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# Trump: The Threat of Chaos and the Promise of Stability

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In his acceptance speech for the Republican nomination to be President of the United States, Donald J. Trump presented the audience with a stark world of good vs. evil, chaos vs. stability. We use Burke's concept good terms and evil terms to rhetorically analyze the acceptance speech. While Trump used specific references to real events in his use of good and evil terms, his promises for stability over chaos are indefinite terms, which allowed a divided Republican Party to unite behind his candidacy. However, governance has required concrete concepts to solve real world issues.

Keywords: Binary oppositions, emotions, semiotics, strict father

In a rhetorical analysis of Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Kenneth Burke evaluated Hitler's usage of god terms to affirm ideological preferences for the Aryan race and his invocation of evil terms against Jews to express the negative side of the ideological hierarchies. We expanded upon Burke's rhetorical techniques in an analysis of President Donald J. Trump's acceptance speech to be president of the United States at the Republican National Convention on July 21, 2016. What we found in Trump's speech was a pattern: Trump would present a god term (often a self reference) and then link that term to a promise of stability; he would use an evil term and connect the evil to a state of chaos. Usually, the evil term was connected to either his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton or to President Barrack Obama. As a result of this speech pattern, Trump presented a clear binary opposition in his acceptance speech: Their policies, as he identified who the "their" was, created the chaos; the election of Trump would end the chaos and create stability.

In addition, we found that Trump peppered his presentation of the speech with semiotics. We observed that he often employed the use of gesture to mark the cadence of his speech by moving his right arm up and down. This "chopping" motion in cadence with specific words of his speech is a punctuation gesture often used to "accent, emphasize, and organize important segments of the discourse." (Knapp, Hall, and Horgan, 2014, p. 214) Two specific hand shapes accompanied this movement. First and significantly more utilized, was an alternation between a "pinch" where his fingers formed a circle touching the forefinger and the thumb and a "point" where his forefinger would be extended straight and the thumb either touches the second finger or extended straight as well. These two hand shapes along with the up and down motion of the arm create a strong sense of authority and instruction most often used when establishing God or stability terms. The second and slightly lesser used hand shape was an open palm slightly turned out towards the audience. This hand shape is also often utilized with the same punctuation gesture and

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establishes an offering of information with an openness or innocence. This gesture is employed in Trump's use of evil/chaos terms. This gives him the impression that he is knowledgeable, but distant or innocent of their doings.

When he finished with his binary opposition of stability vs. chaos, he would pause for applause and look into the television camera. His jaw would set, his eyes would narrow, and he would straighten his shoulders into a posture of heightened status. This exhibition of his status is established both internally and externally. The moment Trump sets himself in such high status postures were often connected to the end of major points of his speech. The posture was as much a statement of his authority and dominance as it was a reflection of the status offered him by the cheering crowd, responding to his message. Regardless of the origin of the status being imposed or offered, there was a clear acceptance of this position as leader or "father" of the party.

We will explain how Trump's acceptance speech set up this confrontation of chaos versus stability through most of speech, while his body language cued and signaled the audience when he was going to make a major point. In the process, Trump presented himself as the person, or in Lakoff's (2016) words "the strict father," who could resolve the binary oppositions by turning chaos into stability. Our analysis considers how this format created strong emotional appeals that chained through the convention audience like a rhetorical vision. The shared emotions created crowd unity judging by their repeated chants in response to Trump. The empathetic resonance of the speech created a sense of ideological unity behind Trump as the leader of a movement seeking to end chaos and create stability. The mastery of the speech was that Trump accomplished this unity with his use of god terms/evil terms with only vague references to the ultimate goals of a Trump Presidency. Considering the chaos of the first months of the Trump presidential administration, his method may have brought him the presidency, but the process of turning god terms into real stability has revealed the fractures within the Republican Party and among the people who voted for him.

## Burke

Burke explained the importance of good and evil as persuasive techniques in many of his writings. Burke published *The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle"* in 1939 and published it in book form in 1941. Burke explained the rhetorical structure of *Mein Kampf* as a series of binary oppositions tied into cause and effect results. *Mein Kampf* called for people to unite together behind "the *spiritual* quality of Aryanism" (217). The Nazi Party became the manifestation of that spiritual quality and became the force that would bring stability to Germany in the midst of chaos. The chaos was the result of the "devil function" (218) of the Jews, who sought world economic control for their own gratification. This binary opposition of good (Aryan) versus evil (Jews) created ideological agreement among those who accepted the premise that Aryans were a superior people. Burke notes that Hitler specifically stated the value of a common enemy: "Men who can unite on nothing else can unite on the basis of a foe shared by all" (193).

Once this binary opposition of good/stability vs. evil/chaos is established, then people will look for a person who can lead them against evil and chaos. As Burke explains, "This male, as orator, woos them—and, when he has won them, he commands them" (195). Another appeal of this binary is that the evil that exists among the good can be ascribed to the evil ideology of the other, i.e., Jews, thereby redeeming the evil within the good. Burke calls this: "The 'curative' process that comes with the ability to hand over one's ills to a scapegoat, thereby getting purification by disassociation" (202).

In other writings, Burke expands on the concepts presented in his rhetorical analysis of *Mein Kampf*. The key factor in any rhetorical event is not the speaker, but the audience. The speaker needs to appeal to the psychology of the audience. The speaker needs to create “an appetite in the mind of the auditor” and then satisfy that appetite (1968, p. 31). That appetite is satisfied by offering good and stability as an ideological alternative to evil and chaos. “An ‘ideology’ is like a god coming down to earth, where it will inhabit a place pervaded by its presence” (Burke, 1966, p. 6). Morality is always presented in binary oppositions (1966, p. 12) because the resolution of oppositions are ideological, and ideology offers a “spirit of hierarchy” and “a sense of order,” Burke (1966, p. 15) explained. The sense of order and hierarchy is then threatened by the evil and so the perfection of the ideology is achieved when there exists the “perfect” enemy (1966, p. 18). “Antithesis” is a really strong rhetorical appeal, explains Burke, because what the dominant order is against defines what the dominant order is for. Therefore, the dominant hierarchy requires a scapegoat to cast its good against (1966, p. 19). God terms and evil terms are convenient rhetorical devices to set up ideological hierarchies, explains Burke (1966, p. 397), because they fill in the blanks ideologically when there is no logic to explain the specific. In other words, the invocation of god terms means that the audience will accept the ideology of stability without the need for the speaker to provide the specifics solutions or methods of obtaining stability. Similarly, evil terms unite the audience against the scapegoat by simply reversing the ideological hierarchy towards chaos without requiring the speaker or the audience to define either evil or chaos.

From the perspective of Saussure (see Culler, 1998), the evil and god terms are recognized by the audience because they understand the signifiers. Evil signifiers like death, murder, suicide, rape, thief, or defeat are well known by participants in the ideology, as are god signifiers like justice, Christianity, hero, or winning. Cultural participants have the signifieds—the individual past experiences—required to create a specific meaning for those words. However, the ideologies of chaos or of stability are much more difficult to define. Chaos terms like slaughter, terrorism, Holocaust, or massacre are vague because few people have participated in a slaughter or been victims of terrorism or victims of terrible events in general. Therefore, the signifieds assigned to chaos terms are going to vary widely among members of the culture, meaning different individuals within the ideology may understand these terms in incomplete ways. Similarly, righteous, perfection, holy, or justice are the end result of god terms becoming praxis, but they lack specificity. As with chaos, people may agree on an ideology of justice, for example, but the understanding of what is just may vary widely among members of a culture.

An example clarifies the point. Jewish survivors of the Concentration Camps of the Nazis have very specific signifiers about the evil and chaos of the Holocaust. However, without that lived experience other people can understand the concept and the evil, but their signifieds will never be adequate to understand the Holocaust the way the survivors understand Holocaust. People can understand acts that are evil, but chaos is a much more nebulous concept to fully grasp. People recognize good when it occurs, but no one lives in a perfect state of stability and so the meaning of stability is fluid.

## Rhetorical Vision

Bormann's (1972) concept of rhetorical vision explains the rhetorical appeals of god/stability and evil/chaos. To Bormann, people without a common culture can create

unification when they participation and share a common event. That event then becomes a “rhetorical vision” that brings people back together in the future when a rhetorical event invokes the rhetorical vision. “A member dramatizes a theme that catches the group and causes it to chain out because it hits a common psychodynamic chord or a hidden agenda item or their common difficulties vis-à-vis the natural environment, the socio-political systems, or the economic structures,” explains Bormann (p. 399). “The group grows excited, involved, more dramas chain out to create a common symbolic reality filled with heroes and villains.” Bormann explains Hitler as a speaker who could create a shared “psychodynamics” and a “preoccupation” with a set of issues (p. 399). Hitler could recreate the rhetorical vision among his followers by invoking the original fantasy and recreating the emotional experience, (p. 399). To participants, the rhetorical experience, the emotions, and the fantasy might be more real to members than the logical inconsistencies, continues Bormann (p. 401). The power of the rhetorical vision, explains Bormann, continues because all future events are evaluated through the vision (p. 402).

### **Empathetic Resonance**

An emotional appeal becomes particularly effective when the audience and the actor share an emotional response to a new situation. Heinz Kohut developed the concept of empathetic resonance, according to Bertleson (1966) and Lynch (1988). Empathetic resonance is more than just feeling empathy or sympathy. According to Kohut’s theory, the resonance occurs when a piece of art invokes a shared emotion between the artist and the viewer. Adams-Price-Price et. al. (2006) note that the actress Meryl Streep often has a shared emotional moment in her films. As they explain, “The sharing of intense emotions between an actress and audience members is an intimate experience. The intimate emotional experience makes the film feel real” (p. 98). The end result of the resonance is to make an event seem “authentic” and “genuine” (p. 103).

Barrett (2017) explains how emotions can be generated in an individual when that individual is part of an event where other people are reacting emotionally. In this case that event was attendance at the Republican National Convention as Trump delivered his speech. “Just get a couple of people to agree that something is real and give it a name, and they create reality,” explains Barrett (131). People generate an emotion because of the environment and then the meanings that they create during that event are understood through the emotional experience, she explained.

We found that Donald Trump’s acceptance speech<sup>1</sup> invoked the evil/chaos versus good/stability binary opposition, except when Trump talked about his family near the conclusion of the speech. Rhetorically and semiotically, Trump presented himself as the masculine hero or savior, who could bring order to the chaos by re-establishing the proper values of good and an ideology of stability. His speech created a strong emotional reaction, judging by the responses of the audience as indicated in the following table, as he invoked several rhetorical visions, such as the sniper attack on Dallas police, illegal immigrants roaming the streets of America, international humiliations like U.S. naval officers on their knees before Iranian captures, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The table that follows shows the structure of the speech and how god/stability and evil/chaos arguments were consistently used.

## The Structure of Speech

Stability: 60% more Republican votes	God term: we
Chaos: 20% fewer votes	Evil term: Democrats
Stability: America back to safety, prosperity, peace, generosity, warmth, law and order	God: Republicans back to White House
Chaos: crisis	Evil: Terrorism, attacks on police, our way of life
Chaos: Chaos in our communities	Evil: violence in our streets
Stability: safety restored	God: January 20 inauguration
Stability: defend citizens	God: duty of government
Chaos: unworthy to lead	Evil: government fails to defend citizens
Stability: straightforward assessment	God: facts, plain facts, honesty
Chaos: corporate spin, lies, myth	Evil: politically correct
Stability: truth, "USA," progress	God: Honor American people
Chaos: Crime, homicides, "Boo", killings, victims	Evil: Obama administration
Chaos: roaming free, released criminals	Evil: officers killed, illegal immigrants, criminals
Stability: public safety, "Build the Wall"	God: our communities
Stability: college, family, daughter	God: innocent young girl, Sarah Route
Chaos: Sarah's life not worth protecting	Evil: released fugitive
Stability: hope for African American children	God: plain facts
Chaos: unemployment, poverty	Evil: trade deficit
Chaos: national debt	Evil: President Obama
Chaos: domestic disaster, international humiliation	Evil: \$19 trillion debt, bad airports, bridges falling down, food stamps
Stability: going to fix the budget	God: Trump and Republicans
Stability: national prestige	God term: our sailors
Chaos: worst deals ever	Evil: Iranian deal
Chaos: far less safe, far less stable	Evil: Obama, Hillary
Chaos: violence, ruins, death, killers	Evil: Libya, Iran, Egypt, Iraq
Stability: shared action, America first	God: Changed leadership
Chaos: disrespect	Evil: globalism
Stability: respect, safe homes, safe neighborhoods, border security, safe from terrorism, prosperity	God: American people first
Stability: rebuild America	God: reform, new jobs, new wealth
Chaos: they have total control	Evil: Special interests, rigged system
Chaos: rigged system, elite media, their benefit, puppet	Evil: campaign of my opponent, major donors, Hillary
Stability: change right now	God: my message
Stability: better life for people	God: I am determined
Chaos: crushed, horrible, forgotten	Evil: the people forgotten
Stability: national good, "USA",	God: Your voice
Chaos: crying mothers, lost children	Evil: politicians with personal agendas

Stability: greatness	God: our police
Chaos: innocent people suffer	Evil: injustice, govt incompetence
Stability: I won't look the other way	God: courage, decency, laws
Chaos: risk, lies, corruption,	Evil: lacks will, sold out, illegal, her crime
Chaos: terrible, terrible crimes, get away with it	Evil: H. extremely careless
Chaos: access, special favors to foreign interests	Evil: raked in millions of dollars
Stability: no one knows the system better than me	God: time for action
Stability: fix the system, fairness, justice	God: join our movement
Chaos: threats, violence, shocked to its core	Evil: crime, terrorism, lawlessness, police executions in Dallas
Stability: the job properly done	God: law enforcement, best prosecutors
Chaos: dangerous environment, failed cities, failed jobs, failed education, failure on every single level	Evil: Obama irresponsible rhetoric
Stability: equality, life better, dreams, safety	God: I am president
Chaos: brutal Islamic terrorism, damage, devastation	Evil: barbarians
Chaos: savage murder	Evil: murders in Orlando nightclub
Stability: protect	God: As your president
Stability: best, absolutely the best gathering of intelligence	God: We need to focus on three things
Chaos: failed policy of nation building	Evil: Hillary Clinton pushed in Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Syria
Stability: going to win fast	God: destroy Isis, stamp out terrorism
Chaos: member nations not paying their fair share	Evil: NATO obsolete
Stability: true step, right direction	God: NATO new program to fight terrorism
Chaos: massive refugee flows	Evil: immigration from terrorist countries
Chaos: no way to screen refugees	Evil: President Obama leadership
Stability: those who do not will never be welcome in our country	God: support our values, love our people
Chaos: lower wages, high unemployment	Evil: record immigration
Stability: immigration system that works for American people	God: immigration system that works
Chaos: illegal immigrants	Evil: children killed
Stability: solve immigration, "Build That Wall"	God: brave representatives
Chaos: sanctuary cities	Evil: Hillary will not meet with the parents of dead children killed by illegals
Stability: stands in their corner, supports them	God: Trump, the whole nation
Stability: save countless families	God: love, pledge, honor
Chaos: awful fate	Evil: suffering
Stability: stops gangs, stops drugs, stops illegals	God: great border wall
Chaos: pouring into our communities	Evil: gangs, violence, drugs
Stability: protection, lawful immigration, integrity	God: endorsement of border patrol agents

Chaos: human smuggling, violence, illegal crossing	Evil: catch and release immigration policy
Stability: laws of the United States are enforced	God: On January 20th, the day I take the oath of office
Chaos: uncontrolled immigration, mass amnesty, mass lawlessness, overwhelmed schools, reduced jobs and wages, cycle of poverty	Evil: radical, dangerous immigration policies
Stability: billions of dollars in business deals, great trade agreements, bring jobs back	God: I have a different vision, fair trade policies, protect jobs, stand up to countries that cheat
Chaos: colossal mistakes and disasters, job killing, destroy manufacturing, hurts workers, subject to rule of other countries.	Evil: companies moving to other countries, firing employees
Stability: America first	God: individual deals, individual countries
Chaos: horrible trade agreements	Evil: massive transactions, trade violations
Stability: building, making things again	God: renegotiating trade deals
Chaos: massive tax increase	Evil: Clinton's plans
Stability: profound relief, taxes simplified	God: my largest tax reduction plan
Stability: companies, jobs roaring back	God: reducing taxes
Chaos: greatest job killers	Evil: excessive regulation
Stability: \$20 trillion in job creating activity	God: lift restrictions
Stability: Donald J. Trump as president	God: great miners, great steel workers
Chaos: out of work, out of business	Evil: Hillary's plan
Stability: quality of life for all Americans	God: new economic policies, new wealth
Stability: millions of more jobs	God: build roads, bridges, airports, tunnels, highways
Chaos: educational bureaucrats	Evil: failing schools, Hillary
Stability: safe schools	God: school choice, rescue children
Chaos: disaster	Evil: Obamacare
Stability: chose your own doctor	God: repeal and replace Obamacare
Stability: take pressure off	God: work with all of our students
Chaos: drowning in debt	Evil: (current policies)
	Evil: depleted military
	God: rebuild military
Stability: take care of our veterans	God: visit doctor, hospital of choice
Chaos: scandal dismissed by Hillary	Evil: the VA scandal
Chaos: wasteful spending	Evil: (current policies)
Stability: elimination	God: list of wasteful projects
Stability: proper judicial philosophies and principles	God: justices to Supreme Court who support the constitution
Chaos: abolish the second amendment	Evil: Clinton plans to take away your guns
Stability: families and Americans safe	God: endorsement of the NRA
Chaos: abolish the second amendment	Evil: Clinton plans
Stability: their amazing support	God: Evangelical community



Chaos: voice has been taken away	Evil: laws restrict churches from speaking
Stability: America is back	God: great things, believe in ourselves, start believing
Stability: great pride and joy	God: Melania, my children
Stability: smartest and hardest working man	God: my dad
Stability: dignity of work, dignity of working people	God: I respect
Stability: warm, fair-minded, honest, charitable, great judge of character	God: my mother
Stability: my love	God: brothers and sisters
Stability: go to work for our country, for you	God: great life in business
Chaos: we don't win anymore	Evil: petty politics, censors, critics, cynics
Stability: We love defeating those people	God: nation of believers, dreamers, strivers
Chaos: no chance	Evil: people who tell you that you can't have what you want
Stability: America is free, independent, strong	God: your champion in the White House
Chaos: I'm with her	Evil: Clinton loyalty pledge
Stability: I'm with you	God: your voice
Stability: we will make America strong again, proud again, safe again, great again	God: I make this promise

As the table shows, after his opening Trump lays out two premises, which will serve as examples of his creation of god terms/stability vs. evil terms/chaos binary oppositions throughout the speech.

*Premise 1:* There is a national movement to elect Republicans, which will put Republicans back in the White House. Republicans will end the chaos in the streets, end terrorism, and attacks “on our way of life.” These evils resulted from the multiple crises created by President Obama’s policies.

*Premise 2:* Trump promises a government that will defend its citizens, which will lead to safety, prosperity, peace, generosity, warmth, law and order. Trump will end the chaos caused because Obama failed to defend the people of the United States, the foremost responsibility of government. Trump will create stability.

Right away, Trump set up the binary oppositions: Obama vs. Trump, Democrats vs. Republicans, chaos vs. stability, terrorism vs. stability, failed economic policies versus prosperity, lawlessness vs. law and order. Obama and Democrats are the evil, according to Trump’s speech, while Republicans and Trump as president are the god terms. However, the signifiers of the ideology are not clear. Exactly, what crisis does Trump refer to? It could be the crisis in Dallas after the shooting of the police officers. Or, the crisis caused by the Great Recession, leaving people still looking for quality employment. The crisis could be caused by Isis, as reflected by the wars in Afghanistan or Iraq or attacks in Paris. Or, some sense of crisis in the minds of the audience because of all of the crises.

The promises also are vague. Stability will mean law and order, prosperity, good jobs and a sound economy, warmth, peace, and generosity. Who is going to be generous and warm? Peace means the war on terror will be won? There is no mention of how that stability could be accomplished. The national economy was growing at about two percent

a year at the time of the Republican convention, adding two million new jobs in 2016,<sup>1</sup> and the New York Stock Exchange was at record highs. However, these are not indicators of a sound economic to Trump; Trump promises a sound economy, strong economic growth, and better jobs without explaining how those goals will be accomplished. The concept of crisis is left to the minds of the convention audience and the television audience to define, as are the promises of a stable society. People at the convention agreed that America was in a state of chaos, and they shared that rhetorical vision, but they did not necessarily define chaos with a shared set of signifiers of what the chaos was, even though they may agreed that evil (Obama and Clinton) created the chaos. Stable society is something of a rhetorical vision because it lacks reference to specific signifiers, but it is invoked through the use of the god and evil terms.

The audience at the convention shared in an emotional experience. The convention audience cheered when Trump stated that the number of Republican voters in the primaries had increased by 60% while the Democrats had declined by 20%. They cheered again when Trump promised a country of prosperity and peace, and again for “law and order.” As Trump completed the words law and order, he stood up straight, juttied out his chin, and locked his eyes on the television camera. As Trump criticizes Obama for his failure to defend the American people, Trump raises his forefinger. He then starts a new point.

Here is the breakdown of a section of the Trump speech with our notations in parenthesis and comments in italics and Trump’s words in a different typeface:

I have a message for all of you: the crime (evil term) and the violence (evil term) that today afflicts (evil) our national will soon, and I mean very soon come to an end (stability). *Trump raises his forefinger, Crowd cheers.* Beginning on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2017, safety (god term) will be restored (stability) *forefinger. Crowd cheers.* The most basic duty of government is to defend the lives of its citizens (god terms). Any government that fails to do so (evil terms) is a government unworthy to lead (chaos). It is finally time *forefinger* for a straightforward assessment of the state of our nation (stability). *Cheering.* I will present the facts (god term) *finger pointing* plainly (god term) and honestly (god term). We cannot afford to be so political correct (evil term) anymore (chaos). *Hands spread out of the frame. Cheering.* So if you want to hear the corporate spin (evil term), the carefully crafted lies (evil terms), and the media myths (evil terms), *forefinger* the Democrats (evil term) are holding their convention next week (chaos). Go there *boos* but here, at our convention, *forefinger* and nothing else (stability). *Cheering, USA, USA, USA.*

Four times raising the forefinger is quickly followed by the audience cheering. When Trump pauses at the conclusion of his point, moves into an erect posture, and looks into the television camera, the audience cheers as the image is also shown on the big screen at the convention. The cheering is an indication of an emotional interaction between Trump and the audience. Trump’s use of god terms and evil terms and his promises of stability rising out of chaos bring out the emotion in the audience. Just in this short segment of the speech, the crowd boos the Democrats, cheers Trump and the Republican Party, and shouts *USA, USA, USA*. Trump’s rhetoric is chaining through the audience as it emotionally unites and shares the moment of the victory of their ideology with Trump.

## Language of Conservatism

Political thought in America has become so oppositional that conservatives and liberals have each developed their own language, argues Lakoff (2016). There is a "language of conservatism" meaning that political speech is defined through that "conceptual system," explains Lakoff (p. 29). Lakoff describes conservatives as followers of the "strict father" model, which means that the president is the father figure in a national family model. The responsibility of the strict father (p. 13) is to ensure that individuals are raised to be self-disciplined and autonomous.

In his acceptance speech, Trump often presented himself as a father figure. Trump's masculine body language when he posed for the camera was a statement of male domination. The forefinger point directed the audience to pay attention. Many times Trump used "I" to set himself up as the person of dominance.

- Trump identified himself as the team leader: "We and I say we because we *forefinger*, then *arms spread wide* are a team."
- Trump presents himself as the keeper of knowledge: "I will present the facts..." and later "I will tell you the plain facts...." Trump informs his audience that he knows about corruption and the crimes of Hillary Clinton.
- Trump promised to be the person who can create jobs: "I will outline reforms (stability) to add millions *forefinger* of new jobs (stability)...." Trump repeats the promise that he can deliver a better lifestyle: "Every day I wake up determined (god term) to deliver a better life for the people (stability) all across the nation...."
- Trump promises to challenge the power of the special interests.
- Trump states that he understands the people who are beaten down: "I have visited the laid-off (evil term) factory workers, and the communities crushed (chaos term) by our horrible (chaos term) *forefinger* and unfair trade deals (evil terms)."
- He promises to protect children and members of LGBTQ community.
- Trump assumed responsibility for the living conditions of his supporters: "I *forefinger* am *forefinger* your *forefinger* voice (god term) *Trump points into the camera, looks into the camera. Cheering, We Want Trump.*"
- Trump told the audience he had no patience for "injustice," "government incompetence," or watching "innocent people suffer." He is man of such purity that "I am *forefinger* not able, to look *forefinger* the other way. And I won't look the other way *forefinger*, *looks into camera.*"
- Trump specifically states his omniscient power: "Nobody knows the system better than me (god term) *cheering, quirky smile from Trump and a look of satisfaction, shrug* which is why I alone can fix it (god term) *spreads arms wide, looks into the camera and smirks.*"
- Towards the conclusion of the speech, Trump makes something of a New Testament, Last Supper promise: "I am your voice (god term) *looking into camera, points at camera, cheering* so to *forefinger* every *forefinger* who dreams for their child (stability), and every child who dreams for their future (stability), I say *forefinger* these words *forefinger* to you tonight: *forefinger* I am with you, *forefinger* I will fight for you, *forefinger* and *forefinger* I will *forefinger* win for you." *Points into camera, poses for the camera and nods.*
- Trump promises that We will make *forefinger* America *forefinger* strong again....make *forefinger* America *forefinger* proud again *cheering* ....make America *forefinger* safe again....make *forefinger* America *forefinger* great again.

## Discussion

Donald Trump offered Republicans at the 2016 national convention a black and white world. Trump, Republicans, and people who shared their beliefs represented good, and good could create stability. President Obama, Hillary Clinton, liberals, and their ilk would only bring more evil and more chaos to America. America could be great again or voters could choose to follow the failed policies of liberal presidents. Trump, as the strict father, was the one person who could defeat evil, end chaos, and bring good and stability to the United States. These appeals fit into the ideology of the strict father paradigm, which Lakoff argues is the ideology of conservatives. Trump's appeals for stability received a strong emotional reaction from an audience, which booed Clinton, shouted "USA, USA, USA," "Build The Wall," "Lock Her Up," "Trump, Trump, Trump," and cheered Trump frequently. That strong emotional appeal of the speech brought the audience together as they shared a moment of empathetic resonance with Trump. Trump offered himself to the audience watching on television by pulling himself up into a masculine pose and looking straight into the television camera after making his key points. The simple binary oppositions of the speech and the emotional appeals united people together behind Trump.

Unity was an important goal for Trump in his acceptance speech. Wikipedia lists seventeen Republicans who participated in presidential debates and dozens of other candidates who were considered as possible candidates.<sup>1</sup> Jeb Bush started the campaign season as the favor of the traditional Republican power structure. Ted Cruz ran as the candidate of the Christian Right. Marco Rubio offered to be the candidate of the political conservative. Rand Paul had the libertarian wing supporting him. Once the number of candidates still standing was down to three, John Kasich became the alternative to either Trump or Cruz. Trump needed the support of all Republicans if he was going to defeat Hillary Clinton, who led in polls conducted July 23-24.<sup>2</sup> Plus, some prominent Republicans thought Trump was unfit for office while members of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate were reluctant to support Trump, as reported by BBC News.<sup>3</sup>

Trump unified enough people to create an election victory in November. Trump appealed in his speech for a safer America, more jobs and prosperity for all, huge tax cuts, and the end of globalism by putting America first. These ideological positions had support among the people attending the conventions and apparently among enough Republican voters to win the election. Eighty-one percent of voters who identified as conservatives voted for Trump.<sup>4</sup> The electoral college map shows Trump carried the South and the central states with Clinton strong on the West Coast and in the Northeast.<sup>5</sup>

Trump's victory in the presidential election seemed to create a unified Republican, conservative government. Republicans controlled the presidency, the House, and the Senate; the appointment of Neil Gorsuch meant there was a conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court. Most state governments were controlled by Republicans. However, once Trump took office, the divisions within the Republican Party became apparent as Republican majorities in both the House and the Senate could not pass legislation on many issues Trump had campaigned on: health care policy, federal spending, immigration, tax reform, wall on the Mexican border, or Social Security reform in the first 100 days of his presidency.<sup>6</sup>

Trump's rhetorical appeals may have been instrumental in winning the presidency, but vague promises of a better future means that the process of political campaigning was not an opportunity to test drive specific solutions after a broad based discussion of issues. Few Americans would support allowing illegal immigrants that kill little girls to walk the

streets of their city, an image Trump created in his speech. However, the issue of illegal immigrants comes home when taxpayers were informed that they are going to have to pay billions to build a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico.<sup>9</sup> Major issues of the campaign included immigration reform, tax cuts, the NATO alliance, Russian hacking of the Democrats, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, fighting ISIS, sources of campaign contributions, the national debt, health care, preventing terrorists from entering the U.S., and creating jobs in a growing economy. The causes of these problems were not directly addressed in his speech; Trump offered no solutions. That worked as a candidate, but not as a president. Trump left the repeal and replacement of Obamacare to Congressional leaders, who were split over what were the problems and how to fix them. The Trump Administration was split over whether the U.S. would support its NATO allies in case of war. Republicans had no tax reform plan to introduce into legislation in the first 100 days; no immigration policy; no plan to pay for a wall; in reality, no plan to govern. James Hohmann (2017), a columnist for *The Washington Post*, wrote on June 6, 2017 for "The Daily 202," that "Trump has always been a flashy show horse. Why would anyone think a septuagenarian is suddenly going to buckle down to become a workhorse?"

## Conclusion

The binary oppositions of good term/stability vs. evil term/chaos were easy for 2016 voters to understand and to emotionally connect to. Of course, simplistic ideology does not lead to a full discussion of a nation's problems or an explanation on how the candidate plans to solve those problems. Burke pointed out the weakness in the approach of Adolph Hitler in 1939, and the German people eventually realized by 1945 that the costs of Hitler's plan was about seven million dead citizens and a country divided into an Eastern and Western sector governed by two different political systems.

After 100 days of a term of office that runs for a little over 1400 days, the real impact of a Donald Trump presidency is impossible to assess. However, evaluating Trump's acceptance speech demonstrates the power of emotional appeals to win over a convention audience. Further consideration of Trump's campaign speeches and his speeches as president would indicate whether the acceptance speech was an aberration or a typical stump speech. A similar analysis of Hillary Clinton's speech could make for an interesting comparison of speech strategies in 2016.

Ultimately, Trump put into praxis the ideology of the divided political right by evading logic and arguments and delivering a performance. That performance staged good vs. evil as a morality play with Trump playing the role of the strict father who could create stability out of chaos. Trump was a Biblical like hero: Noah saving the remnant from the flood, Moses delivering the 10 Commandments to the chaotic world of the Israelites, Jesus damning the money lenders in the Temple. With Trump as the hero the Republicans would be the chosen people who would save America from evil.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> We used the C-Span transcript and video of the speech. We corrected the transcript in a few places. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4612805/donald-trump-addresses-republican-national-convention>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/01/december-jobs-report/512366/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican\\_Party\\_presidential\\_candidates,\\_2016](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_Party_presidential_candidates,_2016)

- <sup>4</sup> <https://today.yougov.com/news/2016/07/25/yougoveconomist-poll-july-23-24-2016/>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-36962942>
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.businessinsider.com/exit-polls-who-voted-for-trump-clinton-2016-11/#more-women-voted-for-clinton-as-expected-but-trump-still-got-42-of-female-votes-1>
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.270towin.com/>
- <sup>8</sup> See the following articles: <https://www.ft.com/content/b2c77db4-fc2d-11e6-96f8-3700c5664d30>; <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/01/the-great-republican-revolt/419118/>; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/09/26/this-explains-the-range-of-republican-candidates-opinions-on-hot-button-issues/?utm\\_term=.ff148ebfcbb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/09/26/this-explains-the-range-of-republican-candidates-opinions-on-hot-button-issues/?utm_term=.ff148ebfcbb).
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2017-trump-mexico-wall/how-much-would-the-wall-cost/>

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