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Impact vs. vision: a critical discourse analysis of Trump and Harris' leadership rhetoric in the 2024 presidential election

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Introduction: This study explores the contrasting rhetorical and leadership styles of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris during the 2024 American Presidential Election, revealing how their discourse strategies reflect societal, economic, and political dynamics.

Methods: Using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model (1992), the research examines key campaign speeches to understand how each candidate's language constructs identities, engages audiences, and addresses voter concerns.

Results: Trump's "Impact Leadership" employs simplicity, urgency, and emotional resonance, blending fear-based appeals with hopeful messaging to connect with conservatives, moderates, and working-class voters. His focus on nationalism, economic protectionism, and crisis-framing positioned him as a decisive leader. Conversely, Harris's "Visionary Progressivism" emphasizes inclusivity, systemic reform, and moral appeals, resonating with progressives but lacking the immediacy to mobilize a wider electorate.

Discussion: The study situates these rhetorical styles within the polarized context of economic instability and social fragmentation, contributing to political discourse research by demonstrating how language constructs power and influences voter behavior.

KEYWORDS

political discourse, rhetorical analysis, leadership styles, Donald Trump, Kamala Harris, critical discourse analysis, voter behavior, election communication

1 Introduction

The American Presidential Election (APE) serves as a microcosm of broader societal dynamics, encompassing issues of power, identity, communication, and governance. It consistently attracts scholarly attention across disciplines such as political science, sociology, communication, and economics. These elections provide a rich dataset for analyzing democratic processes, political behavior, and the critical role of discourse in shaping public opinion and policy (Reeves et al., 2018; Chapman, 2024). Given the United States' status as a global superpower, its presidential elections have far-reaching implications for foreign policy, trade, and global governance. For instance, Donald Trump's "America First" policies contrast sharply with Kamala Harris' emphasis on multilateral cooperation, directly influencing international relations. Furthermore, the APE reflects how socioeconomic factors, including economic inequality, racial tensions, and social justice movements, alongside cultural issues such as polarization, systemic racism, immigration, and urban-rural voting divides, shape voter behavior and political priorities. These dynamics provide insights into broader societal debates (Vavreck, 2009; Sisco et al., 2023; Gendebien and Ma, 2024; Schiffrin and Sagalyn, 2024). Consequently, APE offers a vital framework for understanding democracy, voter behavior, and the interplay of social, political, and economic forces in shaping national and global futures.

Trump embodies core Republican Party values through: (1) his emphasis on deregulation and tax cuts, aligning with the party's economic principles of individual responsibility and economic growth; (2) his "America First" policies, prioritizing military strength and sovereignty; (3) his rhetoric, which appeals to socially conservative voters who emphasize religious and cultural traditions; and (4) his focus on restoring law and order during times of social unrest (Chang and Chakrabarti, 2024; Matthews, 2024). In contrast, Harris represents Democratic Party ideals through: (1) her promotion of progressive taxation and systemic reform to address racial and social inequalities, aligning with the party's commitment to fairness and support for marginalized communities; (2) her advocacy for policies such as childcare support, raising the minimum wage, and expanding affordable housing access; (3) her emphasis on expanded healthcare access and cost reduction for working families; and (4) her rhetorical focus on unity across demographic and ideological lines, reflecting the Democratic emphasis on inclusivity (Keating, 2024; Levitz, 2024; Lowndes et al., 2024; Quinn et al., 2024).

The 2024 APE thus presents a fertile ground for discourse analysis, revealing the interplay between language, ideology, and power in one of the most polarizing and consequential political events of the decade. Presidential campaigns transcend policy contests, serving as rhetorical exercises that shape public perceptions, mobilize voters, and construct national identities (Graham et al., 2009; Bonikowski and Gidron, 2016; Halomoan, 2024). Candidate speeches during these campaigns act as critical artifacts, reflecting the socio-political and economic contexts they operate within and influencing voter choices. This study focuses on the rhetorical and leadership styles of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, two figures representing divergent ideological and communicative traditions within their respective parties. Trump's rhetoric, characterized by directness, crisis-framing, and emotional resonance, contrasts sharply with Harris' aspirational and progressive discourse, emphasizing inclusivity, systemic reform, and moral appeals.

By employing Fairclough's (1992a) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, this research examines the textual features, discursive practices, and social practices underlying their campaign speeches. It explores how each candidate's language strategies mirror broader societal tensions, economic realities, and political ideologies, as well as their impact on voter behavior. Fairclough's model provides a comprehensive framework for comparing Trump and Harris' rhetorical strategies by situating their discourse within broader societal, economic, and political contexts. Trump's ability to align his rhetoric with voter anxieties allowed him to leverage contextual factors effectively, broadening his appeal. Similarly, Harris' discourse underscores progressive ideologies, emphasizing long-term systemic reform and inclusivity.

This analysis positions the 2024 election within a context of economic instability, social polarization, and eroding trust in institutions, highlighting how Trump and Harris leveraged these dynamics to appeal to their constituencies. Trump's rhetoric mobilized his base through urgency and populist appeals, while Harris sought to inspire unity and progressive change. This study contributes to the growing body of research on political discourse, demonstrating how language not only reflects but actively constructs power relations and democratic processes in a deeply divided society.

2 Research significance and questions

RQ1: How do Trump and Harris employ language—such as lexical choices, repetition, and rhetorical devices—to construct their political identities and effectively engage their audiences?

RQ2: In what ways do the candidates frame their narratives to address critical societal issues, including economic insecurity, social polarization, and declining trust in institutions? What rhetorical strategies do Trump and Harris use to critique their opponents and appeal to their respective constituencies?

RQ3: How do the campaign speeches of Trump and Harris reflect and interact with the broader socio-political and economic contexts of the 2024 presidential election? To what extent do their rhetorical strategies reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics and ideological structures in American society?

RQ4: How does Trump's crisis-driven, populist rhetoric compare to Harris' aspirational and progressive discourse in shaping voter perceptions and behaviors? To what degree did Trump surpass Harris in leveraging the socio-economic and political contexts of the 2024 election to mobilize electoral support?

This study is significant as it advances the growing body of research on political discourse by investigating how rhetorical strategies shape public perceptions, influence voter behavior, and reflect broader societal dynamics. By focusing on the 2024 APE—a profoundly polarized and consequential political event—it offers valuable insights into the evolving landscape of political communication within a deeply divided society.

The findings of this research hold relevance for scholars across multiple disciplines, including discourse analysis, political science, sociology, and communication studies. Through a comparative analysis of Donald Trump's direct and populist rhetoric and Kamala Harris' progressive and aspirational discourse, the study elucidates the linguistic and ideological mechanisms that underpin democratic processes. Moreover, it provides a nuanced exploration of how political candidates strategically adapt their messaging to resonate with socio-economic and political contexts. As such, this research serves as an essential resource for understanding contemporary political campaigns and voter engagement in complex and polarized environments.

3 APE landscape

According to the Pew Research Center (2024), the 2024 APE unfolded within a context of profound social, economic, and political challenges. Both Trump and Harris strategically tailored their campaign messages to address these complexities; however, Trump's approach demonstrated greater resonance with a broader segment of the electorate (Deco, 2024; Galston, 2024). The socio-economic and political dimensions of the 2024 American landscape can be categorized as follows: first, social context revealed that the nation faced heightened divisions over critical issues such as racial justice, immigration, and public health. Public trust in institutions continued to erode, with widespread concerns about national unity dominating

public discourse. Second, economic landscape exposed that the post-pandemic recovery was uneven, characterized by persistent inflation and widespread job insecurity. The cost-of-living crisis emerged as a central issue, significantly influencing voter priorities. Third, political climate was marked by deep polarization and growing skepticism toward established political systems. Disillusionment with traditional politics prompted many voters to seek leaders who could challenge the status quo and offer transformative solutions. Both candidates sought to align their campaign messaging with the prevailing social, economic, and political concerns of their respective constituencies. However, Trump's messaging proved particularly effective in addressing these challenges, leveraging voter anxieties to build broader electoral support.

4 Theoretical framework

Fairclough (1992a) model of CDA integrates three interrelated dimensions—textual analysis, discursive practices, and social practices—providing a comprehensive framework for examining ideological contrasts and their influence on audiences. The textual features dimension focuses on the linguistic and structural aspects of a text. This includes lexical choices, which shape perceptions through word connotations; grammar, which emphasizes agency and modality; repetition, used to reinforce key messages and evoke resonance; rhetorical devices, such as metaphors and analogies to enhance persuasion. Textual analysis aims to reveal how language is strategically deployed to construct identities, establish power relations, and provoke emotional or ideological responses.

The second dimension, discursive practices, examines the production, distribution, and consumption of texts within specific social and political contexts. This involves framing, which guides the interpretation of issues, such as presenting an election as a “crisis” or “fight”; audience engagement, including addressing shared concerns and responding to audience reactions; narrative construction, which builds coherent stories aligned with the speaker's objectives; the critique of opponents, using techniques to delegitimize or undermine opposition; and; and intertextuality, referencing other texts or shared cultural narratives to establish familiarity and credibility. Discursive practices mediate between the text and the social context, influencing how audiences perceive and interpret messages. The final dimension, social practices, situates discourse within broader societal, political, and economic structures, exploring its interaction with systemic factors such as power dynamics, ideologies, cultural norms, and socioeconomic realities. This analysis demonstrates how discourse not only reflects but also reinforces or challenges structural factors, shaping behaviors and societal ideologies. Together, these dimensions enable a nuanced understanding of the interplay between language, ideology, and social force.

5 Literature review

Discourse studies have historically sought to explain language usage without extensively addressing the power dynamics and socio-political implications embedded in discourse. Critical Linguistics (CL), introduced in the 1970s by linguists such as Fowler et al. (1979)

and later expanded by Fowler (1991, 1996), marked a significant shift. It emphasized that linguistic examinations should adopt a critical perspective to uncover unequal practices, power distributions, and the ideological systems underlying social practices. Building on this foundation, Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) emerged to scrutinize texts in order to reveal the hidden motivations behind linguistic choices. Within this domain, CDA served as a broad umbrella term encompassing various approaches aimed at explaining discursive activities. Prominent figures in CDA, such as Van Dijk, Fairclough, and Wodak, developed distinct methodologies, including the socio-cognitive, socio-cultural, and discourse-historical approaches, respectively.

Van Dijk's approach emphasizes CDA as a tool for analyzing forms of power abuse, dominance, and the ideological underpinnings of racial and discriminatory practices. His socio-cognitive framework explores the interplay between cognition, society, and discourse, focusing on how group mental representations connect social structures with discourse. Van Dijk's analyses extend to the marginalized discourses of minorities, whom he identifies as outgroups experiencing systemic injustices from dominant in groups. His extensive work (e.g., Van Dijk, 1984, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1996, 2004a, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b, 2009, 2010, 2013) highlights CDA's utility in addressing societal issues such as racism, sexism, and nationalism, making power relations explicit and analyzing their implications on social discrimination (Meyer, 2001).

Fairclough's approach, in contrast, focuses on the social dimensions of discourse, viewing it as a form of social practice. He argues that discourse is always embedded within broader social practices, which include various elements such as participants, their roles, timing, location, and interrelations. His three-dimensional framework (Fairclough, 1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1995) incorporates the analysis of textual features, discursive practices, and social practices, providing a comprehensive lens for examining how discourse reflects and shapes societal structures.

The multifaceted dynamics of APE have been the focus of numerous studies, particularly in relation to political discourse and campaign rhetoric. Jamieson (1996) examines the evolution and impact of presidential campaign advertising, while Beasley (2004) explores how U. S. presidents construct national identity through rhetoric. Sheckels et al. (2012) investigate the portrayal of female presidential candidates and the challenges they face, while Doherty (2012) discusses the blurred lines between campaigning and governance in recent presidencies. Other significant contributions to the analysis of election rhetoric include studies by Edelman (1988), Jamieson (1996), Hart (2000), Winter (2003), Lakoff et al. (2004), Wodak (2009), and Charteris-Black (2011).

Specific to American campaign discourse, Romero et al. (2015) analyze how linguistic style matching during debates influences third-party evaluations and polling numbers. Bonikowski and Gidron (2016) explore populist claims-making, defining populism as a strategy juxtaposing the virtuous populace against corrupt elite. Lacatus (2018) examines formal campaign communications in promoting populist ideas during the 2016 election. Schubert (2021) identifies recurring rhetorical strategies in primary debate closing statements. Recent studies, such as those by Mohapatra and Mohapatra (2022), Halomoan (2024), and Gendebien and Ma (2024), employ advanced methodologies to analyze speeches and rhetorical strategies in APE.

The current study builds on these foundations by analyzing Trump and Harris's campaign rhetoric using Fairclough's tri-dimensional CDA framework (1992a). This approach provides a comprehensive analysis of the textual, discursive, and social dimensions of their rhetoric, offering insights into the strategies that contributed to Trump's electoral success. This paper's originality lies in its integration of these dimensions to evaluate campaign discourse, making it a significant contribution to the understanding of political communication and voter engagement.

6 Methodology

This research deconstructs the language and ideological framing employed in the speeches of Trump and Harris, analyzing how their rhetoric addresses their target audiences' economic, social, and political concerns. It further explores the broader implications of their discourse on voter behavior and policy preferences. To achieve these objectives, Fairclough (1992a) three-dimensional model of CDA is applied to a selection of five prominent speeches from each candidate.

Trump's corpus includes: (1) the Republican National Convention Acceptance Speech (RNC) on July 18, 2024 (Pons, 2024); (2) an interview with TIME on April 30, 2024 (TIME Staff, 2024); (3) a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on October 5, 2024 (Rev, 2024a); (4) a rally in Aurora, Colorado, on October 11, 2024 (Roll Call, 2024); and (5) the Victory Speech in West Palm Beach, Florida, on November 6, 2024 (Nicholls, 2024). Harris's corpus includes: (1) the Democratic National Convention Acceptance Speech (DNC) on August 22, 2024 (The New York Times, 2024); (2) a campaign rally in Atlanta, Georgia, on July 30, 2024 (Rev, 2024c); (3) a campaign event in Kalamazoo, Michigan, on October 26, 2024 (The White House, 2024); (4) a campaign event in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on November 2, 2024 (Rev, 2024b); and (5) the Concession Speech at Howard University on November 6, 2024 (NBC Chicago, 2024).

These 10 speeches, sourced from online media, are manually examined using Fairclough (1992a) CDA framework. Each speech is analyzed for its textual, discursive, and social practice features. The analysis highlights the contrasting discourse strategies and the ideological representations upheld by each candidate. The findings provide insights into the reasons underlying voter preferences for Trump, shedding light on the intersection of discourse, ideology, and electoral success.

7 Results

The major textual, discursive, and social practice features are presented in Tables 1–3 for Trump, respectively, and in Tables 4–6 for Harris, respectively.

8 Discussion

8.1 Trump's textual features

Trump's textual features (Table 1) emphasize his strengths as a communicator and leader by crafting messages that are accessible, emotionally charged, and ideologically appealing. Trump's language is carefully curated to evoke both optimism and critique. His positive lexicon words build an image of renewal and patriotism, portraying him as a leader who embodies American resilience and optimism,

fostering a sense of collective pride, resonating with an audience seeking reassurance and hope. His ability to repeatedly use such terms in various contexts reinforces his central message of restoring America's strength and greatness. Negative lexicon signals critique and instill fear, particularly about the current administration, highlighting perceived deficiencies in opponents' leadership. This dualistic framing helps Trump establish himself as the solution to perceived national decline, positioning him as a problem-solver in contrast to the existing administration. By alternating between hope and critique, Trump effectively amplifies his promise of change while critiquing opponents.

Trump's speeches employ direct and unambiguous sentences. This simplicity ensures accessibility for a wide audience, including less politically or educationally engaged group, and strengthens the impact of his assertions, making them memorable. His use of assertive and direct language reinforces his image as a decisive leader, aligning with his populist appeal. Trump's metaphors create compelling narratives: war metaphors position Trump as a fighter/protector, evoking resilience and solidarity in the face of adversity; providential metaphors align him with religious ideologies, appealing to faith-based voters, linking his leadership to divine favor; and frontier metaphors celebrate the American spirit of exploration and achievement. These metaphors enable Trump to frame himself as a strong, divinely guided leader who embodies both historical and contemporary American values.

Trump employs many rhetorical devices: repeated phrases create rhythm, emphasize his key points and make them memorable; hyperbole inspires confidence and ambition, showcasing visionary leadership; comparing his presidency to perceived failures of others starkly frames him as the superior choice; direct address fosters personal connection, making his appeal intimate and engaging; fear-based appeals connect with voters' concerns, stirring anxiety about national security, allowing him to position himself as both a protector against threats and a visionary leader capable of restoring pride; and dismissal of counterarguments, by which he discredits opposition narratives, reinforces his credibility and undermines trust in other sources. These rhetorical devices make his speeches engaging, emotionally resonant, and easy to recall, strengthening his slogans and central themes.

Trump consistently ties his rhetoric to ideologies that resonate with his base: patriotism evokes pride and unity; populism positions himself as the voice of the marginalized, deepening his appeal to everyday Americans; nationalism emphasizes sovereignty and reinforces his "America First" ideology; religious ideology ties his narrative to divine destiny, appealing to religious conservatives and anti-globalism underscores his nationalist stance, appealing to those skeptical of globalization. These ideological framings deepen his connection with specific voter demographics, making his campaign emotionally and culturally relevant.

Accordingly, Trump's textual features reveal a calculated approach to communication. Trump's lexicon and rhetorical strategies showcase his ability to craft a message that is both resonant and persuasive, using simple, direct language to ensure clarity. His speeches leverage optimism and fear to establish himself as visionary leader and a protector. The strategic use of metaphors, repetition, and contrast reinforces his key themes of strength, safety, and American greatness. This multifaceted discourse strategy makes his messaging memorable and emotionally impactful, solidifying his connection with his audience and positioning him as a relatable yet transformative leader.

TABLE 1 Analysis of Trump’s textual features.

Textual features	Types of textual features	Textual examples/context	Comment
Lexical choices	Positive lexicon	Confidence, strength, hope, greatness, lead, heights, power, our might, law and order, economic relief, border, secured, proper leadership (RNC)	Trump creates an optimistic and patriotic tone, resonating with voters’ aspirations.
		Law enforcement, strong, power, great military (TIME)	
		Great, strong, powerful, wealthy, proud, safe (Butler)	
		Great patriots, powerful, strong, healthy, wealthy, proud (Aurora)	
		Safe, strong, powerful, free, prosperous, great, control, borders, safe, America first, America future, golden age, success (Victory)	
	Negative lexicon	Decline, failure, tragedy, illegal aliens, crisis, inflation, depression, despair (RNC)	Trump critiques the current administration, evoking fear of threats.
		Migrant crime, illegal migration, invasion, inflation, incompetent fool ... energy prices so high (TIME)	
		(Biden) will Shut down your economy, economic death (Butler)	
		Stupid people, ruining, sleepy Joe, illegal alien gang, migrant criminals (Aurora)	
	Simple/assertive language	Under our leadership, the United States will be respected again (RNC)	Trump uses straightforward and assertive statements that resonate with a broad audience, particularly those who value clarity and directness. This makes his messaging accessible and memorable.
		This (migration) is an invasion of our country (TIME)	
		Joe Biden will shut down your economy, ship your jobs to China, ...raise your taxes \$4 trillion (Butler)	
Metaphors	War metaphors	We will not break. We will not bend. (RNC)	Trump positions his vision as a battle against adversity and enemies, creating a sense of urgency and solidarity.
		I fight for you (Butler)	
		I will fight for you (Victory)	
	Religious and providential metaphors	I stand before you in this arena only by the grace of almighty God (RNC)	Trump ties his narrative to divine favor, appealing to religious sentiments.
	Frontier metaphors	Scaled towering mountains (RNC)	Trump evokes the American spirit of resilience and innovation.

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Textual features	Types of textual features	Textual examples/context	Comment
Rhetorical devices	Anaphora (repetition)	we will not break, we will not bend, fight, fight, fight (RNC)	Repetition ensures that his message is memorable and impactful.
		We have made America Strong again. We have made America proud again. (Butler)	This strengthens his core message, creates emotional engagement and reinforces the overarching campaign slogan.
		We will make America powerful again. We will make America wealthy again. We will make America healthy again. (Aurora)	
		We are going to turn it around...we are going to turn it around (Victory)	
	Hyperbole	we will lead America to new heights of greatness (RNC)	Trump inspires confidence and portrays an ambitious vision.
	Contrast	Under my presidency... the world was at peace. Under this administration... the planet is teetering on the edge of World War Three (RNC)	Trump highlights perceived failures of opponents versus his achievements.
	Direct address	Tonight, I ask for your partnership (RNC)	Trump frequently speaks directly to his audience, fostering a sense of personal connection and accountability.
		We are being led by stupid people. (Aurora)	
		We will make America safe (Victory)	
	Emotional and fear-based appeals	Illegal immigration crisis, massive invasion, illegal aliens, misery, crime, poverty, disease (RNC)	Trump uses emotionally charged words to evoke anger, fear, and hope. These appeals amplify voter concerns about security and inspire confidence in his leadership.
		A new category of crime...migrant crime (TIME)	
		A vote for me is ...build the strongest economy in history (Butler)	
		They take the world's criminals, gang members, drug dealers, and they deposit them into the United States (Aurora)	
		This will forever be remembered as the day the American people regained control of their country (Victory)	
	Dismissal of counterarguments	The FBI fudged the numbers... Are they adding migrant crime? (TIME)	Trump validates his claims and undermine trust in other sources
Relevant ideologies	Patriotism	Our American ancestors crossed the Delaware, survived the icy winters at Valley Forge (RNC)	Patriotism invokes American history and values to inspire national pride.
	Populism	To all of the forgotten men and women... you will be forgotten no longer. (RNC)	Trump frames himself as a champion of the "forgotten men and women," appealing to working-class voters.
	Nationalism	We will restore the sacred and sovereign borders of the United States (RNC)	Trump emphasizes sovereignty and protectionism.
	Religious ideology	Every single moment we have on earth is a gift from God (RNC)	Frequent references to God position his vision within a moral and divine framework.
	Anti-Globalism	We will not let countries come in, take our jobs, and plunder our nation. (RNC)	Criticism of foreign powers and international trade policies appeals to those disillusioned by globalization.

This table categorizes and analyzes the textual features present in Trump's speeches, demonstrating his strategic use to engage audiences and convey his vision. The features include lexical choices (positive and negative), metaphors, rhetorical devices (e.g., repetition, hyperbole), and emotional appeals. Each example illustrates how these techniques enhance messaging, foster patriotism, evoke fear or hope, and establish a personal connection. Ideologies such as nationalism, populism, and religious references further align with his political narrative, resonating with specific voter groups. This comprehensive breakdown highlights the rhetorical patterns and themes central to Trump's communication strategy.

8.2 Harris's textual features

Harris's textual features emphasize inclusivity, moral appeals, and progressive values (Table 2). While this approach underscores her aspirational vision, it also exposes weaknesses in her rhetorical strategy, particularly when compared to Trump's more direct and visceral style. Harris frequently overemphasizes inclusivity, while this fosters unity, a sense of solidarity and collective action, appealing to a broad audience seeking hope and connection; it lacks practical impact, the combative urgency and emotional edge that resonate with audiences seeking direct action or strong leadership. Her aspirational language, uplifting but vague during crises, focuses on long-term ideals rather than immediate solutions to pressing issues. This tone appeals to progressives but can feel abstract compared to Trump's more tangible promises and crisis-driven lexicon. Harris's emphasis on abstract ideals may not resonate with voters prioritizing tangible outcomes over symbolic unity. While unifying, Harris's rhetoric can feel detached from the immediate concerns of voters, especially in times of economic or social turmoil.

Harris's speeches emphasize detailed policies, like tax credits and child care caps. While this demonstrates expertise, the technical nature may alienate voters who prefer simpler, more direct solutions. Her metaphors are optimistic but are familiar and less striking compared to Trump's use of dramatic, evocative war metaphors. Journey and frontier metaphors emphasize progress and resilience but lack the combative framing that Trump's metaphors often achieve. Battle metaphors are less visceral compared to Trump's metaphors which create a stronger sense of urgency and solidarity. The abstract nature of her metaphors fails to capture the immediacy of the challenges many voters face.

Though Harris employs repetition, but her delivery is softer, making the impact less visceral than Trump's repetitive slogans. It lacks the emotional forcefulness needed to strongly connect with disaffected or undecided voters. Harris critiques Trump, focusing on moral superiority. Her contrasts often lack the stark, combative tone of Trump's rhetoric, which resonates more strongly with frustrated voters prioritizing practical concerns like the economy or security. In addition, focusing primarily on Trump without fully articulating her own tangible strengths dilutes the impact of her contrasts.

Harris evokes empathy with stories of hardship and struggles, emphasizing moral responsibility. However, her appeals are often idealistic compared to Trump's emotionally charged, fear-based appeals. She avoids fear-driven messaging, preferring moral appeals, which contrasts sharply with Trump's fear-oriented narratives about security or economic threats. While this aligns with her values, Harris's avoidance of such appeals may leave her message less urgent and emotionally engaging. Trump's ability to simultaneously evoke threats and aspirations makes his rhetoric more compelling for undecided voters.

Harris frames her rhetoric around progressive values like reproductive rights, climate change, and social justice, which may alienate moderate or conservative voters. Her appeals to broader ideologies like patriotism and populism lack the forcefulness needed to counteract Trump's stronger framing of nationalism and anti-globalism. Her focus on abstract ideals may feel distant from voters' day-to-day struggles, especially in economic or security crises. Trump's populist and nationalist ideologies, combined with his

emphasis on concrete threats and solutions, have broader emotional and practical appeal.

Harris's speeches, while emphasizing hope, unity, and progressive values, often lack the emotional intensity, directness, and urgency found in Trump's rhetoric. Her reliance on abstract language and detailed policy plans, while intellectually appealing, may not resonate as strongly with voters seeking immediate and tangible solutions to pressing issues like the economy and security. These textual weaknesses make her messaging less memorable and impactful compared to Trump's emotionally charged and accessible style.

Analyzing the textual features of Trump and Harris's speeches reveals stark contrasts. These differences provide insights into why many Americans voted for Trump, despite Harris's values-driven approach. Figure 1 summarizes the textual differences between Trump and Harris' discourse. Americans voted for Trump because his textual features created a powerful sense of urgency, simplicity, and relatability. His rhetoric, rooted in fear-based appeals, war metaphors, and nationalist framing, resonated strongly with voters seeking decisive leadership. In contrast, Harris's values-driven and policy-oriented approach, while aspirational, lacked the emotional immediacy and tangibility needed to mobilize a broad voter base during moments of uncertainty.

8.3 Trump's discursive practice features

Table 3 presents Trump's major discursive practices, showcasing his rhetorical strengths and ability to connect with specific audiences effectively. Personalization and narrative construction underlie Trump's ability to construct compelling stories. Via his survival story, he constructs narratives that frame him as resilient and divinely protected. By referring to "forgotten men and women," Trump aligns himself with marginalized Americans, sharing their hardships and portraying himself as their voice. By sharing anecdotes, such as coordinating disaster relief with Elon Musk, Trump builds credibility and positions himself as a decisive problem solver. Anecdotes connect his grand themes to tangible examples, making his message resonate more deeply with voters. They strengthen his role as a hero within his own narrative, humanizing his leadership, making him relatable and trustworthy to voters who feel excluded from traditional political systems.

Trump effectively uses polarization, positioning himself as the defender of national interests against foreign and elite exploitation. By creating clear dichotomies (e.g., good vs. evil, patriotism vs. globalism, us vs. them), he defines his leadership as the solution to problems caused by his opponents. This polarization strengthens loyalty among his supporters by creating a clear divide between "us" (patriots) and "them" (elites, migrants, Democrats), which fosters an in-group identity, making his audience feel aligned with his vision.

Portraying himself as a victim of an unjust system, Trump fosters anti-elite messaging to align with ordinary Americans who share feelings of disempowerment. His populist rhetoric appeals to these individuals, enabling him to position himself as a defender against elite corruption. By criticizing political adversaries and institutions, while highlighting his economic achievements and pledging future

TABLE 2 Analysis of Harris's textual features.

Textual features	Types of textual features	Textual examples/context	Comment
Lexical choices	Inclusivity	We are all in this together, all Americans (DNC)	Harris employs inclusive language.
		This is a fight we are engaged in, bring people together (Atlanta)	This fosters unity and appeals to collective values but may lack urgency compared to Trump's rhetoric.
		We love our country, and we are prepared to fight to realize the promise of America (Kalamazo)	
		We are all here, we are facing as a country (Pennsylvania)	
		We never give up (Concession)	
	Values-laden language	Freedom, dignity, justice, opportunity (DNC)	Harris frames her message in universal, aspirational, values-driven, and evocative language to align with progressive ideals and inspire hope. Her words lack the emotional intensity of Trump's crisis-driven lexicon
		Hope, faith, progress, ideal, equal justice, dignity (Atlanta)	
		Dignity, freedom, union, opportunity (Kalamazo)	
		Responsibility, dignity, honor, commitment (Pennsylvania)	
		Hope, faith, freedom, equal justice, kindness, respect (concession)	
	Policy-oriented language	...up to \$5 trillion to the national debt (DNC)	This focus on specifics may come across as overly technical or disconnected from the emotional concerns of voters. Trump's simplified economic messaging resonates more broadly and emotionally.
		we will have a \$15,000 tax credit (Atlanta)	
		...will cost the average family nearly \$4,000 a year. (Kalamazo)	
		...working families should not have to pay more than %7 of their income in child care... less than \$125,000 (Pennsylvania)	
Metaphors	Journey and frontier metaphors	We are charting a new way forward (DNC)	These metaphors suggest progress and optimism, but lack the combative framing that Trump's metaphors often achieve.
	Battle metaphors	This is a fight, let us write the next great chapter (DNC)	These metaphors are less visceral and immediate compared to Trump's war metaphors which create a stronger sense of urgency and solidarity.
Rhetorical devices	Anaphora (repetition)	We are not going back. We are not going back. (DNC)	Harris uses repetition to reinforce key ideas. Her repetition lacks the memorable impact and emotional charge of Trump's emphatic anaphora.
		we fought for our country, we fought for the ideas (Atlanta)	
		It is about dignity. It is about dignity (Kalamazo)	
		we know why we should vote, We know why we should vote (Pennsylvania)	
	Contrast	Trump fights for himself and his billionaire friends... We will pass a middle-class tax cut (DNC)	Harris juxtaposes her policies with Trump's record. Her contrasts often focus on moral superiority, which may not resonate with voters prioritizing practical concerns like the economy or security.
	Appeal to emotion	stories of women miscarrying in a parking lot (DNC)	Harris's appeals, while inspiring, lack the visceral fear or hope that Trump's emotionally charged language generates. Trump's ability to simultaneously evoke threats and aspirations makes his rhetoric more compelling for undecided voters.
		Atlanta represents the hopes and the dreams (Atlanta)	

(Continued)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Textual features	Types of textual features	Textual examples/context	Comment
Relevant ideologies	Progressivism	We will create an opportunity economy (DNC)	Harris focuses on reproductive rights, climate change, and economic justice.
	Patriotism	We are the heirs to the greatest democracy (DNC)	Harris emphasizes American ideals and global leadership.
	Feminism	We trust women (DNC)	Harris advocates women's rights and reproductive freedom.
	Populism	He fights for himself and his billionaire friends... I fight for the American people (DNC)	Harris criticizes elite power structures.
	Global leadership	I will stand strong with Ukraine and our NATO allies (DNC)	Harris is committed to international alliances and democratic values.

This table highlights the textual features in Harris's speeches, focusing on inclusivity, values-driven language, metaphors, and rhetorical devices. Her speeches emphasize unity, progress, and justice, appealing to collective ideals while presenting a hopeful vision for the future. Metaphors such as "journey" and "fight" frame her messages, though they lack the urgency of Trump's war metaphors. Repetition reinforces her key ideas, and emotional appeals connect through personal stories and aspirations. Her rhetoric reflects ideologies of progressivism, feminism, and global leadership, contrasting with Trump's nationalism and populism. This analysis showcases how Harris's approach seeks to inspire and unify a diverse audience.

prosperity, Trump reinforces his image as a capable leader. This approach helps him build trust among his supporters and solidify his role as their champion.

Trump masterfully frames issues such as immigration, economic challenges, and global instability as existential crises, creating a sense of urgency. Crisis framing positions Trump as a decisive leader, creating a stark choice between chaos under his opponents and stability under his leadership. He employs a mix of fear and hope to engage his audience, motivating them through both anxiety and optimism.

Trump aligns his leadership with American heritage and faith through historical analogies or references to events like crossing the Delaware, which evokes American resilience and patriotism. Religious undertones tie his vision to divine favor, appealing to religious audiences. Such references ground Trump's rhetoric in a larger moral and nationalistic framework, reinforcing his credibility and appeal. Trump uses visual props and performative gestures to energize his audience and reinforce his key messages. By responding to audience chants and emphasizing shared patriotism, he creates a participatory atmosphere that deepens engagement, strengthening his bond with live and televised audiences.

Trump's discursive practices emphasize urgency, emotional engagement, and a clear vision of leadership. By framing crises, fostering polarization, and employing populist rhetoric, he aligns with his audience's values and mobilizes support through emotional and ideological connections, crafting a compelling narrative that solidifies political backing.

8.4 Harris's discursive practice features

Table 4 showcases Harris's discursive practice features aimed at connecting with audiences, framing political narratives, and emphasizing shared values. Harris frequently uses personal stories to humanize her platform, but these often feel less directly tied to broader national crises than Trump's emotionally charged narratives. Compared to Trump's vivid anecdotes about saving jobs or confronting crime, Harris's stories may appear less actionable or relevant to urgent voter concerns. Hence, her personal anecdotes, while empathetic, lack the directness, high-stakes drama and pragmatic focus that characterize Trump's narratives.

She contrasts herself with Trump through moral dichotomies, which are ideological rather than grounded in practical outcomes, lacking the precision and relatability needed to sway undecided or centrist voters. While this strategy appeals to progressive voters, it risks alienating moderates who prioritize bipartisan solutions and practical governance over ideological battles. Her focus on collective values risks failing to address the specific needs of key voter groups, such as those experiencing economic hardship. The broad unity framing emphasizes inclusivity and shared national values, contrasting sharply with Trump's polarizing "us vs. them" rhetoric. While this appeals to progressive audiences, it risks coming across as abstract and failing to address specific voter anxieties.

Harris frames her campaign as addressing critical issues but focuses less on pressing economic concerns. The emphasis on reproductive rights does not sufficiently address widespread economic anxieties, which are often voters' top priorities. Unlike Trump's apocalyptic crisis framing (e.g., "nation in decline"), Harris's crisis framing lacks the same

TABLE 3 Discursive features of Trump's speeches.

Discursive features	Examples/Context	Comment
Personalization and narrative construction/ anecdote	I stand before you in this arena only by the grace of almighty God, To all of the forgotten men and women (RNC)	These anecdotes validate Trump's claims, personalize abstract issues, making them relatable.
	Migrant crime... And you are seeing it in all of the cities, especially the Democratic-run cities (TIME)	
	We saved a place called... the Philadelphia Shipyard...and Biden was shutting it down (Butler)	
	Kamala has imported an army of illegal alien gang members ... a 35-year-old mother had to leave her apartment out of fear for her children's lives (Aurora)	
	And you know when we had the tragic Hurricane Helene...I called Elon Musk. (Victory)	
Polarization and dichotomies	Under my presidency... the world was at peace. Under this administration... the planet is teetering on the edge of World War Three (RNC)	Trump often frames issues as battles between clear moral opposites. This strategy divides society into allies and enemies, reinforcing loyalty among his base by identifying common adversaries like Democrats, the media, or immigrants.
	We will not let countries come in, take our jobs, and plunder our nation (RNC)	
	the liberal groups or the progressive groups (TIME)	
	I found that Biden, frankly, wanted open borders, because...I never believed it (TIME)	
	Biden will shut down your economy...and send your state into a deep and catastrophic depression (Butler)	
	these gang members who Kamala Harris had ordered (Butler)	
Populism and "us vs. them" rhetoric	Democrats should stop weaponizing the justice system (RNC)	Trump portrays himself as a victim of an unjust system, galvanizing support from those who feel similarly disempowered
	We created a record 11.4 million jobs (Butler)	
	She should not be the one that was chosen ... a threat to democracy (Aurora)	
Crisis framing	We are a nation in decline (RNC)	Trump emphasizes inflation, job loss, and economic stagnation to foster a sense of necessity for change
	The greatest invasion in history is taking place (RNC)	By framing immigration as a crisis, Trump appeals to fears of national security and economic competition.
	War is now raging in Europe and the Middle East (RNC)	Trump highlights crises to create a sense of urgency. This positions him as the decisive leader necessary to address these threats.
	The Democrats should stop weaponizing the justice system... I am the one saving democracy (RNC)	Trump casts himself as both a victim of injustice and a savior for the American people"
	This is an invasion like no country has ever seen before (TIME)	Trump portrays the state of the nation as being on the brink of collapse. This creates urgency and positions him as the decisive leader required to avert disaster
	This election is a choice between a Biden depression or a Trump boom (Butler)	Trump frames the election as a choice between disaster and prosperity
	Multiple apartment complexes have been taken over by the savage Venezuela prison gang (Aurora)	Trump frames immigration and crime as existential crises. This creates a sense of urgency and positions him as the only leader capable of solving these issues
	We're going to fix our borders (Victory)	This narrative frames Trump as the solution to systemic problems.

(Continued)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Discursive features	Examples/Context	Comment
Emotional appeals	We have become a dumping ground for the world, which is laughing at us (RNC)	Trump invokes fear to emphasize external threats, from illegal immigration to global adversaries.
	Together, we will SAVE THIS COUNTRY (RNC)	Trump employs aspirational language, promising brighter tomorrows under his leadership
Historical and religious references	Our American ancestors crossed the Delaware (RNC)	Historical analogies align his leadership with the legacy of American resilience
	Under God, we are indivisible (RNC)	Trump often references religious faith to frame his leadership within a broader narrative of divine destiny.
Visual and performative aspects	This is a movement like nobody's ever seen before (Victory)	Trump frames his victory as part of a historic political movement
	Next to me on stage... are Corey's firefighting helmet and jacket (RNC)	These visual symbols reinforce Trump's message of sacrifice and unity
	FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT (RNC)	Trump's phrases are paired with physical gestures to energize audiences
	Thank you... vote for Trump (Aurora)	Trump frequently engages with his audience, responding to chants and emphasizing shared patriotism

This table explores Trump's discursive strategies, emphasizing his use of personalization, polarization, crisis framing, and emotional appeals to galvanize support. Personal anecdotes and historical references create relatability and align his leadership with American resilience. Dichotomies and "us vs. them" rhetoric deepen societal divisions while fostering loyalty among supporters. Crisis framing evokes urgency, positioning Trump as the necessary solution to national and global threats. Emotional appeals range from fear-based warnings to aspirational promises. Visual and performative elements further amplify his messaging, making it memorable and impactful. Together, these discursive features showcase Trump's ability to influence and mobilize his audience.

emotional immediacy, which may alienate voters concerned about broader, everyday economic challenges. She often frames issues in moral terms or broad principles. This misalignment with voters' immediate priorities (e.g., inflation, job security) diminishes her relatability compared to Trump's targeted crisis messaging.

She invokes solidarity and hope, emphasizing collective action and systemic change. However, these appeals can feel less visceral than Trump's emotionally charged calls to action, which evoke fear or excitement. Her optimistic tone may feel disconnected from voters experiencing frustration or fear about current issues. Unlike Trump's ability to alternate between fear and hope, Harris's rhetoric remains overly hopeful, limiting its emotional engagement with anxious or undecided voters. Her engagement feels polished rather than spontaneous, which may reduce its authenticity.

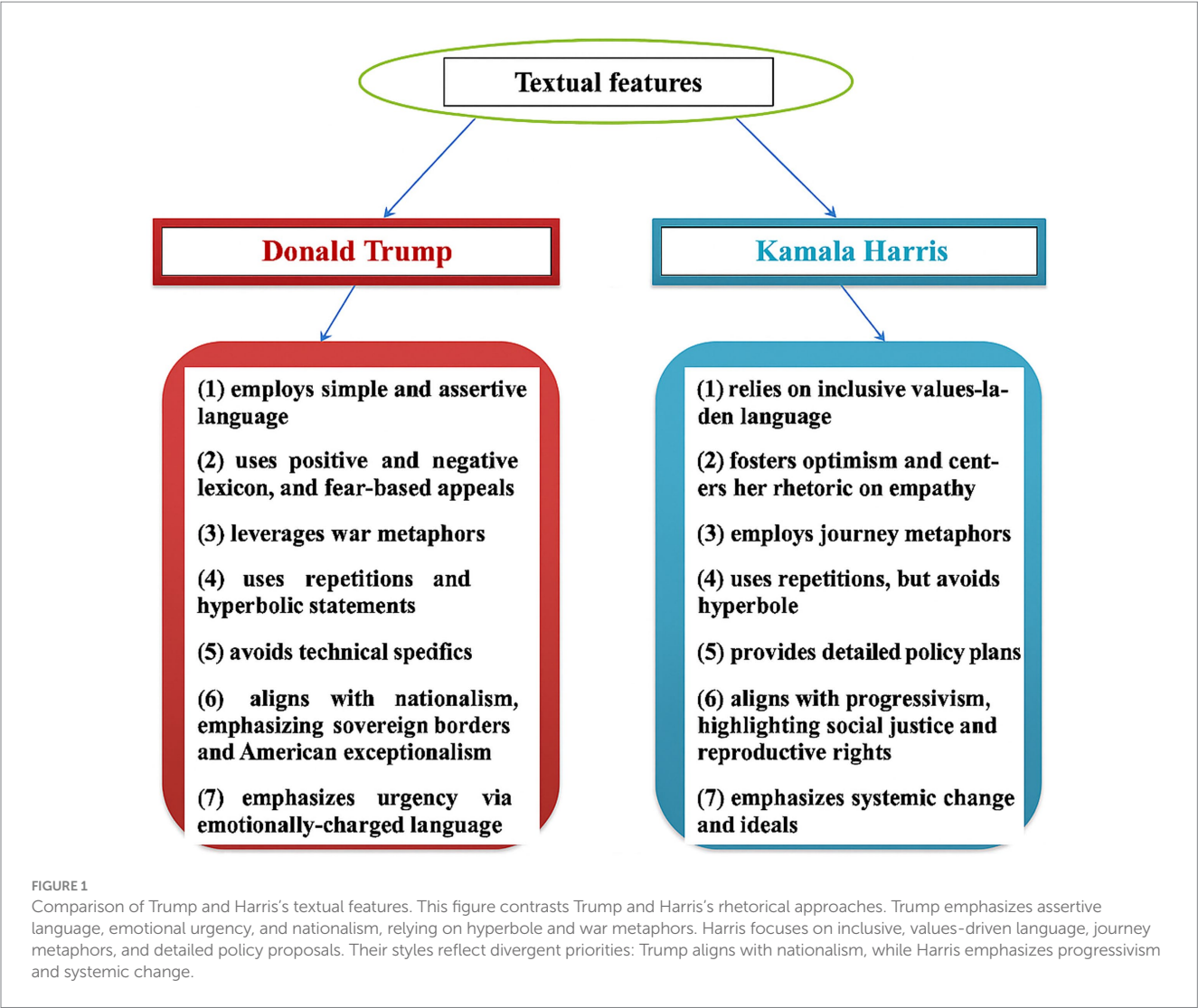
Kamala Harris's discursive practices emphasize unity, moral framing, and personal connection, appealing strongly to her progressive base. However, her reliance on abstract ideals, limited focus on economic issues, and less dynamic audience engagement reduce her broader appeal. In contrast, Trump's emotionally charged, action-oriented rhetoric effectively mobilized voters by combining a sense of urgency, clear crisis framing, and straightforward promises. His approach of polarizing, personalizing, and performing allowed him to resonate deeply with voters who felt marginalized or anxious about the future. While Harris's inclusive and aspirational rhetoric resonated with her core supporters, it lacked the immediacy and specificity necessary to connect with a wider audience. Her emphasis on moral ideals and systemic change, though impactful, failed to evoke the emotional connection and urgency that defined Trump's style. Figure 2 summarizes this contrast in rhetorical strategies and helps explain why Trump's approach resonated with more Americans, despite Harris's vision of unity and progress.

8.5 Trump's social practice features

Table 5 demonstrates Donald Trump's social practice features, revealing his ability to strategically align his rhetoric with the socio-political and economic realities of his audience. Trump's rhetoric consistently addresses pressing economic anxieties. He connects with voters through relatable concerns, such as inflation, job insecurity, and the rising cost of living. By proposing solutions such as reducing regulations, imposing tariffs, and advocating for domestic production (e.g., "Made in the USA"), he appeals to nationalist and protectionist sentiments. His alignment with voters' anxieties about economic uncertainty strengthens his connection to working-class Americans. Trump effectively frames himself as a solution-oriented leader who understands economic struggles, using promises like deregulation and tax cuts to appeal to voters seeking immediate relief.

Trump frames immigration and globalization as threats to national security and economic stability. He links immigration with crime, job loss, and cultural erosion, creating a direct connection between these issues and voter fears. By emphasizing local law enforcement and deportation operations, Trump positions himself as a defender of American sovereignty and safety. Trump's rhetoric taps into xenophobic and anti-globalist sentiments, resonating with voters who feel marginalized by globalization and concerned about cultural identity.

Trump strategically mobilizes conservative voters by exploiting cultural divides and focusing on polarizing issues such as education,



reproductive rights, and patriotism. He frames these topics as battles to preserve traditional values, aligning with core conservative priorities like law enforcement, gun rights, and religious principles. His promises to strengthen the military, ban sanctuary cities, and prioritize education bolster his credibility as a defender of traditional American ideals. By emphasizing law and order, family values, and national pride, Trump solidifies his base and appeals to voters seeking a return to perceived stability and order.

Trump uses language to reinforce nationalist and patriarchal ideologies. He ties American pride and power to his leadership, positioning himself as the only candidate capable of restoring national greatness. His references to family roles, e.g., thanking Melania for her letter calling for unity, subtly reinforce traditional gender roles, appealing to socially conservative voters. By associating his leadership with strength, sovereignty, and traditional social structures, he aligns himself with conservative Christian demographics, a key part of his support base.

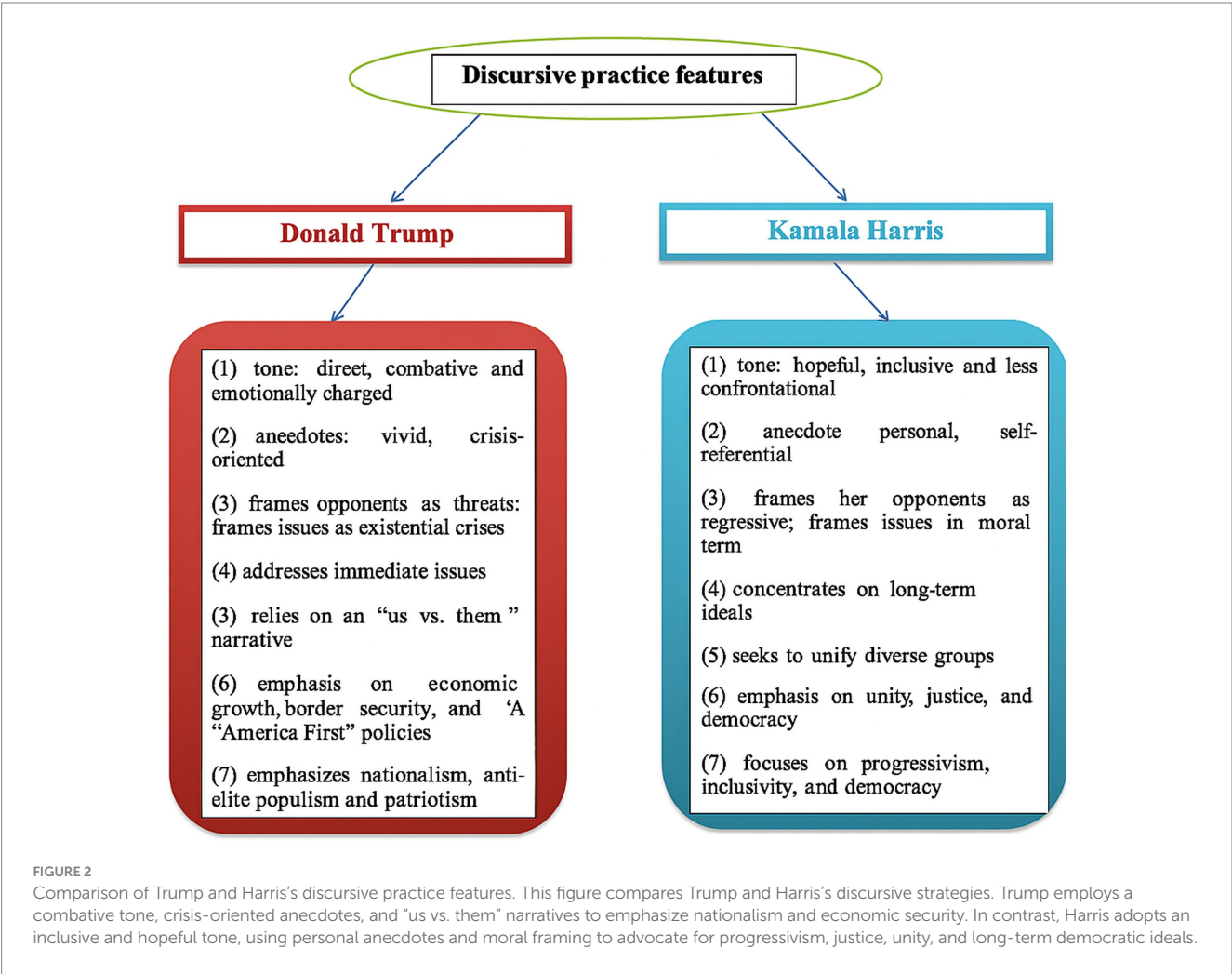
Trump emphasizes the urgency of protecting national security. He creates a sense of imminent danger and casts himself as the leader needed to avert disaster. By linking national security with his

leadership, Trump appeals to voters seeking stability and confidence in uncertain times.

Trump’s social practice features reveal a calculated alignment of his rhetoric with the economic, cultural, and ideological concerns of his audience. By addressing economic hardships, exploiting cultural divisions, and emphasizing nationalism, he effectively positions himself as the protector of American values and sovereignty. His ability to connect with voters on these deeply personal and societal levels explains his strong appeal, particularly among conservative and working-class demographics.

8.6 Harris’s social practice features

Table 6 highlights the social practice features of Harris’s platform, emphasizing progressive values, social justice, and systemic reforms. While these features align with a progressive agenda, they reveal significant limitations in her ability to appeal to a broader voter base. Harris addresses economic issues but often with limited depth. Her focus on systemic reforms, such as childcare affordability and labor



rights, contrasts with more immediate voter concerns, including inflation, energy costs, and middle-class job security. Harris’s economic proposals, such as the \$25,000 down payment assistance program, can appear abstract or overly technical compared to Trump’s direct and relatable messaging on issues like “Made in the USA” initiatives or energy independence, which resonate more effectively with working-class voters. This lack of specificity and immediacy in her economic rhetoric diminishes its impact on voters seeking clear, actionable solutions, particularly in times of economic uncertainty.

Harris frequently frames her leadership in terms of democratic ideals and progressive policies. She positions herself as a defender of democracy, universal healthcare, affordable childcare, and climate-friendly policies, emphasizing constitutional loyalty and systemic reforms. Her strategy may lack the tangible, results-driven approach that could broaden her support. While appealing to progressive voters, her focus on ideals like democracy and social equity may feel disconnected from immediate concerns, such as inflation or border security, that resonate more broadly across demographics. By critiquing Trump’s authoritarian tendencies, Harris risks alienating moderate voters who view such statements as partisan attacks rather than solutions to pressing issues. Harris advocates for social justice measures, such as banning chokeholds and addressing systemic racism, which appeal to progressive

and minority voters. The focus on racial justice, while morally significant, might not connect with voters seeking tangible improvements in their personal lives, such as job growth or reduced taxes.

Harris acknowledges crises but fails to create a sense of urgency. Her proposals, such as “a \$25,000 down payment assistance,” feel technical and distant from the immediate crises many voters face. Trump’s crisis framing (e.g., framing inflation and immigration as existential threats) generates urgency and positions him as a decisive leader, which Harris’s rhetoric lacks. Harris’s crisis framing, while empathetic, lacks the emotional intensity and immediacy that galvanize voter action. Compared to Trump’s strong framing of economic crises, cultural identity, and national security, Harris’s emphasis on ideals and technical policies feels less relatable and actionable, lacking urgency and specificity, limiting her broader appeal.

Trump and Harris employ distinct social practices in their speeches, reflecting their differing priorities and target audiences. Trump’s social practices directly address voters’ economic, cultural, and national security concerns. His ability to frame crises, tap into fears, and project strength aligns with voter anxieties and aspirations, particularly among conservatives, moderates, and the working class. Trump’s rhetoric resonates with voters concerned about cultural identity and job security, issues Harris underemphasized. In

TABLE 4 Discursive features of Harris’s speeches.

Discursive features	Examples/Context	Comment
Personal narratives/ anecdote	My mother was 19 when she crossed the world alone... When I was in high school... my best friend Wanda ... confided in me... (DNC)	Harris employs personal stories to build emotional connections and highlight her background. While these stories are heartfelt, they lack the immediacy or high-stakes drama that characterize Trump’s survival or crisis narratives.
	Coming to Atlanta is like coming back to the womb (Atlanta)	
	I grew up in a middle-class... I took care of my mother when she was sick (Kalamazo)	
	And I have got my savings from my mother, and so we just kind of “Well, my mother said that” (Pennsylvania)	
Polarization and contrast	... his explicit intent to jail journalists (DNC)	This moral dichotomy, while appealing to progressives, may alienate moderates who prioritize pragmatic issues like the economy or security.
	Donald Trump’s vision is focused on the past and himself; the other, ours, focused on the future and you and your family... (Kalamazo)	
Unity frame	... as Americans... where everyone has the chance to succeed. (DNC)	The unity frame resonates with Harris’s progressive base and broader audiences. However, it may lack specificity compared to opponents’ more targeted messaging.
	We are in a fight for the dignity (Atlanta)	Harris frames the election as a moral battle for justice and equality
	When we vote, we win (Atlanta)	This underscores the importance of turnout, particularly among marginalized communities.
	This democracy that we hold dear ... our willingness to fight for it. (Pennsylvania)	This frames the election as a shared responsibility, contrasting Trump’s polarizing rhetoric.
	We all have so much more in common than what separates us (Concession)	This inclusive framing appeals to Harris’s progressive base but lacks the targeted focus of Trump’s messaging.
Crisis frame	Many fundamental freedoms are at stake (RNC)	Harris highlights critical challenges and focuses on reproductive rights and democracy, while important, may not fully address broader economic anxieties, which are often voters’ top priorities
Forward-looking frame	Chart a new and joyful way forward (Kalamazo)	This optimism contrasts with Trump’s more direct and fear-driven messaging
	This election truly is,...battle for the soul of our nation (Pennsylvania)	Harris employs aspirational language to inspire voters and emphasize hope
	The light of America’s promise will always burn bright (Concession)	This aspirational language highlights her commitment to long-term ideals but may lack the immediacy voters prioritize in crises.
Emotional appeals	We are the heirs to the greatest democracy (DNC)	Harris uses emotive language to inspire hope and solidarity
	... hope will fuel the fight (Atlanta)	Harris’s emotional appeals lack the depth and urgency needed to galvanize a broader electorate.
	... your voice is your power (Kalamazo)	This aligns with her broader theme of collective action and systemic change
Audience engagement	Yes, we will win (Kalamazo)	Harris interacts with her audience, creating a sense of camaraderie.

This table examines Harris’s discursive practices, including personal narratives, polarization, unity framing, and emotional appeals. Her speeches often incorporate heartfelt personal stories to build connections and emphasize shared values. She frames issues through moral and forward-looking perspectives, using themes of justice, equality, and collective progress. While her unity frame appeals to broad audiences, it may lack the immediacy of Trump’s crisis-driven rhetoric. Harris highlights critical challenges like reproductive rights and democracy but may not fully address economic concerns. Her aspirational language and emphasis on shared responsibility resonate with progressives, aiming to inspire hope and motivate voter turnout.

TABLE 5 Social practice features of Trump’s speeches.

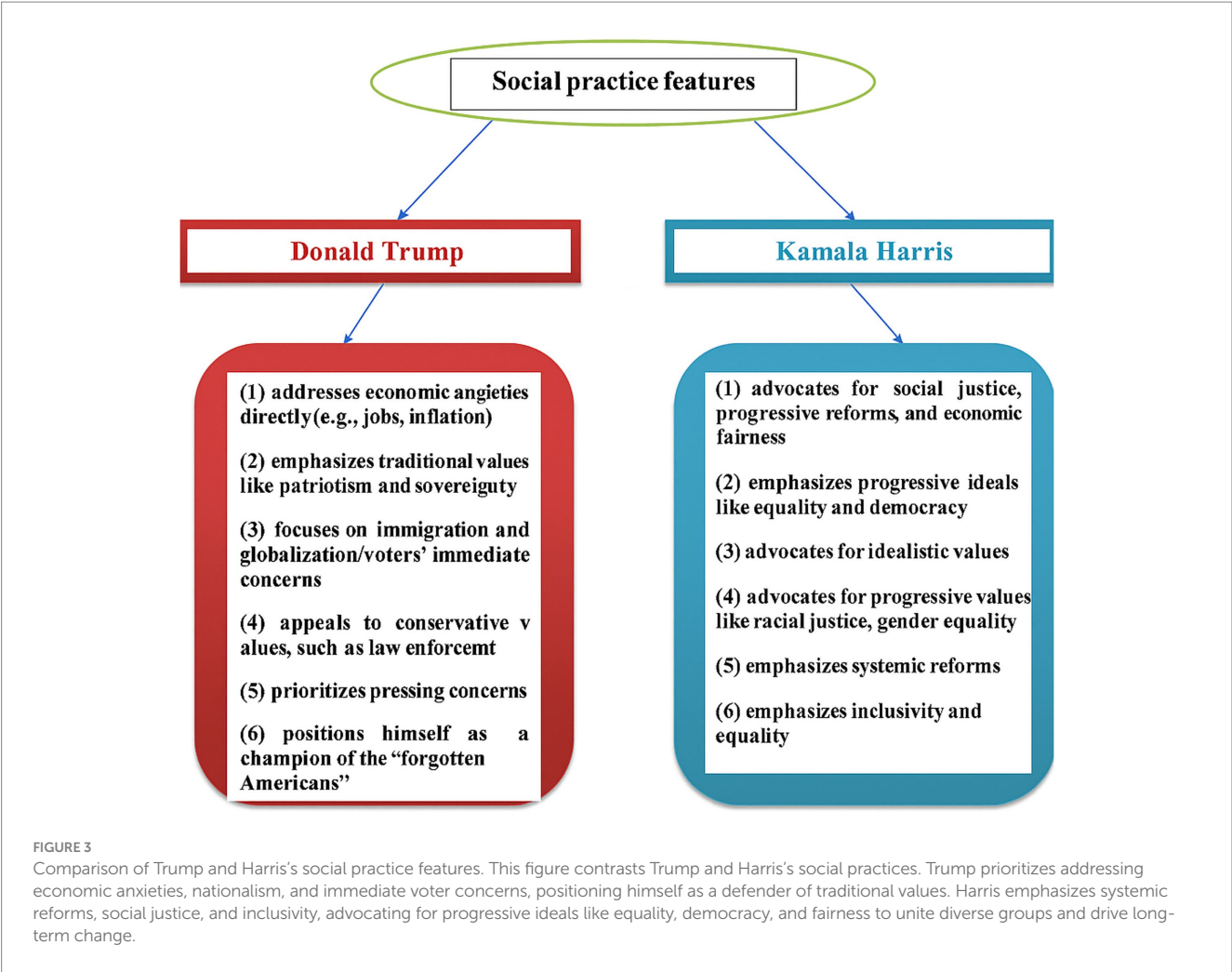
Social features	Examples/Context	Comment
Economic realities	I will END the devastating Inflation Crisis immediately	The U. S. economy during the speech’s context faced challenges like rising inflation and job insecurity post-pandemic.
	Tariffs on all imports (TIME)	Trump addresses voter concerns about jobs and inflation.
	Pennsylvania oil and natural gas support nearly 1 million jobs (Butler)	Trump aligns his rhetoric with voter anxieties about job security and taxes
	We will end our reliance on China ...and bring back Made in the USA ... We’ve reduced taxes (Butler)	Trump advocates for deregulation and tax cuts to spur economic growth. This aligns with nationalist and protectionist ideologies
	U. S. inflation has hit a new 40-year high (Aurora)	Trump appeals to economic anxieties, particularly around inflation and job loss.
Immigration and globalization	Illegal immigrant invasion ... We will return law and order to our streets, patriotism to our schools (RNC)	Trump’s emphasis on immigration reflects concerns about job security, cultural identity, and national sovereignty. This taps into xenophobic fears and critiques of globalization, aligning with nationalist ideologies.
	And we are going to be using local police because local police know them (migrants) by name (TIME)	Trump emphasizes public safety, often associating crime with immigration.
	Biden has pledged a staggering 700% increase in refugees from the most violent terrorist hotspots anywhere on Earth. (Butler)	Trump appeals to social concerns.
	Armed Venezuelan gang members storming an apartment complex in Aurora, Colorado (Aurora)	Immigration is framed as a direct threat to safety and prosperity.
	We’re going to fix our borders (victory)	Trump frames immigration as a threat to safety, prosperity, and cultural identity, which resonates with voters concerned about crime and national sovereignty. His focus on “law and order” reinforces his appeal to those favoring strict immigration policies.
Conservatism	We are defending you. We’re spending most of the money on NATO with the United States (TIME)	Trump emphasizes traditional values, law enforcement, and state rights.
	We will teach our children to love our country (Butler)	This resonates with conservative voters who value traditional American ideals.
	We will hire more police and ban deadly sanctuary cities (Butler)	This resonates with conservative voters who value law and order.
	We will put these vicious and bloodthirsty criminals in jail or kick them out of our country ... law enforcement (Aurora)	Emphasis on protecting borders and prioritizing American citizens over immigrants aligns with voters.
	We are going to start by all putting America first (Victory)	This reinforces his image as a protector of national security, protecting American sovereignty.
Link between language and power structures	No nation will question our power (RNC)	The speech emphasizes national pride and sovereignty, reinforcing nationalist ideologies.
	We will launch the largest deportation operation in the history of our country (RNC)	References to crime and immigration invoke a conservative law-and-order ideology.
	Thank you, Melania, and thank you also for your beautiful letter to America calling for national unity (RNC)	The speech subtly reinforces traditional gender roles and family values. This appeals to voters seeking a return to traditional social structures.

This table examines Trump’s social practice features, focusing on economic realities, immigration, conservatism, and the link between language and power. Trump addresses voter anxieties about inflation, job security, and globalization, promoting deregulation and nationalist policies. His emphasis on immigration as a threat to safety and prosperity resonates with concerns about cultural identity and sovereignty. Appeals to traditional values, law enforcement, and conservative ideologies reinforce his base’s support. Through language emphasizing urgency and power, Trump positions himself as a decisive leader. His rhetoric reflects a strategic negotiation of nationalist, capitalist, and conservative values to align with his audience’s priorities.

TABLE 6 Social practice features of Harris's speeches.

Social features	Examples/Context	Comment
Economic realities	We will create what I call an opportunity economy (DNC)	The speech briefly addresses economic issues, proposing an "opportunity economy" to support the middle class.
	We are looking at families that are getting up at the crack of dawn (Atlanta)	Harris acknowledges multiple crises, including public health and economic crises.
	Prices are still too high (Kalamazo)	Harris addresses economic problems.
	...to making sure that taxes do not get raised on anyone making less than \$400,000 a year (Pennsylvania)	Her focus on systemic reforms and progressive policies often lacks the immediacy of Trump's direct promises, such as reducing inflation or increasing jobs.
Upholding democratic ideals /progressivism	Consider his explicit intent to jail journalists, political opponents...(DNC)	Harris critiques Trump's authoritarian tendencies to position herself as a defender of democracy.
	We will make childcare affordable for every family (Atlanta)	Harris advocates for progressive policies on healthcare.
	We will create a \$25,000 down payment assistance (Kalamazo)	Harris advocates for progressive policies on taxation
	Access to healthcare should be a right (Pennsylvania)	Harris highlights healthcare and labor rights policies to address systemic inequities.
	The ideals that reflect America at our best ... Loyalty to the Constitution of the United States (concession)	Harris's speeches frequently emphasize progressive priorities, such as social justice, systemic reforms, labor rights, electric vehicles, and healthcare, which risks alienating moderate voters who value pragmatism over ideology, and may fail to connect with broader voter and diverse demographics priorities such as national security, inflation, and energy independence.
Racial justice	We need to ban chokeholds and carotid holds... George Floyd would be alive today if that were the case (Atlanta)	This appeals to voters prioritizing social justice but may alienate those focused on broader economic issues.

This table highlights Harris's social practice features, focusing on economic realities, democratic ideals, and social justice. Harris promotes systemic reforms such as affordable childcare, healthcare access, and racial justice initiatives. Her emphasis on progressive policies appeals to voters prioritizing equity and democracy. However, her focus on long-term systemic solutions and progressive ideals may lack the immediacy required to address pressing economic concerns like inflation or energy independence. While her rhetoric resonates with progressive audiences, it risks alienating moderates who prioritize pragmatism and national security. Harris's speeches reflect a commitment to advancing inclusion, fairness, and democratic principles in America.



contrast, Harris's focus on systemic reforms, abstract ideals, inclusivity, and progressive ideals lacks the urgency and specificity needed to appeal to a broader electorate, limiting her ability to connect with voters facing immediate challenges. This contrast in focus and rhetorical style explains why many Americans were more compelled by Trump's message. Figure 3 summarizes their social practice features.

9 Conclusion

This research examines the contrasting rhetorical strategies of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris during the 2024 presidential campaign, highlighting the distinct appeals of their leadership styles. Trump's approach, termed here as "Impact Leadership," is characterized by direct, action-oriented communication that emphasizes urgency, emotional resonance, and crisis-framing. His rhetoric, grounded in accessible language, vivid metaphors, and emotionally charged appeals, effectively connects with voters navigating economic and social insecurities. By focusing on nationalism, economic protectionism, and cultural preservation, Trump's messaging addresses immediate concerns, particularly resonating with conservatives, moderates, and

working-class voters. This strategy cultivates a perception of decisiveness and pragmatic problem-solving, fostering broad electoral appeal.

In contrast, Harris's rhetorical style, described here as "Visionary Progressivism," emphasizes systemic reform, moral appeals, and long-term societal transformation. Her discourse, rooted in inclusivity and equity, primarily resonates with her progressive base. While her aspirational language and detailed policy proposals signal a commitment to addressing structural injustices, the abstract and future-oriented nature of her messaging lacks the immediacy needed to engage a broader electorate. For many voters prioritizing tangible, short-term solutions, her vision appears less relatable or actionable.

The comparative analysis of these rhetorical styles reveals the broader dynamics shaping voter behavior. Trump's "Impact Leadership" leverages simplicity to transcend ideological divides and connect with voters on a visceral level. Conversely, Harris's "Visionary Progressivism," though intellectually compelling, struggles to mobilize widespread support due to its abstract focus. This contrast in leadership models highlights why Trump's communication style, centered on immediate action and emotional impact, proves more effective in galvanizing a diverse electorate.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this study can be found in online repositories. The names of the repository/repository and accession number(s) can be found in the article/supplementary material.

Ethics statement

This study analyzed publicly available data in the form of speeches delivered by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris during the 2024 American Presidential Election. These speeches were accessed through publicly accessible online platforms and official campaign archives. As the data is public and pertains to individuals in their professional capacities as political figures, no direct interaction with human participants was conducted. According to established ethical guidelines for research using publicly available online data, informed consent was not required for this study. However, the analysis was conducted with a commitment to integrity and transparency, ensuring the data was used solely for scholarly purposes and within the scope of the study. The research complies with institutional and international ethical standards for studies involving publicly available online content. This research aligns with ethical research practices for studies utilizing online-mediated public data.

Author contributions

DH: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. NA: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

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