gold*" (oil and gas reserves) and the assurance of energy independence emphasized the region's economic significance with the statements and assertions such as

*“we possess more liquid gold oil and gas than any nation globally, more than Saudi Arabia more than Russia”* (EI- Resources). Besides economic concerns Trump addresses immigration as a subject that often provokes intense sentiments in battleground areas. His promise *“To seal those borders while allowing people to come into our country legally”* (SI-borders) appealed to those who saw border security as a crucial issue. This close match with voter concerns allowed him to frame complex issues in simple, approachable language, making his proposals comprehensible to undecided voters.

Moreover, by celebrating the victories in battleground areas like North Carolina and Pennsylvania Trump carefully underlined the significance of these regions stating *“we have won the battleground states and this will allow us to make America great again”* (VC-Battleground). This persistent focus on pivotal states not only validated the significance of their voters, but also cultivated a feeling of pride and confidence among them.

### **Voter Alignment and Nationalist Appeals:**

An important element of Trump’s populist discourse was his ability to align his vision with the values and concerns of various voter demographics. His recurrent allusions to *“winning battleground states”* like North Carolina, Georgia, and Pennsylvania (VC- Battleground) revealed his strategic targeting of undecided voters in these critical regions. By recognizing the *“Heart and Soul of this movement”*, he created a sense of collective identification and strength among his followers (CA-Unity). Nationalism significantly influenced Trump’s speech, shown by the prevalence of VC-Nationalist, T+ (6.25%) and VC-Promotional, T+ (6.25%). Moreover, Trump’s rhetorical focus on American exceptionalism, encapsulated in phrases like *“Golden Age of America”* and *“Unprecedented Mandate”*, communicated hope and pride. This convergence with nationalistic beliefs resonated deeply in battleground states where voters want a leader who advocates for American values and economic revitalization.

A key characteristic of Trump’s populist rhetoric theory was its resonance to nationalism and collective identity. Trump’s emphasis on togetherness was also significant. The predominant code, T+, CA-Unity (21.25%), highlighted his efforts to cultivate a cohesive identity among his followers. He frequently evoked the idea of reinstating America’s grandeur, linking his campaigns with ambition and desires of his audience. Statements such as, *“This is the most important job in the world, and I will govern by a simple motto: Promises made, Promises kept”* (VC-Promotional, T+) emphasized his commitment to people and reinforced the impression that his leadership was a mission for national betterment.

Inclusivity became another critical element of Trump’s messages, despite his polarizing reputation, his speeches often emphasized unity among diverse voter groups. He characterized his coalition as including *“Young and old, men and women, rural and urban,,,uniting citizens of all backgrounds around a common core”* (VC-Nationalist, T+). By portraying his movement as inclusive

representative, Trump hoped to engage hesitant voters from many groups who sought a unifying figure.

### **Emotional and Aspirational Tone:**

A hallmark of Trump's speeches was their emotional impact accomplished via both affirmative and adverse framing. Positive codes like **T+** were prevalent, contributing to **21.25%** of the total, while negative codes like **T-** and **VC-Criticism (5%)** offered contrast. Statements such as *"This is the most important job in the world and it will govern by a simple Moto, "Promises made promises kept"*, projected confidence and reliability among them. These aspirational messages resonated with uncertain voters by offering a picture of individual and communal achievement. Conversely, Trump's criticism of adversaries and external threats utilized and **"Us versus them"** narrative. For example, his unfavorable portrayal of immigration policy shown in SI-immigration **T+ (2.5%)** depicted migrants as a societal strain, foe example, with Statements like *"Crime here is up and through the roof"*. The term migrant crime polarized audiences but resonated with people who saw immigration as a danger to economic and social stability. This dichotomy of ambitious and aggressive speech effectively mobilized undecided voters by portraying Trump as both a guardian and a visionary.

### **Mobilization through calls to action:**

Trump's speeches often included explicit invitations to action, encouraging people to reclaim authority over destinies. Codes like **VC-Promotional and T+ (6.25%)** exemplified his capacity to galvanize collaborative efforts. His assertion will forever be remembered as the day the American populace reclaimed authority over their nation, invigorated voters by framing their participation as transformative. This rhetorical strategy not only motivated the undecided voters but also established them as an essential to the movement's success. The recognition of the voter donations further strengthens their connection. Statements like *"The millions of diligent Americans have been the heart and soul of this movement"* (**T+ CA-Unity**) validated the supporters' efforts and cultivated loyalty by fostering cultivating Camaraderie and a collective objective, Trump effectively mobilized his audience to act resolutely in his favor.

### **Contrasts and the "Us versus them" negative dichotomy account:**

Populist discourse often uses contrast to depict contrast depict or frame opponents as threats to the common good, Trump skillfully used this tactic as reflected in codes **T-**, **VC-criticism (5%)**, and **SI-Democracy 2.5%**. His attacks on policy changes exemplified by his statement such as *"Everything she believed three years ago is out the window, painted his opponents as inconsistent and opportunistic"*. By presenting himself as a resolute leader, Trump attracted those desiring sincerity and conviction. This discourse included his deliberations on government and security codes like **SI-Governance**, **T-**, and **SI-Security**, **T+**, highlighted his ability to address the national challenges, while admonishing the perceived shortcomings of his adversaries. These contrasts reinforced his reputation as a resolute leader, capable of restoring order and prosperity.

**Examination of frequency and proportion:**

The frequency and percentage of codes indicate Trump’s strategic focal points **T+, CA-Unity (21.25%), and T+, VC-Promotional (18.75%)** dominate, highlighting focus on cohesion and positivity. These codes demonstrate his capacity to cultivate loyalty and inside action via affirmative framing. In contrast, negative codes like **T-, VC-Criticism (5%) and T-, SI-Democracy (2.5%)**, exemplify his competitive approach to addressing opposition and in dealing with external challenges. Infrequently used Codes, such as **SI-border VC-nationalist (2.5%)**, voter apprehensions appeal to specific voter concerns such as border security and energy Independence. These targeted communications enhance the overarching themes of nationalism and collective identity reinforcing Trump’s alignment with the concerns of swing states.

In conclusion, Donald Trump’s populist rhetoric significantly influenced undecided voters in swing states by addressing their immediate concerns, cultivating emotional connection, and establishing a sense of collective purpose. By concentrating on these prominent problems, such as job creation, immigration and resource management Trump connected with voters on a personal level, with the Americans. His inspirational speech and strategic distinction from opponents enhanced his appeal. The frequency analysis reveals between positive promotion and critical contrast, enabling Trump to successfully inspire and organize people by blending nationalism, unity, and emotional engagement. These findings align with prior multimodal corpus analyses, which underscore the power of language to shape audience engagement and meaning across diverse communicative contexts [20]. Trump’s populist discourse not only struck a chord with undecided voters, but also enfranchised them as active contributors to his vision for America’s future. This multi-dimensional approach proved instrumental in securing his influence in the key states.

**Kamala Harris’s Speech Analysis:**

*Table 2. Frequency Count and Proportion of Codes*

| Code               | Frequency | Proportion, % |
|--------------------|-----------|---------------|
| T+ (Positive Tone) | 22        | 29.73         |
| CA-Unity           | 7         | 9.46          |
| CA-Action          | 6         | 8.11          |
| CA-Inspiration     | 3         | 4.05          |
| CA-Gratitude       | 1         | 1.35          |
| SI-Democracy       | 6         | 8.11          |
| SI-Constitution    | 4         | 5.41          |
| SI-Rights          | 4         | 5.41          |
| SI-Security        | 1         | 1.35          |
| VC-Promotional     | 16        | 21.62         |
| VC-Empowerment     | 4         | 5.41          |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>74</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

Source: compiled by Habibullah Pathan.

So, this study indicates that **positive tone T+**, predominates Kamala Harris's concession speech accounting for approximately **30%** of the coded components, highlighting her strategic focus on optimism and hope notable. Secondary themes like promotional appeals, **VC-promotional and Unity, CA-Unity** and its course motivating the rhetoric and calls for collective solidarity constituting **21.62%** and **9.46%** respectively. The speech also reflects her dedication to democratic ideals and equality with such as democracy, **SI-Democracy and Human Rights SI-Rights** together accounting for more than **13%** of the topic while gratitude and security are minor themes. Their inclusion supports the overriding objective of bolstering democratic integrity and social welfare. Overall, the speech effectively balances inspiration, solidarity, and resilience positioning her capitulation as a catalyst for ongoing growth and public involvement.

Kamala Harris's concession speech illustrates the intentional use of **Agenda Setting Theory** in political communication. Harris adeptly highlights the themes of democracy, resilience, equality, and collaborative action. Harris effectively frames publicly discourse, and posits a shared vision shared vision for the future, the use of exotic appeals and motivational rhetoric insurance that these ideas profoundly connect with her audience, fostering hope, unity, and ongoing participation. This method emphasizes her values but also illustrates the influence of language in shaping society's goals and maintaining civic engagement throughout the difficult periods.

### **Frequency analysis and quantitative insights:**

The frequency analysis of courses that are used in Kamala Harris speeches offers according to insides into the themes that she emphasized most, principal conclusions from frequency analysis;

#### **1. Predominant Code: T+ (Affirmative Tone)**

- The positive tone appears 22 times, representing 29.73% of total codes.
- This underscores the significance of hope, resilience, and unity in Harris's rhetoric, especially in addressing the emotional impact of her election setback.

#### **2. Secondary themes:**

- **VC-Promotional (21.62%):** Harris's recurrent motivational appeals characterized by an exhortation for presidency and hope reflect her focus on posting communal resilience.

- **CA-Unity (9.46%) and SI-Democracy (8.1%):** These codes illustrate her emphasis on unity and democratic values in shaping public objectives.

#### **3. Lesser emphasis:**

Codes such as CA-Gratitude (1.35%) and SI-Security (1.35%) are in frequently indicate that while present, these things are subordinate to the overarching objectives of fostering of action and democratic trust the predominance of positive terminal and Advertising material reflects Harris's efforts to maintain morale among her supporters. Her unwavering emphasis on unity and democratic ideals demonstrates her intention to position these as central components in public debate compatible with the Agenda-Setting Framework.

### **Salience of Issue:**

Enhancing fundamental democratic values, Harris promotes democratic integrity and constitutional government especially in recognizing the peaceful transition of power. Harris argues that accepting the election results is essential to American democracy, Harris positions democratic values as the cornerstone of her message and posturing confidence in institutions. *“Our allegiance is to the Constitution of the United States not to a president or to a political party”* (**SI-Constitution, T+**). She underscores the impartial role of constitutional principles in governance separating democracy from partisan affiliations. These topics comprising (13.52%) of total codes align with agenda setting theory of democracy and trust institutions during a politically turbulent era.

### **Framing Resilience and Hope:**

Harris employs affirmative and positive tone to foster resilience and optimism with motivational appeals constituting a significant element of her address. *“The fight for our freedom will take a hard work... but it is always worth it”* (**VC-promotional, T+**). This presents obstacles as surmountable through collective effort appalling to perseverance. *“Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars...let us fill the sky with the light of optimism and faith”* (**VC-Promotional, T+**). Through metaphorical imagery, Harris frames hardship as a catalyst for progress. The combined percentage of 51.35% for positive tone and advertising Appeals reflects a strategic focus on emotional salience cultivating an environment of optimism and determination this alliance with agenda setting theory of focusing public attention on Collective determination and Forward Thinking action.

### **Advocacy for equality and rights:**

Equality and justice are central themes in Harris’ addresses underscoring society’s advancement, as a collective goal. *“We will never give up the fight for freedom, opportunity, fairness, and dignity for all people”* (**SI-Rights, T+**). Harris establishes equality as a national imperative, framing it as intrinsic to the nation’s principles. *“You have power. Don’t ever listen when anyone tells you... something is impossible, we see empowerment”* (**T+**). Addressing younger generation Harris encourages embrace both personal and community agency It prioritizes equality and empowerment as seen in **(10.82%) of codes** highlighting these themes as central to her vision for the nation’s future. This framing resonates with Agenda Setting Theory by emphasizing themes of inclusion, social progress and a call to action.

### **Engaging Collaborative Endeavor**

It integrates numerous calls to actions encouraging her audience to stay involved in civic affairs. *“Do not disappear... this is time to roll up our sleeves to organize, mobilize, and stay engaged”* (**CA-Action, T+**). Harris emphasizes the importance of proactive engagement in fostering social advancement. *“Let this courage be our inspiration to fight for justice to fight for themselves to fight for others”* (**SI-Inspiration, T+**). She uses practical examples to motivate the action and dedication. Harris has a distinct intention to engage her audience, as seen in

**21.62%** of the codes related to calls to action which aligns with Agenda Setting Theory and focuses on shaping public priorities and behavior.

### **Emotional Tone and Its Role in Agenda Setting**

Harris's constant use of **positive tone 29.73%** effectively unifies the audience, contextualizing public problems with a broader narrative of resilience and Hope. This strategy enhances her rapport with supporters, ensuring her priorities, democracy, equality and action remain pivotal in public conversation. The combined qualitative and quantitative analysis of Kamala Harris's speeches underscores the strategy coherence of the language with the tenets of Agenda Setting Theory. Harris adaptively articulates themes of democracy, resilience, and equality as fundamental to her vision of the future. The frequency of codes further highlights a harmonious blend of an optimistic tone, motivational pleas and calls to action. The prevalence of codes underscores her focus on optimism and civic involvement, demonstrating her ability to inspire both hope and action among her supporters. This approach reflects the power of political communication in molding public discourse and maintaining collective determination in the face of challenges. The research integrates qualitative insights with quantitative data, offering a total comprehensive understanding of Harris's rhetorical strategies and their correspondence to wider social concerns.

***Which rhetorical methods rooted in populist discourse were most effective in swaying undecided voters in swing states for Donald Trump and Kamala Harris?***

Rhetorical strategies embedded in populist discourse for Donald Trump and Kamala Harris to uncertain voters in key states. One of the key principles of Donald Trump's strategies was to highlight the prominent problems such as economic recovery and border security. Trump won over supporters who felt ignored by the conventional political discourse by speaking in accessible language and addressing these problems head-on. For instance, he focused on own particular goals like energy-independence and employment development by saying that "*we possess more liquid gold oil and gas, than any nation globally, more than Saudi Arabia, more than Russia*". Pennsylvania and other energy dependent states were receptive to his speech on this regional economic potential. His resolute stance on immigration was reflected in his commitment to "*seal those borders while allowing people to come into our country legally*". This links a complex topic to fears about open borders.

On the other hand, Kamala Harris's speeches were characterized as more inclusive and aspirational hopeful and united tone was aimed at fostering collective unity. The principles of democracy, equality, and perseverance were central to her populist rhetoric speeches. As she embraced the phrase the struggle for our freedom will take hard work but it is invariably worthwhile", portrayed obstacles as solvable issues by collaborative endeavors. This underscores her dedication to fight for equality and institutional integrity, in addition to her call to "*roll up your sleeves*", to organize, mobilize, motivate, and engage proactive voter involvement which is

in line with the Agenda-Setting theory's recommendation for maintaining a civic engagement of their communities.

***To what extent did the use of populist language by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris differ in terms of emotional appeal, issue framing, and voter engagement in swing states?***

The emotional appeal and voter agreement of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris were markedly different in their use of populist language. There was a notable difference between these languages involving these characteristics. Trump's nationalist tone that was used in his speeches emphasized the emotional appeal through both positive and negative framing, while he confidently made claims like *"Promises made, promises kept"* and portrayed the immigration as a societal burden with the statement, "This crime here is up and through the roof". He polarized the "Us versus them" narrative and the combination of aspirational and confrontational tone enabled him to appeal to undecided voters by presenting himself as a leader with a vision, a protector against enemies, using a mix of his aggressive and inspirational rhetoric.

Conversely, Harris's comments leaned heavily on optimism and inclusivity, highlighting her commitment to resiliency and democratic principles. High frequency use of affirmative positive language exemplified by *"Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars... let us fill the sky with the light of optimism and faith"*, positioned diversity as a stimulus for advancement. While Trump's speech often identified particular dangers, Harris emphasized collective agency stating, *"You have power, don't ever listen when anyone tells you something is impossible"*. This approach resonated with a diverse audience, promoting cohesion and optimism via a constructive presentation of matters, such as equality and human rights.

Regarding voter engagement Trump's populist rhetoric stimulated the voter involvement while portraying participation as a revolutionary and transformative, claiming, *"This will forever be remembered as the day the American populace reclaimed authority over their nation"*. Harris, in contrast, used inclusive language to promote teamwork asserting, *"Let this courage be our inspiration to fight for justice, to fight for themselves, to fight for others"*, by humanizing a feeling of pride and reputation among the supporters, she united her vision with their values. This inclusive call to action highlighted her dedication to sharing values, concentrating on long-term resilience and civic connection.

In summary, Trump's discourse relied on direct emotional appeals and nationalist themes, while both leaders used populist techniques to engage people, emphasizing loyalty and urgency. Harris's approach was more ambitious and comprehensive, emphasizing unity, equality, and institutional integrity to captivate a diverse audience. These dissimilarities underline how both modified their rhetoric to resonate with specific voter concerns, hesitations, and interests in frontline states.

## Conclusions

According to the findings of the study, populism played a significant role in Donald Trump's ability to convince and decide voters in swing states by addressing their immediate concerns, fostering emotional connections, and building a sense of collective identity. Trump's language used the straightforwardness, simplicity, and emotional resonance that are hallmarks of populism to align his discourse with the objectives of these important voting segments. The topics of economic recovery immigration restriction and national pride are encapsulated through codes in speeches like (T+, CA-Unity (21.25%), and T+, VC- Promotional (18.75%). By framing his vision as a shared mission to a common goal to "make America great again", he crafted a narrative that resonated deeply with the audience seeking inclusive and aspirational, which connected strongly with audiences who were looking for answers and validation.

To strike a balance does strategic use of positive rhetoric was tempered by opposing negative portrayals of opponents and external threats. This was visible in codes such as T- and VC-Criticism (5%). This duality of hopeful aspiration and oppositional critique- is his capacity to present himself as both a unifier and a problem-solution. He offered unsure voters a compelling reason a compelling reason to align with his vision This combination of optimistic ambition of optimistic ambition and oppositional criticism eating forced by evocative language such as *"liquid gold"* and *"unprecedented mandate"* solidified his appeal, especially in areas that have considerable populations of working-class people reliant on manufacturing and energy Industries. Trump's populist language not only connected with undecided voters by addressing their specific anxieties and goals, but it also gives them the ability to view themselves as an active participants to the success of his movement. By blending emotional engagement with the targeted issue, relevance from successfully engaged people as a result he was able to secure the supporters in swing states and highlight the enduring influence and the lasting power of populism in modern political discourse.

On the contrary, Kamala Harris's populist rhetoric helped her appeal to indecisive voters especially in battleground states by addressing issues that directly tackle the daily life concerns like healthcare, economic stability and social justice. She spoke of common good her inclusive rhetoric of the people versus Elite dysfunction helped her to connect with diverse demographics and bridge ideological divides. Kamala Harris used populist rhetoric to explain the complicated political issues, into relatable actionable terms which may persuade in the indecisive people, wanting clarity and representation. Additionally, her emphasis on Unity and Grassroots empowerment build voter trust and agency encouraging them to align with her vision of progress and equality agenda. Her populism, empathy and inclusivity-based discourse appeal to people in swing state moral and practical concerns.

The populist language of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris exhibited distinct strategies in emotional appeal problem framing, and voter involvement that

highlights the political ideologies and approaches to address the voter's concern. Trump used a forceful nationalist discourse that matched emotionally intensity with polarized framing, capitalizing on themes of economic revival, "border security", and "America first" principles to mobilize undecided voters through a sense of urgency and exclusivity. Conversely, Kamala Harris adopted an inclusive and aspirational tone invoking common ideals of unity, democracy and resilience. Her use of optimism and positive language framed societal challenges as collective opportunities for progress, motivating and inspiring people, and appealing for sustained civic engagement. Harris's focus on institutional integrity and equality resonated with a broader, more diverse audience, cultivating a feeling of optimism and empowerment.

Ultimately, the rhetorical strategies of both leaders demonstrate the efficacy of populist speech to mobilize voter engagement in swing states, although via markedly different approaches. Trump's emotionally charged issues and quick appeals contrasted with Harris's uniting and value-oriented remarks, highlights the nuanced role of populism in contemporary American political campaigns and underscores its intricate significance. Both strategies are customized for their target audience highlighting the significance of rhetorical choices in persuading indecisive voters in pivotal electoral landscapes.

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