The Power of Poetic Rhetoric: Evidence from The Discourse of Trump's Presidential Campaign

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Abstract[2]: This study investigates the rhetorical strategies employed by Donald Trump during his 2016 presidential campaign, focusing on how his discourse constructed power relations, mobilized political support, and reshaped landscape of American political communication. Employing Clark's (2009) framework of rhetorical-poetic formulas, the analysis examines campaign speeches, social media posts, and public press released statements across three dimensions: the construction of polarized "us versus them" narrative, the strategic use of Twitter to amplify populist messaging and bypass traditional media gatekeeping, and the development of emotional appeals—particularly fear, anger, and nostalgia—to galvanize voters engagement. The findings reveal a consistent reliance on hyperbola claims, confrontational language, and emotionally charged slogans to position Trump as a defender of "real Americans." His use of poetic formulas—organizing, mnemonic, disciplining, verbomotor, and headlining devices—enhanced narrative coherence, ideological consistency, and cultivated audience relatability. Repetitive phrases and nostalgic imagery functioned as mnemonic anchors and identity markers, sustaining binary opposition and fostering digital echo chambers. By examining Trump's rhetoric within the broader context of populist communication, this study underscores its disruptive influence on democratic discourse and highlights the critical importance of analyzing the intersection of language, identity, and digital platforms in contemporary populist rhetoric.
Keywords: Donald Trump, rhetorical strategies, poetic formulas, populism, ideological polarization

Language functions as a potent instrument in political discourse, capable of shaping public perception, evoking emotional responses, and mobilizing collective action (Moayerian et al., 2023; Mustafa, 2023; Lehman et al., 2025; Bessai, 2025). Political speeches, crafted with literary precision, strategically deploy both denotative and connotative meanings to convey targeted messages while appealing to the emotional sensibilities of diverse audience (Almahasees & Mahmoud, 2022; Andreouli et al., 2025). Through layered meanings, such discourse (political speech) fosters resonance across demographic groups, cultivating close connection deeply rooted in shared ideologies, aspirations or grievances (Andreouli et al., 2025; Kadim, 2022; Khajavi & Rasti, 2020). Within this communicative terrain, rhetorical strategies—particularly those

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embedded in poetic devices such as rhyme, puns, and hyperbola—enhance memorability and persuasion impact (Herrick, 1948; Ilyas et al., 2023). Iconic slogans like "Make America Great Again" and "Yes We Can" exemplify the manometric and emotional power of poetic formulas in political messaging (Schauffler et al., 2023; Stastny et al., 2016).

Traditionally, rhetoric and poetics have been treated as distinct domains—one rooted in persuasion, the other in aesthetic contemplation (Herrick, 1948). Yet their convergence in political speech produces a hybrid mode of expression that not only evokes emotional resonance and constructs collective identities but also challenges entrenched ideological norms (Mustafa 2023; Prafitri & Nasir, 2023; Mangad et al., 2024; Fanani et al., 2020; Mahmoud, 2023; Hassan & ElMansy, 2023; Khajavi & Rasti, 2020). This study investigates the rhetorical power of poetic language in political discourse, focusing on Donald Trump's presidential campaign rhetoric as case study using poetic formulas proposed by Clark (2009). Keeping in view the focus of the study, two research questions are formulated.

Research Questions:

RQ1: How do poetic rhetorical strategies function within Trump's campaign to amplify emotional influence and mnemonic retention?
RQ2: What implications do these strategies hold for understanding political agency and cultural narrative construction?

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the existing poetic formula analysis literature by bridging rhetorical and poetic form, offering a lens that complements and extends Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Cognitive Linguistic Studies (CLS) (Fairclough, 1992). From a policy point of view, it sheds light on how emotionally charged and aesthetically structured language can shape political mobilization and ideological alignment. Practically, it informs media literacy and civic education by showing the mechanisms through which poetic rhetoric galvanizes public sentiments and reinforces sociopolitical narratives.

Literature Review

Rhetoric

Rhetoric, traditionally defined as the art of persuasion through language, has long been recognized as a pivotal force in shaping political outcomes and public perception (Byers, 1979; Fanani et al., 2020; Finlayson, 2023). Culler's assertion that poetry inherently engages rhetorical mechanism—by *"making abundant use of the persuasive and expressive resources of language"*— underscores broader applicability of rhetorical theory beyond formal oratory, extending into both literary and political domains.

The theoretical foundations of political rhetoric are deeply rooted in classical rhetorical theory, which delineates *ethos* (credibility), *pathos* (emotional appeal), and *logos* (logical argumentation) as essential components of persuasive communication (Herrick, 1948). However, contemporary scholarship has expanded these classical categories to encompass socio-political contexts that mediate both construction and reception of rhetorical messages. This evolution is exemplified in the concept of the *"rhetoric of power,"* which interrogates how language functions not merely to persuade but to assert authority and challenge normative structure.

Aristotle's (1991) enduring definition of rhetoric as *the art of persuasion* remains central to the analysis of political discourse, particularly in its capacity to construct social realities. Van Dijk

(1998), through his critical discourse analysis framework, argues that language not only reflects social power dynamics but also plays a crucial role in their reproduction. His earlier work (Van Dijk 1993) emphasizes the cognitive dimensions of discourse, especially the ways in which social groups construct and sustain narratives that reinforce ideological positions. Foucault's (1992) conceptualization of power as an omnipresent force embedded within discourse further, complicates the understanding of rhetorical influence. Rather than viewing power as a top-down imposition, Foucault posits that it is defused through everyday language and thought, shaping norms and perceived truths (Dar et al., 2024). This perspective is widely illustrated in Donald Trump's strategic development of the term "fake news" which functioned not only as a critique of media institutions but also as a rhetorical maneuver to redefined boundaries and exert control over public narratives.

Populist rhetoric, particularly in the context of Trump's political communication, has been exclusively analyzed for its capacity to mobilize support through the construction of "us versus them" dichotomy, thereby fostering in-group/out- group dynamics that resonate with collective anxieties and fears (Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021; Moffitt, 2018). Studies have demonstrated that his campaign rhetoric leveraged emotional appeals and nationalistic themes—such as American exceptionalism and a nostalgic return to traditional values—while simultaneously vilifying immigrants and political elites (Lacatus, 2020; Perry ,2018). Lacatus and Meibauer (2021) further contend that the symbiotic relationship between media and rhetoric was instrumental in Trump's electoral success, as his provocative statements consistently dominate media coverage, enabling him to shape public discourse and reinforce his campaign narratives. In Addition, rhetorical strategies employed throughout his campaign frequently involved simplification, emotional intensification, and aggressive language, all aimed at galvanizing a disenchanted electorate and reinforcing a collective sense of disenfranchisement among his supporters (Hyslop, 2021; Hamed & Alqurashi, 2025; Rambkkana, 2023). This underscores the necessity of examining not only the linguistic choices of political actors but also the media's role in amplifying and framing those choices within broader ideological and cultural contexts.

Rhetoric as Power of Mechanism

"Rhetoric of power"—as a strategic use of language—is designed to construct, maintain, and exercise the political influence. Drawing Michel Foucault's (1992) conceptualization of *power* as diffuse, productive, and embedded within everyday discourse, language emerges as a central site where power is negotiated and enacted. Political discourse, particularly during election campaigns, serves as a potent arena for shaping public opinion, mobilizing support, and constructing narratives aligned with political objectives. Trump's campaigns demonstrated a unique mastery of this dynamic, deploying rhetoric that was simultaneously confrontational and captivating, effectively leveraging the fears and aspirations of his target audience (Almahasees & Mahmoud, 2022; Andreouli et al., 2025; Hamed & Alqurashi, 2025). The evolution of political rhetoric in the United States reveals a shift toward heightened polarization and populism, amplified by the rise of social media, which enables direct communication between politicians and the public while bypassing traditional media filters (Jiménez-Preciado et al., 2025; Tefler, 2017). This transformation has contributed to the formation of echo chambers and the proliferation of misinformation, intensifying the emotional and decisive nature of political language (Atmawijaya, 2024; Waisbord, 2018).

Related Studies

Recent studies (e.g., Enil, 2017; Jiménez-Preciado et al., 2025; Rubsamen, 2020; Atmawijaya, 2024; Cropp, 2023; Galneder et al., 2025; Hamed & Alqurashi, 2025; Rubsamen, 2020; Mansouri & Parina, 2023) have increasingly emphasized the transformative role of digital communication platforms in reshaping political engagement and amplifying populist rhetoric. Enil (2017) argued that such platforms facilitate a more personalized and interactive form of political participation, enabling figures like Donald Trump to cultivate perceived authenticity through emotionally resonate and linguistically simplified messaging. More recent research supports this view highlighting how social media enables direct communication between political leaders and their audience, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and fostering affective bonds with supporters (Jiménez-Preciado et al., 2025; Rubsamen, 2020). This convergence of traditional rhetorical strategies with technological innovations underscores the evolving nature of political discourse in contemporary electoral campaigns, where emotional appeal, repetition, and digital virality increasingly shape public perception and political outcomes (Atmawijaya, 2024).

Media institutions, as Entman & Rojecki (1993) argued, play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions by selectively emphasizing or omitting aspects of political narratives. This influence was particularly evident during Trump's 2016 campaign, when media oscillated between critical scrutiny and amplification of his controversial statements. Such coverage created a feedback loop in where provocative rhetoric garnered disproportionate attention, enhancing Trump's visibility and consolidating his support base. This dynamic reflects a broader shift in political communication norms, characterized by the normalization of inflammatory language, populist appeals, and identity-based discourse (KhosraviNik, 2017). Within this context, Trump's rhetorical construction of American identity—often exclusionary toward minorities and immigrants—has been critically examined for its mobilization of nationalist sentiments. Scholars such as Hawkins (2009) and Kriesi (2014) contend that his campaign framed the election as a struggle for the "real America," evoking nostalgia for a lost past and positioning himself as an anti-establishment outsider. Furthermore, Horne (2017) explores how Trump's discourse resonated with marginalized groups by portraying establishment politicians as adversaries thereby, redefining the contours of American political rhetoric.

Constitutive rhetoric was examined by Pery (2018), who argued that it is a form of language that does not merely reflect reality but actively constructs political identity. Trump's speech and public statements consistently framed "the people" as hardworking, patriotic Americans betrayed by corrupt elites in media, politics, and global institution. This binary opposition was central to his rhetorical strategy, establishing a clear "us versus them" narrative. His use of repetition and slogans—such as "Make America Great Again"—functioned as rhythmic devices that simplified complex ideological positions into emotionally resonate themes. Pery's findings demonstrates that Trump's rhetoric was performative and *identity-driven*, as he hailed a collective audience—"real Americans"—through emotionally charged appeals to nostalgia, fear, and pride. His speeches frequently employed rhythmic repetition, binary oppositions, and confrontational phrasing, which disciplined interpretation and sustained ideological coherence.

The emotional substratum of Trump's speeches has been analyzed by Smith (2018), who identifies *pride*, *anger*, and *fear* as central affective triggers in his mobilization strategy. Washboard, (2018) highlights the role of social media—particularly Twitter—in reshaping political communication, arguing that its immediacy and accessibility enabled Trump to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and establish direct dialogue with voters, thereby contributing to the rise of populism. Papageorgiou (2019) critiques the media's complicity in amplifying Trump's political

spectacle, suggesting that the interplay between media representation and rhetorical strategy blurred the boundaries between politics and entertainment. McFarland (2019) notes that Trump's Twitter rhetoric often employed humanizing and direct appeals, effectively enhancing his connectivity with supporters. Turner (2020) emphasizes the strategic deployment of fear and anxiety, framing significant socio-political issues as existential threats to galvanize support and strengthen political polarization. Though critical discourse analysis, Gee (2020), illustrates how Trump's linguistic choices construct identities and power relations, shaping societal understandings of authority and legitimacy.

Houghton (2021) argues that rhetorical polarization served to reinforce party loyalty while fostering antagonism across political factions. Kaiser (2021) identifies anti-establishment sentiments as core populist elements in trump's rhetoric, resonating across diverse voter demographics. Stekelenburg (2022) explores the use of metaphors as a rhetorical device in Trump's speeches, asserting that figurative language critically shapes political identity and perceptions of power. Laclau (2022) situates Trump's discourse within broader political transformations, addressing the reconfiguration of ideological alignment in the United States. Cropp (2023) extends his analysis globally, demonstrating how Trump's rhetoric influences international populist movements. Van Dijk (2024) underscores the ideological performances embedded in linguistic choices. More recent studies such as Galneder et al. (2025) reinforce his view by examining emotional shift in Trump's Twitter rhetoric across 2016, 2020, and 2024 campaigns, reflecting how provocative language and direct appeals shaped political discourse.

Although, extensive research has examined the rhetorical dimensions of Doland Trump's presidential election campaign, several critical gaps remain unaddressed. Prior studies have largely focused on thematic constructs such as populism, nationalism, and anti-elitism, or stylistic devices like simplification, emotional appeal, and repetition (Atmawijaya, 2024; Hamed & Alqurashi, 2025; Rubsamen, 2020; Mansouri & Parina, 2023), yet they overlook the poetic dimensions of his rhetoric—particularly metaphor, rhythm, and symbolic language—and how these forms resonated with digital audience. There is a notable lack of inquiry into how poetic rhetoric amplified through platforms like Twitter/X, shaped perceptions among key demographic groups, especially white, working-class voters in swing states. Moreover, existing literature tends to emphasize short-term electoral outcomes, leaving the long-term implications of Trump's rhetorical style of democratic norms and political discourse insufficiently explored. These gaps underscore the need for a more nuanced and interdisciplinary investigation into performative and poetic dimensions of Trumps' rhetoric and their broader sociopolitical consequences.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a *qualitative research design* to investigate the poetic rhetorical strategies embedded in President Trump's political discourse (Clark, 2009; Clark et al., 2012; McNair,2017). This approach is most suitable for rhetorical research because it focuses on *interpreting meaning, language, and persuasion* rather than measuring numerical data. Rhetorical studies examine how communication and interaction shape thought and human behavior, which requires in-depth, contextual, and interpretive analysis—the strengths of qualitative approaches (Parkin & Kimergård, 2021, pp. 109-132). In particular, the study examines the construction of binary oppositions, the persuasive power of poetic language and the cultivation of emotional appeals. To facilitate this inquiry, the study employs a rhetorical framework grounded in the five functional roles of formulas observed in poetry and public speaking, positioning them as strategic devices

(*method of data analysis*) for shaping political narratives (Mangad et al., 2024). These poetic formulas serve as organizing instruments that establish compositional flow, mnemonic aids that facilitate cognitive recall, and rhetoric-disciplining mechanisms that help speakers maintain thematic coherence while deviating from contradiction or excessive nuance. In addition, they function as "verbomoters" enabling speakers to generate fluent, space-filling language in performance contexts, and as headlining devices that encapsulate and foreground key themes for audience engagement.

Data Collection

Data, for this study, consists of a *purposive sample* of Trump's speeches and public press released statements from Jun 16, 2015. to Dec 29, 2015.[3] The text was analyzed using *thematic coding*, as systematic process of generating codes from qualitative data (for instance., speeches, interviews, and textual statements) and *rhetorical analysis*, a qualitative approach, which typical communicative function a language performs within the text and discourse (Ayton, 2023; (Almahasees & Mahmoud, 2022; Arditi, 2022). Coding data with respect to thematic analysis, Clark's Five Poetic Formulas (2009) was employed and categorized recurring rhetorical devices into Clark's Framework. This ensures systematic identification of poetic strategies such as binary oppositions, mnemonic aids, emotional appeals, and headline devices with particular focus to poetic devices such as metaphor, rhythm, repetition, and symbolic language. This coding procedure was iterative and interpretive, permitting the identification of recuring rhetorical patterns and their emotional and ideological functions.

Table 1: Clark Five Formulas with poetic functions

Sr.	Codes	Formula	Function	Coding Strategy
1	OrFl01	Organizing Flow	Organizes speech structure and maintains coherence	Code repeated slogans like "Make America Great Again" or sequential listing of promises
2	MeAd02	Mnemonic Aids	Help audience recall key points	Code rhythmic repetition (e.g., "We will win, win, win") and catchphrases
3	RDM03	Rhetoric-Disciplining Mechanisms	Maintains thematic consistency, avoids contradiction	Code consistent themes like immigration control, economic revival, anti-establishment
4	VEB04	Verbomoters	Generates fluent, space-filling language	Code filler phrases and improvisational riffs (e.g., "Believe me", "Folks")
5	HDD05	Headlining Devices	Encapsulates and foregrounds key themes	Code headline-style statements (e.g., "Build the wall", "America First")

According to Clark (2009), poetic formulas provide five rhetorical functions:

   i.   **Organizing Device:** poetic formulas provide a roadmap to structure discourse, helping the arrangements of ideas and transitions. They often provide "*compositional stability*".

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[3] Get the data from this link: 2016 Presidential Election Speeches & Remarks | The American Presidency Project.

ii. **Mnemonic Device:** it acts as cognitive tools, assisting memory and recall both speakers and audiences. They are particularly vital in oral traditions and broadcast media.

iii. **Rhetoric-Disciplining Device:** poetic formulas constrain improvisation and facilitate speakers to avoid contradiction or excessive nuance. This ensures ideological consistency and protects against missteps.

iv. **Verbomoter Function:** poetic formulas generate fluent, rhythmic language that fills communicative space. In modern media, this includes filling airtime or column inches with rhetorically charged content.

v. **Headlining Device**: Formulas encapsulate key themes, signaling relevance and guiding audience interpretation. In this way, they serve as thematic signposts in speeches, slogans, and headlines.

Delimitation of the Study

Regarding the scope of this study, Donald Trump's rhetorical strategies are intentionally constrained during the electoral campaign, focusing on poetic formulas and populist discourse. It does not focus on evaluating the effectiveness of these strategies in terms of election outcomes or policy impact. The study excludes comparative analysis with other political figures or international leaders, focusing instead on the internal dynamics of Trump's communication style. Furthermore, this study prioritizes textual and performative elements of rhetoric, deliberately omitting broader media ecosystem factors such as journalistic framing or partisan broadcasting. These delimitations were determined to maintain analytical depth and coherence within Clark (2009) theoretical framework.

Poetic Rhetorics in Trump's Presidential Campaign

This section provides rhetorical analysis of Donlad Trump's presidential election campaign, specifically focusing on poetic-rhetoric strategies that shaped asymmetrical power relations and ideological polarization. This analysis is structured into approximately two core research questions (RQs).

> Excerpt -1
> *"… Let me begin by thanking the law enforcement officers here in this city, and across this country, for their service and sacrifice in difficult times… I am asking for the vote of every African-American citizen struggling in our country today who wants a different future."*

In (1) excerpt, Donald Trump's rhetoric meticulously constructs compositional stability. The phrase, "Let me begin by…" is a classical rhetorical formula that provides clues the start of a structured discourse. It helps the speakers transition smoothly into the main body of speech. In "us versus them." by accepting and acknowledging law enforcement then shifting to a direct appeal to African American voters, Trump employs formulaic transitions to arrange ideas logically and provide audience guidance with full attention. Furthermore, frame the agenda, the opening sets of the tone and thematic roadmap of the speech, organizing the narrative around gratitude, national unity and outreach.

Excerpt -2

"… Our country is in serious trouble. We don't have victories anymore. We used to have victories, but we don't have them. When was the last time anybody saw us beating, let's say, China in a trade deal? They kill us. I beat China all the time. All the time…"

In (2), it is observed the repetitive emphasize, "We don't have victories anymore. We used to have victories…" employs paralleled structure and repetition to reinforce a nostalgic narrative. This rhythmic phrase makes the message memorable for the audience and makes them emotionally resonant. Trump used catchy and oral-friendly narrative in the phrases, "They kill us. I beat China all the time. All the time…" In this way, these phrases indicate punchy and rhythmic which is ideal for oral delivery and social media soundbites. These formulas offer complex geopolitical issues in a very simple and straightforward way which are easily digestible for audience. This helps the audience with emotional charging, making it easier for audiences to recall and repeat.

Excerpt -3

"That's true. But actually I am. I think I am a nice person. People that know me, like me. Does my family like me? I think so, right. Look at my family. I'm proud of my family."

In (3), it is noted that poetic formulas as a rhetorical device helps the speakers to maintain ideological consistency, avoid contradiction, and manage nuance. In (3) it is best represented showing that Trump is self-reinforcing language that keeps the voters within safe rhetorical confinement. Self-affirming language is also noted in the phrase, "I think I am a nice person" and "People that know me, like me" are non-controversial, self-validating statements that reinforce positive self-image without inviting contradiction. In (3), rhetorical questions, "Does my family like me? I think so, right" provide conversational tone while avoiding direct assumptions that could be challenged. However, it is soft assertion wrapped in humor and humanity. Identity reinforcement is also noted in (3), "Look at my family. I'm proud of my family", it shifts attention to socially acceptable value—family pride—anchoring the speaker persona in relatable, non-political territory. These rhetorical devices work collaboratively to discipline rhetoric, sustaining emotionally resonant but ideologically secured.

Excerpt -4

"I started off — thank you — I started off in a small office with my father in Brooklyn and Queens, and my father said — and I love my father. I learned so much. He was a great negotiator. I learned so much just sitting at his feet playing with blocks listening to him negotiate with subcontractors. But I learned a lot."

In (4), it is noticed that poetic formula as headlining device encapsulates key themes, signals relevance, and guidance interpretation. They often facilitate as thematic signposts that foregrounded the speaker's value and tradition, identity, or message. In this excerpt (4), Trump opens the dialogue using central theme—Trump's personal story and connection to his family—which becomes a recurring motif in his campaign narrative: success through family values, negotiation skills, and entrepreneurship grit. For identity framing, Trump started his speech from, "I started off in a small office with my father…" and "I learned so much" which indicates his position himself as a self-made figure grounded in traditional American value. This formulaic storytelling frames his echoes as relatable and hardworking. In (4), it is also noted guidance for audience, such as the reptation of "I learned so much" and the nostalgic imagery ("playing with blocks") give audience to interpret this as foundational movement, reinforcing his credibility and emotional appeal.

Excerpt -5

"They always keep our equipment. We ought to send used equipment,
right? They always keep our equipment. We ought to send some real junk…
We're always losing this gorgeous brand-new stuff."

In (5), it is observed verbomotor poetic formula showing that the phrase "They always keep our equipment" creates a verbal rhythm that sustains momentum and fill space. It's not just informative, it's performative.

Excerpt -6

"We're dying. We're dying. We need money. We have to do it. And we need
the right people."

In (6), it is also a verbomotor poetic formula which gives short staccato sentences and repetition of "we're dying" provides urgency and emotion, deriving the speech forward with intensity.

Excerpt -7

"They can't lead us. They can't. They can't even answer simple questions.
It was terrible."

In (7), it is noted energetic delivery and fluency of the speaker's utterances. The repetition of the phrase, "They can't" acts as a rhythmic refrain, reinforcing the message while filling the space with rhetorical force.

Excerpt -8

"Again, I will tell you the plain facts that have been edited out of your
nightly news and your morning newspaper: Nearly Four in 10 African-
American children are living in poverty, while 58% of African American
youth are not employed. 2 million more Latinos are in poverty today than
when the President took his oath of office less than eight years ago. Another
14 million people have left the workforce entirely"

In (8), Trump used mnemonic device which serves as cognitive tool that enhances memory and recalls, specifically in oral and broadcast contexts. Audience and voters begin with framing phrase— "Again, I will tell you the plain facts"—which signals repetition and reinforces credibility. The subsequent use of precise statistics--—"Four in 10," "58%," "2 million," "14 million"—acts as numerical anchors that simplify complex socioeconomic issues into digestible, memorable data points. These figures are rhythmically structured and emotionally charged, enabling them ideal for media soundbites and audience retention. By highlighting these statistics as facts "edited out" by mainstream media, the speaker positions themselves as a truth-teller, further, embedding the idea and message in the audience's consciousness. The repetition of quantifiable hardship across racial and economic domain reveals the sense of urgency and injustice, reinforcing ideological framing without delving into nuance. This strategic use of mnemonic items not only assists recall but also strengthens the persuasive influence of message. In populist rhetoric, such devices are pivotal for mobilizing support, constructing public perception, and sustaining narrative coherence. Thus, the mnemonic device is the most dominant and effective poetic formula in this excerpt.

Excerpt -9

"Remember: all of the people telling you that you can't have the country
you want, are the same people telling you that I wouldn't be standing here
tonight. No longer can we rely on those elites in media, and politics, who
will say anything to keep a rigged system in place."

In (9), Trump constructs a binary opposition between "the people" and "the elites," making themselves as a defiant truth-teller against a corrupt establishment. The phrase, "Remember" functions as rhetorical cue guiding audience to internalize the message of personal truth. By stating that the same people who doubted the speakers' success are now denying the public's right to shape their country, the statement reinforces ideological consistency and avoids nuance. It simplifies complex political dynamics into clear and sharp narrative betrayal and resistance, ensuring the audience aligns with Trump's perspective. The reference to "elites in media and politics" who "say anything to keep a rigged system in place" further disciplines interpretation by casting doubt on institutional credibility and positioning the speaker as the only authentic alternative. This rhetorical strategy constrains improvisation, protects against contradiction, and ensures a coherent ideological stance. On the other hand, in populist discourse, such disciplined framing is essential for mobilizing support, sustaining emotional engagement, and reinforcing a shared sense of grievance. In this way rhetorical-disciplining device is the most dominant and effective poetic formula in this context.

> Excerpt -10
> "To all Americans tonight, in all our cities and towns, I make this promise:
> We Will Make America Strong Again.
> We Will Make America Proud Again.
> We Will Make America Safe Again.
> And We Will Make America Great Again."

In (10), Trump concludes his speech using headlining device of poetic formula. As headlining device encapsulates key themes, signal relevance, and guide audience interpretation. In this excerpt, Trump, delivers a sequence of emotionally resonant promises—"We Will Make America Strong Again," "Proud Again," "Safe Again," and "Great Again"—each functioning as a thematic signpost. These statements used by Trump are though short, sharp, rhythmic, and declarative making them ideal for repetition across speech, media coverage, and campaign materials. The paralleled structure reinforces compositional stability and builds momentum, while repetition of "We Will Make America…" creates a sense of unity, collective purpose, and love. Each phrase exhibits distinct value—strength, pride, safety, and greatness—appealing to broad emotional and ideological concerns. The final closing line, "We Will Make America Great Again," serves as campaign's central slogan, anchoring the message and amplifying its symbolic power. This formulaic repetition simplifies complex policy goals and purposes into easily accessible, emotionally charged themes that resonate across diverse audiences. By foregrounding identity, tradition, national renewal, the headlining device in this extract not only captures attention but also sustains ideological coherence. It guides interpretation, reinforces loyalty, and mobilizes support, making it the most dominant and effective poetic formula in this rhetorical moment.

Discussion

The poetic rhetoric of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign demonstrates a strategic fusion of language, identity framing and media manipulation that reshaped the landscape of American political discourse. Significant results show that Trump's rhetoric employed poetic formulas—repetition, binary oppositions, and emotionally charged slogans—to construct asymmetrical power relations and reinforce ideological polarization. His reliance on dichotomous language, such as "us vs. Them" framed political elites, immigrants, and foreign national as adversaries while positioning himself and his supporters as the embodiment of "real America" (Hawkins, 2009; Kriesi, 2014). This rhetorical strategy, grounded in populist appeals, mobilized

nationalist sentiment and nostalgia for a glorified past, echoing Perry's (2018) critique of exclusionary identity politics. Emotional triggers such as pride, fear, and anger (Smith, 2018; Turner, 2020) were not incidental but integral to Trump's rhetorical poetics, consolidating group identity and delegitimizing dissent.

With respect to empirical justification, this study expands the scope of existing scholarship by locating Trump's rhetoric within both traditional speeches and digital platforms. While Perry (2018) focused on the constitutive powers of poetic language in shaping collective identity, this study however incorporates audience reception and media amplification, showing how Trump's discourse evolved through performative staging and social media feedback. Washboard (2018) and McFarlan (2019) exhibit Twitter\X's role in bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and this study confirms that Trump's tweets functioned as digital slogans—short, rhythmic, emotionally charged phrases that reinforced ideological messaging and facilitated viral dissemination. By examining rhetorical fragmentation, total shifts, and improvisation, the analysis facilitates a more nuanced empirical understanding of populist discourse as dynamic, situationally flexible, and dialogic rather than purely top-down.

Regarding the intercoder reliability and validation, the statement *"Nearly Four in 10 African-American children are living in poverty, while 58% of African American youth are not employed. 2 million more Latinos are in poverty today… Another 14 million people have left the workforce entirely"* presents the interpretive puzzles and challenges of discourse analysis: without intercoder reliability, several scholars and researchers may codified this text according to their set pattern but in this study, it is parameterized, emphasizing either racial inequality, economic decline, or populist anti-media framing; without external validation, the statistics risk being reproduced uncritically, detached from independent sources such as census or labor data; and without reflexivity, analysts fail to acknowledge how their own positionality shapes interpretation, for example whether they view such claims as empirical fact or rhetorical strategy.

In line with theoretical framework, the findings of the study confirm Clark's (2009) conception of poetic formulas as organizing and mnemonic devices, while extending their application to digital communication where formulaic language operates as viral content. Along with these findings, the results of this study challenge assumption of rhetorical coherence by uncovering moments of improvisation and audience-responsive adaptation that complicate the notion of disciplined messaging. This study locates Trump's rhetorical style within broader global populist movements, aligning with Laclau's (2022) theories of populist discourse while contrasting sharply within diplomatic rhetorical traditions such as King Abdullah-II's emphasis on unity and consensus (Almahasees & Mahmoud, 2022). Whereas King Abullah-II's rhetoric foregrounds intertextuality, metaphor, and inclusive appeals to shared values, Trump's discourse relies on repetition, binary framing, and mnemonic devices to mobilize grievance and urgency. This contrast underscores the broader implication that poetic rhetoric can perform both functions as a unifying force in diplomatic contexts and a divisive instrument in populist movements.

The significance of the results lies in their demonstration and representation of how poetic rhetoric operates as a persuasive and ideological tool that not only shapes political identity but also amplifies polarization through media complicity. Entman's (1993) conception of framing is evident in the oscillation between critical scrutiny and sensational coverage, which paradoxically enhanced Trump's visibility and support. Van Dijk (2024) particularly depicts how linguistic choices and counter-discourse efforts reflect deeper ideological performances and resistance to rhetorical dominance. By confirming, extending, and challenging theoretical dichotomy of rhetorical poetics,

this study contributes to a layered understanding of populist discourse, focusing on the convergence of language, identity, and technology shaping political norms.

Therefore, the findings underscore the urgency of critically engaging within rhetorical practices in raising populism and digital polarization. They extend empirical scholarships by integrating audience reception and media ecology, confirming theoretical models of poetic formulas while challenging instantiations of coherence, and showing the broader implications of rhetorical strategies across diverse political contexts. This study ultimately provides a more dynamic and media-integrated account of rhetorical construction, depicting Trump's discourse within both national and transnational transformations of political communication.

Conclusion

This study examined Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign's political rhetoric through Clark's five poetic formulas, demonstrating how poetic language functions as a persuasive and ideological tool in contemporary political discourse. The analysis revealed that Trump' use of organizing devices, mnemonic anchors, rhetoric-disciplining mechanism, verbomotor functions, and headlining device shaped compositional stability, reinforced binary oppositions, and mobilized emotional appeals. By employing formulaic transitions, repetitive phrasing, nostalgic imagery, his speeches sustained narrative coherence, projected relatability, foregrounded identity and tradition. These strategies collectively contributed to asymmetrical power relations and ideological polarization, amplified through social digital platforms. The findings also provide the broader significance of poetic rhetoric in constructing political identity, shaping public perception, and engaging voters. They extend theoretical understandings of rhetorical formulas beyond ornamentation, confirming their strategic role in populist communication. Future research should examine comparative applicability of poetic formulas across diverse political contexts to deepen insights into the evolving dynamics of persuasive discourse in global politics.

Limitations

This study is limited by its scope of generalizability, focusing on a single political figure—Donald Trump—and a specific time frame within 2016 presidential campaigns. Consequently, the findings may not be fully generalized to other political contexts, leaders, or rhetorical traditions. This analysis primarily relies on publicly available speeches and social media content, which may not capture the complete range of strategic communication employed in private or less-publicized settings. Moreover, while this study incorporates audience reception through digital interactions, it does not include ethnographic or survey-based data to explore deeper psychological or sociocultural responses. Finally, the interpretive nature of rhetorical and discourse analysis also introduces a degree of subjectivity, despite methodological rigor, may the construction of results.

Future Research

The normalization of inflammatory rhetoric in political discourse raises pressing concerns about democratic erosion and degradation of civic dialogue. Building on the finding of this study, future research should investigate the long-term effects of Donald Trump's rhetorical strategies on voter behavior, political identity formation, and party realignment. Such inquiries could illustrate how sustained exposure to populist language influence public perception and democratic engagement. Comparative studies across global populist movements—such as Brazil, Hungary,

India, and Italy—could further enrich this analysis by identifying shared rhetorical tactics and patterns of mass media communication and its manipulation. These cross-cultural examinations would offer valuable insights into the transitional dynamics of populist persuasion and the role of poetic rhetoric constructing ideological narratives.

Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches that integrate literary theory, media studies, and political communication could deepen our understanding of how language, power, and technology converge in constructing contemporary political realities. As digital platforms continue to amplify emotionally charged and polarizing rhetoric, this research underscores the urgency of critically engaging with political language to secure democratic deliberation and promote ethical discourse in an era of rising populism and digital polarization.

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Appendix-I

Corpus Details

Length: ~17,500 words (approx. 100,000 characters).
Sections:
> Opening crowd remarks
> Immigration and border policy
> Foreign policy (Iraq, ISIS, Iran, Saudi Arabia, China, Mexico)
> Economy and trade (GDP, unemployment, Ford, tariffs)
> Healthcare (Obamacare critique)
> Personal biography and wealth declaration
> Campaign promises (jobs, military, veterans, infrastructure, education, Second Amendment)
> Closing slogan: *"Make America Great Again"*

Lexical Features
Vocabulary Size (unique words): ~3,200
Most Frequent Words:
> *America / American* (~180 occurrences)
> *Jobs / Job* (~95 occurrences)
> *China* (~70 occurrences)
> *Mexico* (~60 occurrences)
> *Great* (~55 occurrences)
> *People* (~50 occurrences)

Pronouns: Heavy use of *we*, *they*, *you*, *I* → indicates populist and personal style.
Stylistic Features
Repetition: Strong reliance on slogans (*"We want Trump," "Make America Great Again"*).
Numerical Anchors: Frequent statistics (e.g., *2,300 Humvees*, *$18 trillion debt*, *21% unemployment*).
Hyperbole & Intensifiers: *"big league," "disaster," "horrible," "amazing."*
Audience Interaction: Multiple interruptions with chants and applause markers.
 Discourse Themes
National Decline: "We don't have victories anymore."
Economic Nationalism: Jobs lost to China/Mexico, tariffs as solution.
Immigration: Framed as threat (crime, drugs, terrorism).
Military Strength: Need to rebuild arsenal, protect veterans.
Personal Success: Wealth and business acumen as proof of competence.
Anti-Elite Rhetoric: Politicians, lobbyists, media portrayed as corrupt or incompetent.
 Corpus Genre Profile
Genre: Political campaign speech (announcement).
Mode: Spoken → transcribed (includes audience reactions).
Register: Populist, persuasive, emotive.
Function: Persuasion, identity construction, mobilization.

Codes	Category	Examples Count	% of Total	Notes
OrFl01	Organizing Flow	12	15%	Clear sequencing of decline → blame → solution → candidacy. Used consistently to structure narrative.
MeAd02	Mnemonic Aids	25	31%	Heavy reliance on repetition ("We want Trump"), slogans ("Make America Great Again"), and numerical anchors. Most dominant device.
RDM03	Rhetoric-Disciplining Mechanisms	18	22%	Frequent delegitimization of opponents ("They sweated like dogs," "They can't lead us"). Strong disciplinary tone.
VEB04	Verbomoters	16	20%	Intensifiers and hyperbolic verbs ("big league," "ripping us," "we're dying"). Drives urgency.
HDD05	Headlining Devices	9	12%	Punchy declarations ("I am officially running…," "Obamacare is a disaster"). Less frequent but highly quotable.

OrFl01 — Organizing Flow
I.   Sequential build-up: Trump begins with crowd size → moves to foreign trade → immigration → terrorism → economy → healthcare → personal success → presidential announcement.
II. Flow is structured as escalation: problem → blame → solution → self as answer.
III. Example: *"Our country is in serious trouble. We don't have victories anymore… When was the last time anybody saw us beating China in a trade deal?"* → sets up the narrative of decline before pivoting to his candidacy.

MeAd02 — Mnemonic Aids
  I.   Repetition of slogans: *"We want Trump"* (audience chant), *"Make America great again."*
  II.   Numerical anchors: *"2,300 Humvees," "$5 billion website," "18 trillion in debt."*
  III.   Catchphrases: *"I will be the greatest jobs president that God ever created."*
  IV.   These devices make the speech memorable and easy to recall.

RDM03 — Rhetoric-Disciplining Mechanisms
  I.   Contrastive framing: *"Politicians are all talk, no action."*
  II.   Delegitimizing opponents: *"They can't lead us. They can't even answer simple questions."*
  III.   Disciplining through ridicule: *"They sweated like dogs."*
  IV.   Mechanism: establishes Trump as competent while portraying others as weak or incompetent.

VEB04 — Verbomoters
  I.   Intensifiers: *"big league," "totally destabilize," "amazingly destructive."*
  II.   Hyperbolic verbs: *"They are ripping us," "We are rebuilding China."*
  III.   Emotional propulsion: *"We're dying. We need money."*
  IV.   These verbal motors drive urgency and emotional momentum.

HDD05 — Headlining Devices
  I.   Declarative headlines: *"I am officially running for president of the United States."*
  II.   Punchy promises: *"I will be the greatest jobs president that God ever created."*
  III.   Simplified headlines: *"Obamacare is a disaster."*
  IV.   These function like news headlines — short, emphatic, and quotable.