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The Former President and January 6 U.S. Capitol Attack: How Trump Weaponized His Rhetoric

Pham Phuong Uyen Diep¹, Ngoc Yen My Nguyen²

¹Manship School of Mass Communication, Louisiana State University

²A. Q. Miller School of Media and Communication, Kansas State University

Employing both computational and manual content analysis, the study examined how then-President Donald J. Trump weaponized his rhetoric before the Capitol storm on January 6, 2020. The authors analyzed 19 speeches (N = 19), resulting in 801 paragraphs (N = 801), of Trump from November 7, 2020, to January 6, 2021, collected from the White House and his campaign platforms. Within 19 speeches, the most frequently used words centered around achievements of Trump's administration and alleged election fraud. Eight hundred-one paragraphs further identified Trump's rhetoric style, using the frameworks of weaponized communication and bonding-bridging rhetoric. Over half of the 801 paragraphs contained weaponized communication cues, while 296 paragraphs used bonding tactics. There were indeed differences in the rhetoric employed between the White House speeches and the campaign ones.

Keywords: presidential rhetoric, weaponized communication, bonding-bridging, rhetorical analysis, January 6

Donald J. Trump's 2020 presidential election campaign was described as "a media circus," where he was the master orchestrating the show via multiple media, influencing his supporting community, at least on Twitter, and showing characteristics of a cult (Autry, 2020; Pompeo, 2020; Tran, 2021). He continuously spread conspiracy theories, fake news, dis- and misinformation to refuse the ballots' legitimacy and groundlessly affirm that the election had been rigged (Brewer & Egan, 2021; Freking, 2020; Riccardi, 2020). Words matter and presidential rhetoric, in particular, can incite illegal activities (Brewer & Egan, 2021). The 45th President of the United States has been blamed for inspiring and provoking the Capitol attack by a speech before the incident (Brewer & Egan, 2021; Eisen & Reisner, 2021; Savage, 2021).

Nonetheless, it is unclear whether Trump's rhetoric and its characteristics significantly relate to the insurrectionists and Capitol assault. Especially, the examination of his speeches before and on that day remains an underresearched field of inquiry. Therefore, the current study examines Donald Trump's speeches after Joe Biden was projected to win the 2020 presidency, in terms of the level of weaponizing and bonding - bridging rhetoric that could reasonably trigger the lawless actions of the storming on the Capitol on January 6, 2021. The investigation of former President Trump's rhetoric can, initially, suggest if there is a plausible connection between his speeches and the January 6 attack, as one of the most important applications of the American president's rhetorical power is the construction of the people (Beasley, 2004; Dorsey, 2007; Stuckey, 2004).

This study may provide academic evidence on how and to what extent the former President had weaponized his communication to call for riots and ignited the Capitol insurrection. Furthermore, understanding his rhetorical messages to supporters concerning the attack, which was described as a 9/11 "assault from within" or "democracy under siege," is essential for informed citizens and scholars. It also complements academic analysis efforts about an unprecedented leader's discourse and persona, which affects U.S. modern democracy. The findings about Trump's rhetoric further contribute to comprehend other democracies' current similar situations (Rowland, 2019). Scholarly concerns are increasing that democracy is under threat worldwide and America is not alone, in which politicians tend to demonize their rivals, weaken the free press, refuse to accept the elections' results, and deny functional validity of democratic institutions (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trump's presidential rhetoric

Rhetoric becomes essential because of the distance between candidates and their supporters, which is a barrier to interacting with leaders (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). Followers, therefore, depend on perceived or ascribed attributes that are typically extracted from candidates' rhetoric, such as public speeches, debates, and social media offerings, to evaluate (Shamir, 1995; Trope & Liberman, 2010). According to Lee et al. (2022), with other forms of communication such as social media posts, a leader's rhetoric can be utilized to convey information which then manifests as real-world actions toward a political purpose.

While presidents since 1990 have simplified their rhetoric, using experimental languages that evoked more informal and personable quality, Trump was far less analytical and sophisticated in delivering his messages compared to his predecessors (Jordan et al., 2019). Several studies (e.g., Quam & Ryshina-Pankova, 2016; Savoy, 2017) found that Trump's speeches appealed to audiences with

simple repetitive words and short sentences that revealed his ego and conveyed his messages forcefully. Equipping those rhetorical tactics, his speeches with relative topics centered around emotional and personal beliefs appeals, helping reach the interest of a wide range of voters (Lakoff, 2017; Wang & Liu, 2017). There was also evidence that when using fewer and simpler words, as well as repeated phrases, Trump allowed his followers to chant familiar taglines, and created the rise of entertainment politics because of his root as a celebrity-turned-politician (Bender, 2021; Boydston & Lawrence, 2019; Jordan et al., 2019).

Trump is no longer the president of the United States, yet he is still considered a kingmaker of the Republican party where Trumpism remains dazzling (Schwartzman, 2021). When campaigning for and occupying the presidency, Trump's rhetoric follows the realm of prototype-based reasoning that relies on associative networks and senses of affiliation (i.e., the identification and effect that influences decision-making processes) (Burke, 1969; Kahneman, 2011; Lakoff, 2016). Taking the violent insurgency in the United States Capitol as an example, Schwartzman (2021) argued that the factors motivating such actions go beyond mere false beliefs but communicative forces (e.g., from Trump), which needed to be examined and understood. Rather than blaming his supporters for not reasoning, the attention should focus on the resonance of Trump's messages, whose analysis may highlight the means of generating their beliefs (Finchelstein, 2020; Schwartzman, 2021). Haslam et al. (2022) further argued that Trump's willingness to participate in identity leadership and engaged followership should serve as the foundation for determining the extent of Trump's responsibility for the January 6 attack.

Generally, Trump's discourse can be unpacked by theoretical orientations of post-truth political communication namely heuristics and biases, dramatism, and moral foundations theory (Schwartzman, 2021). The heuristics and biases realm are facilitated by "images, metaphors and narratives to which affective feelings have become attached," which differentiate to rationality (Slovic, Finucane, Peters, & MacGregor, 2004, p. 316). The heuristic process can also be triggered by dramatism, a concept to explain how communication solidifies and persuades support for particular political positions and leaders (Burke, 1941). Communicators incorporate certain issues into preferred storylines to support a preferred political figure or agenda.

Weaponized communication

The consequences of Trump's rhetoric have become a particular focus of scholars, identifying the encouragement of white supremacy and the use of hilarity and compromise for hatred demand, which is an ongoing trend of American political discourse (Hartzell, 2018; Gunn, 2020; McHendry, 2018; Sanchez, 2018). Others highlight the adverse effects of his rhetoric on America's liberal democracy and its norms (Edwards, 2018; Edwards, 2020; Jamieson & Taussig, 2017). While the impact of Trump's speech has been repeatedly described as a clear and present danger (Brewer & Egan, 2021), weaponized communication deems a rational and useful lens to examine Trump's rhetoric.

Mercieca (2019) conceptualized weaponized communication employment as "propaganda, conspiracy theory, fake news, and disinformation; doxing and spying and exposing people to public ridicule, shame, and aggression; hate speech, violent threats, and bullying; distorting meaning, taking words out of context, intentionally ignoring contradictory information; and distorting public sentiment through bots, algorithms, and computational propaganda" (p. 271). This type of rhetoric was tactics which were used strategically and aggressively to increase compliance and decrease accountability of a

communicator (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Political accountability is, in turn, essential and an unaccountable leader is threatening to any political market (Mercieca, 2019).

There are four characteristics of weaponized communication, if any of which is applied in rhetoric, the tendency of a potentially dangerous leader is indicated (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Four factors and their frameworks are adapted for coding in the paper including (1) reject or show a weak commitment to the “democratic rules of the game,” (2) denied the legitimacy of political opponents, (3) tolerated or encouraged violence, and (4) to curtail the civil liberties of opponents and the media. Trump’s communication style concentrates on creating a negative “other” through “negative stereotypes,” particularly towards his opponents, and this negative “other” against “us” (Sclafani, 2018). It is not solely an “other” as a politician but also an adversary country, for instance, China, using simpler and crude language to talk about an anti-intellectual culture of fear or conspiracies (Degani, 2016). He promotes the “us” by employing populist anger and the charismatic, cooperative constructs such as “everyone” and “together,” knowing how to enhance trust for the in-groups and, in turn, distrust and partiality for the out-groups (Degani, 2016; Ghazal Aswad, 2019; Seyranian & Bligh, 2008).

His style presents a negative campaign where a candidate attacks the opponent by portraying them as a “foolish, inexperienced, ineptitude, irresponsible, disconnected, or evil” person (Gregory, 2015, p. 1). The reasonably clearest example and consequence of his negative rhetorical orientation is the mob riot at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 since they believed (in a continuing conspiracy of Trump and his party) that the 2020 election had been “rigged” and “stolen” (Schwartzman, 2021).

The style of bonding-bridging rhetoric

Another framework to examine the rhetoric of Trump is bonding-bridging rhetoric. It directly relates to the depiction of repulsive and threatening opponents (the out-groups), while he himself, intra-party politicians, and followers (the in-groups) are on the positive side (Schwartzman, 2021). Political conservatives indeed value in-group authority and purity (Kugler, Jost, & Noorbaloochi, 2014). These values have a consistent linkage with particular political affiliations (e.g., candidates, parties, and policies), becoming one of the social factors influencing choices (Graham et al., 2011; Schwartzman, 2021). Political ideology and affiliation help members of a party to perceive what is happening, define group identity, and decide a course of action to take (Banning, 1978).

Trump tries to establish an in-group and an out-group, which directs the allegiances of audiences (i.e., his supporters). For instance, he primarily depends on collective terminology (e.g., “we,” “us,” “together,” “our”) to create a common ground with his followers and foster their sense of unity, or bonding rhetoric (Ghazal Aswad, 2019). The bonding rhetorical approach focuses on associating with people having the same social characteristics, whilst the bridging style aims to connect with people with different social backgrounds (Dryzek, 2010). Bonding rhetoric is likely to deepen the social divisions of in- and outgroups as it can invoke emotions and passions of like-minded people, which possibly turn into extremes. On the other hand, bridging rhetoric takes a serious look at the outgroups in the effort to not differentiate and divide people with different social characteristics.

The more Trump promotes himself and his party to trigger unified senses for the in-groups, the higher level he employs negative discourse to describe the out-groups. His strategy is to narrate the “us” versus “them” to induce other parties (e.g., intra-party politicians, the corporate media, and the establishment) (Ghazal Aswad, 2019). The concept of a homeland that is under threat by dangerous others is reinforced by Trump’s informal, direct, and provoking communication style (Kreis, 2017). The

communitarian rhetoric of Trump and the collective sense of “we” allow the belief that “we” are different from “them,” and shift the identity salience from individual to collective conceptions (Ghazal Aswad, 2019; Smith-Rosenberg, 1992). Specifically in the January 6 attack, by the practice of portraying the U.S. as divergent and dividing the American society into two opposing categories: the in-groups (i.e., Trump, the Republicans, his supporters) and the out-groups (i.e., the Democrats, the media, his opponents), Trump attempted to justify his call to fight for him (Hamed, 2021).

Research Questions

RQ1: What were the most frequent words used in former President Trump’s speeches from November 7, 2020, to January 6, 2021?

RQ2: What were dominant topics of former President Trump’s speeches from November 7, 2020, to January 6, 2021?

RQ3: To what extent did Trump employ weaponized communication tactics in his speeches from November 7, 2020, to January 6, 2021?

RQ4: To what extent did Trump employ bonding and bridging rhetoric in his speeches from November 7, 2020, to January 6, 2021?

METHODS

The computational and manual content analysis methods were applied.

Data collection

Former President Trump had kept a low profile and avoided public appearance since November 7, 2020 when Joe Biden was projected to win the election, and his Twitter account was permanently suspended for making unsupported claims that the election was stolen. Given the situation, the study chooses to investigate his public speeches via video scripts on two YouTube channels of his campaign and White House archives, as well as his remarks on the White House’s website. These two channels are compared to see if there are any differences.

The selected timeframe is from November 7, 2020, to January 6, 2021. A total of 19 speeches with diverse lengths were collected, six of them was from Trump’s campaign. The unit of analysis for qualitative content analysis is the individual speech (N = 19), while the unit of analysis for quantitative content analysis based on two theoretical frameworks is the paragraph (N = 801). By inspecting paragraphs, the proportions of weaponized and bonding - bridging rhetoric will be revealed.

Procedure

Initially, the computational content analysis was performed via NVivo and R, to identify the most frequent words, dominant topics, and their clusters in Trump’s speeches, overall and separately according to each speech (i.e., the event it was given) and their published platforms (i.e., The White House and Trump’s campaign channels). Then, two coders code paragraphs following the codebooks of “weaponized communication” and bonding - bridging rhetoric. Twenty percent of the corpus was coded (N = 168). The intercoder reliability was .925 for weaponized communication and .886 for bonding-bridging rhetoric, calculating via Krippendorff’s alpha for nominal data via ReCal (Freelon, 2013). Two coders independently coded the rest.

RESULTS

RQ1: What were the most frequent words used in former President Trump’s speeches from November 7, 2020, to January 6, 2021?

The first computational content analysis was completed. Using NVivo, the study found 51 most frequently used words by Trump, excluding English stop words, which were primarily related to the 2020 election (Table 1).

Table 1.
Top 51 most frequently used words in Trump’s speeches

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Word	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
great	219	0.82	Greatest	54	0.20
election	186	0.69	Military	53	0.20
country	184	0.69	Important	51	0.19
ballots	181	0.67	Voters	51	0.19
votes	173	0.64	Voting	51	0.19
georgia	130	0.48	Tremendous	50	0.19
years	120	0.45	Pennsylvania	48	0.18
first	105	0.39	Ballot	43	0.16
thousands	105	0.39	Nation	43	0.16
american	95	0.35	County	42	0.16
nobody	95	0.35	administration	40	0.15
president	95	0.35	democrat	40	0.15
world	90	0.34	fight	40	0.15
america	88	0.33	hundreds	40	0.15
history	81	0.30	millions	40	0.15
david	80	0.30	china	39	0.15
trump	78	0.29	elections	39	0.15
million	74	0.28	media	39	0.15
incredible	72	0.27	money	39	0.15
kelly	72	0.27	coming	38	0.14
fraud	71	0.26	maybe	38	0.14
biden	61	0.23	record	38	0.14
vaccine	55	0.20	court	37	0.14
democrats	54	0.20	voter	35	0.13
			house	34	0.13
			weeks	34	0.13

Researchers further used R to identify top ten unique combinations of two words (bigram) in speeches from two sources, i.e., the White House and Trump campaign (Figure 2). Ten pairs of word from the White House were mainly about events where Trump gave his speeches, for instance, vaccine or happy Thanksgiving. Meanwhile, rhetoric from his campaign's channel mentioned overwhelmingly about election, its legitimacy, and falsehoods of fraud, for instance, signature verification, voter ID, and Dominion voting.

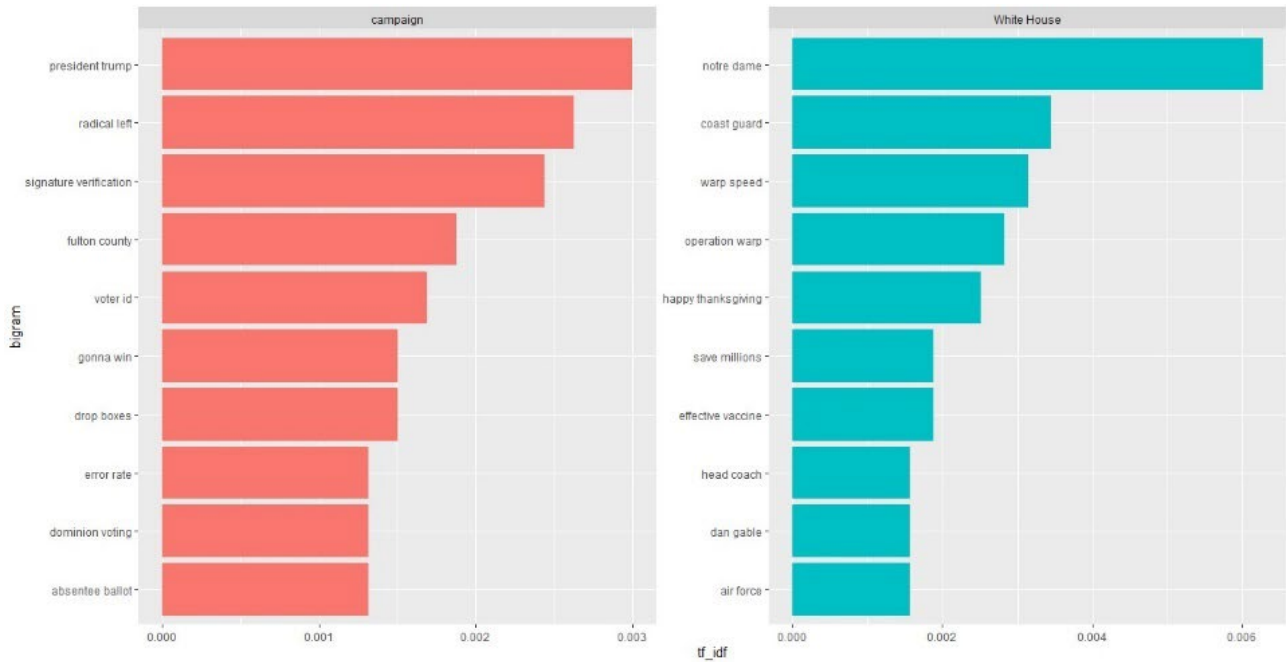


Figure 2. Top ten unique combinations of two words (bigram) in Trump's speeches

RQ2: What were dominant topics of former President Trump's speeches from November 7, 2020, to January 6, 2021?

From most frequently used words, NVivo analysis of a topic cluster resulted in two big clusters namely vaccine, which contained praises for his administration's COVID-19 vaccine distribution, and the election, which consisted of topics on calling supporting from Georgia, swing states, and election fraud with words "ballots," "fraud," "Biden," "democrats," and "media" (Figure 3).

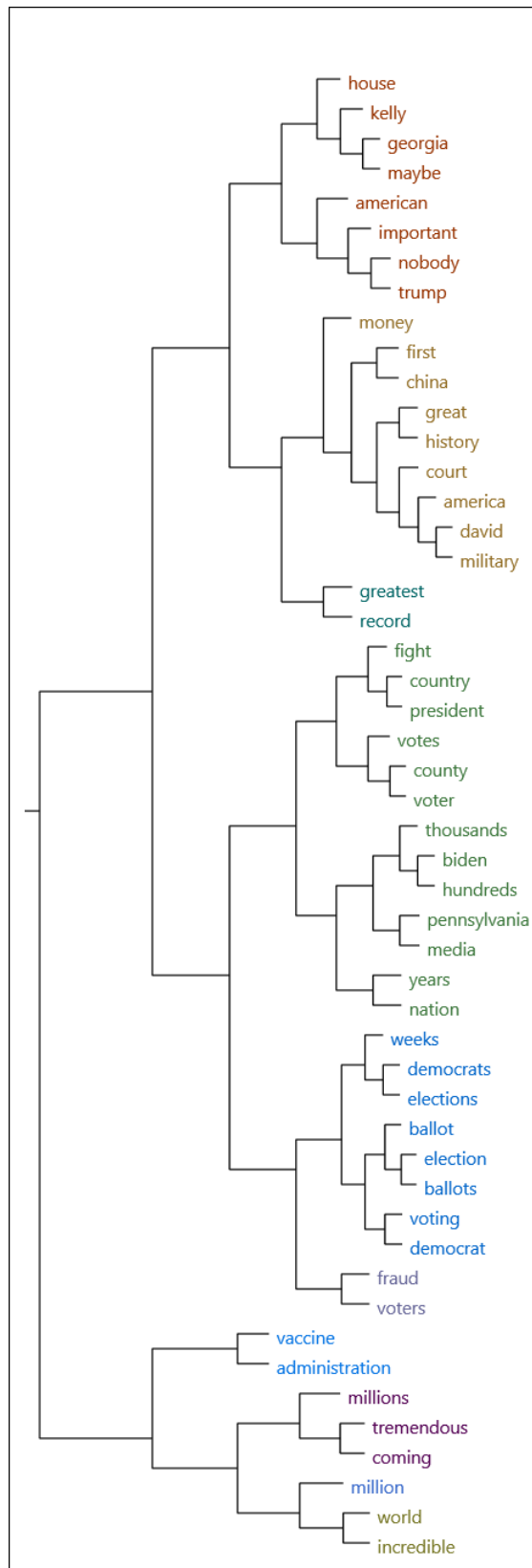


Figure 3. Top ten unique combinations of two words (bigram) in Trump's speeches

RQ3: To what extent did Trump employ weaponized communication tactics in his speeches from November 7, 2020, to January 6, 2021?

In a total of 801 paragraphs of 19 speeches of Donald Trump, there were 396 paragraphs (or 49.44%) that did not contain any weaponized communication cues. Meanwhile, he predominantly employed the tactic of democratic rules rejection and opponents' legitimacy denial in his speeches, 202 paragraphs (or 25.22%) and 169 paragraphs (or 21.10%), respectively. A small proportion of then-President Trump's rhetoric contained the violence encouragement, ten paragraphs, and the willingness to curtail opponents' civil liberties.

There was a statistically significant difference in employment weaponized communication style between speeches posted on the White House channels and those casted via Trump's campaign platforms ($\chi^2(4) = 237.272, p < .001, \text{Cramer's } V = 0.544$) (Table 2). Fourteen speeches on the White House channels contained 250 paragraphs, while the length of merely five speeches from the campaign was 551 paragraphs, which were speeches at rallies. He kept insisting that there was "the tremendous voter fraud" and the 2020 election was "stolen" from him. In speeches from the White House, denying opponents' legitimacy tactic was dominantly used, 18 paragraphs (or 10.65%), compared to 151 paragraphs (or 27.40%) from Trump's campaign. For instance, Trump argued that "the Democrats had this election rigged from the beginning."

While there were six paragraphs (or 2.97%) from the White House channels that had the cues of rejecting democratic rules, 196 paragraphs (or 97.03%) in speeches casted via the campaign platforms occupied the tactic. Only two paragraphs suggested the willingness to curtail opponents' civil liberties and no rhetoric encouraged violence in the White House's speeches.

Table 2.

Four weaponized communication tactics employed in Trump's speeches

Weaponized communication		Source		
		Campaign	White House	Total
Reject democratic rules	Count	196.000	6.000	202.000
	% within row	97.030 %	2.970 %	100.000 %
	% within column	35.572 %	2.400 %	25.218 %
Deny opponents' legitimacy	Count	151.000	18.000	169.000
	% within row	89.349 %	10.651 %	100.000 %
	% within column	27.405 %	7.200 %	21.099 %
Encourage violence	Count	10.000	0.000	10.000
	% within row	100.000 %	0.000 %	100.000 %

	% within column	1.815 %	0.000 %	1.248 %
Be willing to curtail opponents' civil liberties	Count	22.000	2.000	24.000
	% within row	91.667 %	8.333 %	100.000 %
	% within column	3.993 %	0.800 %	2.996 %
None	Count	172.000	224.000	396.000
	% within row	43.434 %	56.566 %	100.000 %
	% within column	31.216 %	89.600 %	49.438 %
Total	Count	551.000	250.000	801.000
	% within row	68.789 %	31.211 %	100.000 %
	% within column	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %

RQ4: To what extent did Trump employ bonding and bridging rhetoric in his speeches from November 7, 2020, to January 6, 2021?

Table 3.
Bonding and bridging rhetoric employed in Trump's speeches

		Source		
Bonding-bridging rhetoric		Campaign	White House	Total
Bonding	Count	243.000	53.000	296.000
	% within row	82.095 %	17.905 %	100.000 %
	% within column	44.102 %	21.200 %	36.954 %
Bridging	Count	5.000	10.000	15.000
	% within row	33.333 %	66.667 %	100.000 %
	% within column	0.907 %	4.000 %	1.873 %
None	Count	303.000	187.000	490.000
	% within row	61.837 %	38.163 %	100.000 %
	% within column	54.991 %	74.800 %	61.174 %
Total	Count	551.000	250.000	801.000
	% within row	68.789 %	31.211 %	100.000 %

% within column	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %
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Trump predominantly used the bonding rhetorical style in his speeches, 296 paragraphs (or 36.95%), which enhanced the connection among his supporters or who shared the same view with him and others. For example, while suggesting the election was rigged, he called the audience as American people and used the term “we” to ask for restoring “honesty and integrity to our elections” and “trust in our system of government.” Meanwhile, only 15 paragraphs of his speeches (or 1.87%) employed the bridging style, which targeted people having different social backgrounds, and 490 paragraphs did not contain any cues of bonding or bridging rhetorical techniques. For instance, he casted the message on all American citizens while sending his appreciation to “all of the brilliant scientists, technicians, doctors, and workers,” who made the COVID-19 vaccines available.

There existed a statistically significant association between the bonding-bridging rhetorical style in his speeches and where they were posted ($\chi^2(2) = 44.222, p < .001, \text{Cramer's } V = 0.235$) (Table 3). Fifty-three paragraphs of speeches from the White House (or 17.90%) had bonding rhetoric, compared to 243 paragraphs in speeches from the campaign (or 82.10%) used the style. Speeches from the White House contained more bridging rhetoric, ten paragraphs (or 66.67%), whilst merely five paragraphs of speeches from the Trump campaign (or 33.33%) employed the tactic.

DISCUSSION

The tendency of rules rejection

The findings overall demonstrated the consistency of themes in each source. While speeches from the White House concentrated on societal and national issues (e.g., COVID-19 or Christmas), Trump’s rhetoric via his campaigns centered around the 2020 election such as repeated falsehoods. For instance, the most frequently used words in remarks of two rallies in Georgia shared the similar pattern including “country,” “great,” “Georgia,” “Kelly,” “David,” and “ballots.” They suggested the topics of elections that targeted people in the state and called for support for two Republican representatives. The results were also consistent with the literature arguing that Trump’s speeches were marked by the repetition of the same discourse and simple words, incorporating short sentences (Savoy, 2017). Within 801 examined paragraphs, there were several ones that had one or two sentences.

Donald Trump overwhelmingly employed weaponized communication in his speeches, particularly the tendency of rejecting the democratic rules and disregarding the legitimacy of his opponents. Although the use of weaponized communication in speeches from the White House was far less than the ones via the campaign’s channels, then-President Trump tried to include the orientation in his remarks by insisting the election fraud and claiming the greatest of his administration. For example, in the video teleconference with the military before Thanksgiving, the most frequently used words of Trump were “tremendous,” “thousands,” “votes,” “fraud,” “election.” Misstatements from politicians were arguably not a novel phenomenon, yet Trump stood out with the unprecedented amount of exaggerating quotes and conspiracies (Schwartzman, 2021). Trump has made over 30,000 untruthful statements which were fact-checked by the Washington Post within his presidency (Kessler, Rizzo, & Kelly, 2021).

Negative partisan

Rejecting the democratic rules would lead to the intent of de-legitimizing opponents. The tactic of negative partisanship and campaigning were long equipped in Trump's rhetoric. He had created a narrative of stolen elections from the Democrats from the 2016 election and intensively repeated the conspiracy after the 2020 election's result was projected (Ghazal Aswad, 2019). The conception of a country that was threatened by outsiders and incompetent leaders (i.e., the Democrats) was also highlighted during Trump's presidency (Kresis, 2017). It further expanded the sense of in- and out-groups, partisan gap, and distinguished "they" - who stole the election, versus "we" - who would save the country and "make America great again."

Demonizing the other party was indeed a strategy to increase party loyalty and make supporters feel better to stick with their partisan choice, which was defined as negative partisan driven by anger and dislike toward an opposing party (Groenendyk, 2019). Adverse political claims and partisanship had become a major element in the American political sphere and rational responses to increase the chance of being elected (Davis & Ferrantino, 1996; Klein, 2010). Those excavating and misleading rhetoric was widely spread and enhanced the polarization among like-minded people (Hasen, 2022).

From weaponized communication to potential violence

The findings did contribute to the literature of presidential rhetoric when investigating Trump's discourse via the concepts of weaponized communication and bonding-bridging rhetoric. Nonetheless, they were unable to directly argue that then-President Trump's rhetoric ignited the attack on January 6, 2021, especially with the seldom employment of violent encouragement cues in his speeches from November 6, 2020, to the storm date. The results instead could partly interpret the extent of weaponized communication in Trump's discourse which potentially led to violence. Eberly (2022) posited that Trump's efforts to undermine the election's outcome and legitimacy were unprecedented in modern American politics, which may only occur in the environment of unprecedented affective polarization, negative partisanship, and low levels of trust. Donald Trump was a prime exemplar of a transformation of political communication when politics had become heavily affective (Grossberg, 2018; Schwartzman, 2021).

The weaponized communication of Trump, a then-leader, employed in the era of increasingly political anger, which met the levels of tolerance and acceptance for political violence (Eberly, 2022). The mob storming the U.S. Capitol was politically motivated violence that had the support from a significantly large proportion of U.S. citizens. A survey by the American Enterprise Institute found that nearly three in ten Americans concurred that "if elected leaders will not protect America, the people must do it themselves, even if it requires violent actions." It also recorded 32 percent of responders (with 66 percent of them being Republicans) refused the legitimacy of Biden's election victory (Cox, 2021).

The then-President, however, did little to pacify the anger but trigger it by weaponizing his rhetoric, as the current findings suggested, increasing the distrust level in the government which also accompanied by declining trust in big institutions such as big corporates and the media (Carter, 2020; Eberly, 2022). In most of his rallies, Trump targeted the media as "the enemy of the people," while referring to big tech companies as corrupted businesses. The lower level of trust the public had, the decline in governing capacity and compliance with law got worse (Hetherington, 2017; Marien & Hooghe, 2011); thus, potentially triggering violence.

On the other hand, it improved the level of trust from supporters when a president was a member of their party (Eberly, 2022). Trump chose the bonding rhetoric strategy to address his speeches. He appealed to his base by the I-hear-you rhetorical style talking about the inequality between the masses and authorities or elites (Hart, 2020). The populist style incorporated the “go narrow” orientation, which targeted his supporters, donors, and locals (Cohen, 2010; Doherty, 2012). He did not attempt to expand his followers’ size during his presidency, limiting the number of formal addresses and heavily depending on social media platforms to spread his words (Bump, 2019; Scacco & Coe, 2021).

Limitations

This study has several limitations. One is its inability to find the direct connection between Trump’s rhetoric and his supporters’ attack to the U.S. Capitol. Yet, the findings suggested weaponized communication cues and bonding strategy of his discourse that may play a significant role in facilitating the storm. Future studies may look at the reactions of audiences and Trump’s supporters to these speeches to posit the connection of them.

The sample of speeches may be expanded to the beginning of the 2020 election to identify words and themes that were employed in Trump’s speeches. It also helps to investigate how the then-President narrated election fraud even before the 2020 election result was projected.

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About the Author(s)

Uyen Diep is a first-year Ph.D. student at Manship School of Mass Communication, Louisiana State University. She studies and practices journalism. Her research agenda focuses on Journalism studies, Media literacy, and Political communication, particularly in the Global South.

My Nguyen is a second-year master's student at the A.Q. Miller School of Media and Communication, Kansas State University. Her research interests include journalism studies, media effects, and social media studies, with an emphasis on international news agencies and Vietnamese news organizations.

Online Connections

To follow these authors in social media:

Uyen Diep: [@uyendpp](#)