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A Critical Discourse Analysis of the 2024 Republican Presidential
Nominees' Rhetoric
Framing, Othering, and Responsibility Attribution in Trump's,
DeSantis', and Haley's Campaign Speeches and Interviews

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Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Political communication: analysis and genres.....	3
2.1. Core principles of political discourse	3
2.1.1. Defining ‘politics’ and ‘political’	3
2.1.2. Political discourse and PDA	4
2.1.3. Legitimation in political discourse.....	5
2.1.4. Semantic and syntactic strategies	5
2.2. Text genres in political communication	7
2.2.1. Political interviews	7
2.2.2. Political speeches	8
3. Theoretical foundations: CDA and the DHA	9
3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis.....	9
3.1.1 Three central notions of CDA	10
3.1.2 Approaches to CDA	11
3.2. The Discourse-Historical Approach	12
3.2.1. Discourse, text, and context.....	13
3.2.2. Intertextuality and interdiscursivity.....	15
3.2.3. Three dimensions of analysis.....	16
4. Review of relevant studies	18
4.1. Studies employing the DHA	18
4.2. Studies on right-wing populist discourse	19
4.3. Studies on US political rhetoric	20
5. Research context and study design.....	22
5.1. Research context.....	22
5.1.1. Historical context.....	22
5.1.2. Economic context.....	22
5.1.3. Socio-political context	23
5.2. Study design.....	24
5.2.1. Data types.....	24
5.2.2. Steps of analysis	26
5.2.3. Potential limitations of the findings	27
6.1. Analysis of Trump’s speech 1.....	28
6.3. Analysis of Trump’s interview 1.....	35
7. Analysis of Ron DeSantis’ speeches and interviews.....	40
7.1. Analysis of DeSantis’ speech 1	40
7.2. Analysis of DeSantis speech 2.....	44
7.3. Analysis of DeSantis’ interview 1.....	47
7.4. Analysis of DeSantis’ interview 2.....	49

8. Analysis of Nikki Haley's speeches and interviews.....	53
8.1. Analysis of Haley's speech 1.....	53
8.2. Analysis of Haley's speech 2.....	56
8.3. Analysis of Haley's interview 1.....	60
8.4. Analysis of Haley's interview 2.....	63
9. Discussion.....	66
9.1. Framing of issues.....	66
9.2. In- and out-group construction.....	68
9.3. Attributing responsibility	70
10. Conclusion	71
12. References	74
12.1. Secondary sources	74
12.2. Primary sources.....	76
12.3. Transcription software	77
13. Appendices.....	78

List of figures

Figure 1. Interdiscursive and intertextual relations.....	15
Figure 2. Overview of the speeches and interviews of the three politicians.....	25
Figure 3. The discourse topics in Trump's campaign rally speech in Waco, Texas.....	28
Figure 4. The discourse topics in Trump's caucus event in Waterloo, Iowa.....	31
Figure 5. The discourse topics in Trump's Full Measure interview.	35
Figure 6. The discourse topics in Trump's interview with Meet the Press on NBC News.	37
Figure 7. The discourse topics in DeSantis' presidential campaign launch speech.....	40
Figure 8. The discourse topics in DeSantis' speech on his economic plan.	44
Figure 9. The discourse topics in DeSantis' extended interview on CBS News.	47
Figure 10. The discourse topics in DeSantis' interview with John Stossel.	50
Figure 11. The discourse topics in Haley's speech announcing presidential run.	53
Figure 12. The discourse topics in Haley's economic speech on Freedom Plan.	56
Figure 13. The discourse topics in Haley's interview on the WSPA 7News Channel.	60
Figure 14. The discourse topics in Haley's interview on CBN.	63

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit analysiert die Rhetorik der drei republikanischen US-Präsidentschaftskandidaten - Donald Trump, Ron DeSantis und Nikki Haley - während des Wahlkampfs 2023-2024. Die Arbeit fokussiert sich dabei insbesondere darauf, wie Schlüsselthemen des Landes von den genannten Akteuren portraitiert, In- und Out-Groups konstruiert sowie Verantwortung in ihren Reden und Interviews zugeschrieben werden. Während durch bereits bestehende Forschung die Rhetorik von Präsidenten wie Trump untersucht wurde, schließt diese Studie durch den kritischen und gezielten Diskurs nicht-präsidialer Kandidaten, welche dennoch wesentlich zur Gestaltung des politischen Diskurs im Land beigetragen haben, eine Forschungslücke. Die Studie verwendet die kritische Diskursanalyse, insbesondere den Diskurshistorische Ansatz (DHA) in Kombination mit politischer Diskursanalyse (PDA), um diskursive Strategien in der Diskussion wirtschaftlicher Themen, Klimawandel, Abtreibungsrechte, soziale Gerechtigkeit, Einwanderung und nationale Sicherheit aufzudecken. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Trump emotional aufgeladene und hyperbolische Sprache verwendet und Einwanderer häufig als Sündenböcke darstellt, DeSantis verschiedene Themen primär durch Viktimisierung und Moralisierung rahmt und Haley individuelle Verantwortung und nationale Souveränität betont. Alle drei Politiker konstruieren klare In- und Out-Groups und etablieren dabei häufig oppositionelle Binärverhältnisse. Die Analyse trägt zum wachsenden Forschungsbereich bei, der die Rolle von Sprache bei der Etablierung und Aufrechterhaltung ungleicher Machtdynamiken, der Legitimierung von Ausgrenzung und der Verstärkung konservativer Ideologien untersucht.

Abstract

The study analyzes the rhetoric of the three Republican US presidential candidates - Donald Trump, Ron DeSantis, and Nikki Haley - during the 2023-2024 election campaign. The analysis centers around the way the three political figures frame key issues facing the country, construct in- and out-groups, and attribute responsibility in their speeches and interviews. Although existing research has examined the rhetoric of presidential figures like Trump, the study addresses the gap by also investigating critically the discourse of non-presidential candidates that nonetheless contribute to shaping political discourse in the country. The study employs the Critical Discourse Analysis, specifically the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) along with Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) to reveal discursive strategies utilized in discussing economic issues, climate change, abortion rights, social justice, immigration, and national security. Findings reveal that Trump employs emotionally charged and hyperbolic language, often scapegoating immigrants, DeSantis frames various issues primarily through victimization and moralization, while Haley emphasizes individual responsibility and national sovereignty. All three politicians construct clear in-groups and out-groups, often establishing oppositional binaries. The analysis adds to the growing body of research on the role language plays in establishing and maintaining unequal power dynamics, legitimizing exclusion, and reinforcing conservative ideology.

1. Introduction

Political discourse plays a crucial role in shaping national policies and societal structures. It influences decisions made by key political figures and the way they address social issues. As the United States grapples with a range of internal and external challenges, the national elections emerge as a key process for deciding the policy direction that will ultimately address these issues. During the campaign period leading up to the elections, candidates face immense pressure to engage voters, highlight key topics, and assign responsibility to specific individuals or groups. In doing so, candidates aim to connect with potential voters by proposing policy solutions and framing challenges such as inflation, immigration, and healthcare. To accomplish this, candidates often employ a number of discursive strategies to influence their public perceptions in ways that serve their political agendas. Van Dijk (1997: 33) provides an example that effectively illustrates this: “our bad habits, properties, products or actions will usually tend to be described (if at all) by euphemisms, as when our bombs are called ‘Peacemaker’ and our killings of civilians among the Others as ‘collateral damage’”. Here, he highlights two central concepts vital to understanding how discourse is manipulated: the framing of issues and the construction of in- and out-groups.

The three contenders for the Republican nomination that the present study is centered around are Donald J. Trump, Ron DeSantis, and Nikki Haley. Donald Trump served as the 45th president and was elected as the 47th president of the US. Notably, he is the first president to face any type of criminal charges (NBC News 2025). Ron DeSantis is the current governor of Florida and a former member of the US House of Representatives (NBC News 2025). Nikki Haley is the former governor of South Carolina and a former US Ambassador to the UN (NBC News 2025). Although all three are members of the Republican party, their rhetoric differs in various ways, such as in how the candidates frame issues the country is facing. The issues include inflation, abortion rights, the climate crisis, social and racial inequality, immigration, and national security. Their public communication, particularly their speeches and interviews, offers a unique lens to examine how three candidates of the same political party construct political identities, frame issues, and assign responsibility.

While the political discourse of prominent figures, such as Barack Obama, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump has been studied extensively, insufficient attention has been directed towards non-presidential US political figures, such as governors. One of the goals of the study is to address this gap by analyzing the rhetoric of these often-overlooked individuals. Additionally, the study is highly relevant as it focuses on the issues that are currently at the

forefront of political discourse in the United States, including immigration, economic inequality, and social justice. Examining how lesser-researched figures like DeSantis and Hailey engage with these topics will ostensibly provide a more comprehensive view of the political landscape and the forces influencing public opinion in the US.

The present study will thus address the following research questions:

1. How do the presidential candidates Donald Trump, Ron DeSantis, and Nikki Haley frame and address internal and external issues facing the United States in their rhetoric in the period between February 2023 and March 2024?
2. How do these politicians construct in-groups and out-groups within their discourse, and what are the implications for the representation of the various social groups?
3. In what ways do the politicians attribute responsibility to certain individuals or groups for the issues in their discourse?

The study is essential for understanding how political figures' discourse shapes social perceptions and how these perceptions, in turn, reinforce political agendas. It will offer an insight into the field of political communication from a critical perspective and into the role of language in defining public perception of political figures. Essentially, the study will provide insight into the mutually constitutive nature of discourse and society.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proves to be an essential tool in untangling the complex relationships between language, power, and ideology (Lin 2014: 215). The primary goal of CDA is gaining an understanding of how power dynamics are established by means of discourse within political, social and institutional context. This approach has several major contributors, including the aforementioned van Dijk, as well as Ruth Wodak and Norman Fairclough. The present study will be grounded in the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), along with a number of strategies from van Dijk's political discourse analysis (PDA) framework, to answer the research questions.

This study adds to the growing body of CDA research by applying the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) in the contemporary political landscape of the US. This approach is particularly suited for the project due to its incorporation of extralinguistic factors and historical context of discourse. Furthermore, the DHA allows for the examination of how the rhetoric of the three political figures recontextualizes historical narratives (e.g., past conflicts, debates on immigration, national identity) to frame current political issues. For instance, the present rhetoric of Donald Trump can only be fully understood when examined alongside the historical context of past nationalist movements and isolationist sentiments.

The approach necessitates a detailed examination of the context surrounding the critical issues that have been at the forefront of the politicians' agenda. These key issues include inflation, abortion rights, immigration, social justice concerns, climate change, and national security – factors that often contribute to societal divisions. This study will explore how the candidates' rhetoric reflects and reinforces the increasing polarization in US politics, providing insights into the role of language in this process. For the analysis, data will be drawn from two campaign speeches and two interviews per candidate in order to ensure an accurate representation of the three politicians' rhetoric.

The thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 2 examines the conceptual foundations of PDA as well as the two genres of political communication. Chapter 3 then presents the theoretical and methodological framework of the study, introducing CDA and its central concepts, followed by an examination of DHA. Chapter 4 offers a detailed review of the relevant studies. Chapter 5 examines the historical, economic, and socio-political context, as well as the research design, including the types of data used and the analytical steps. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 provide the analysis findings of the three politicians' speeches and interviews. Chapter 9 then presents the discussion of the findings, focusing on issue framing, in- and out-group construction, and responsibility attribution. Chapter 10 concludes the study by summarizing the findings and offering suggestions for future research.

2. Political communication: analysis and genres

This chapter delves into political discourse analysis, covering key concepts, such as legitimation, the various semantic and syntactic strategies, as well as the two genres of political communication under examination.

2.1. Core principles of political discourse

This subchapter examines the tenets of political discourse analysis, including the meaning of 'politics', 'political', the process of deliberation, as well as the strategies involved, including legitimation and semantic strategies.

2.1.1. Defining 'politics' and 'political'

In understanding political discourse, it is necessary to define both 'politics' and what it means to be 'political'. According to Martin (2014: 4), politics denotes the "activities of administering and bargaining between organized interests, forming coalitions, developing policy and taking decisions on the basis of instituted relations and procedures". It follows that being 'political'

encompasses the abstract frames and principles that determine: (1) whose representation is prioritized, (2) which social groups gain validity as participants, and (3) what issues are legitimized as topics of dispute (Martin 2014: 4). Crucially, the political also “names a dimension of controversy and, potentially, violence where some options are ruled in and others ruled out” (Martin 2014: 4).

A key aspect of politics is deliberation, which is the process of collaborative decision-making about means to achieve an outcome, especially when in situations of uncertainty (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012: 27). Deliberation generally terminates in some procedure, such as voting (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012: 27). Since deliberation is integral to political decision-making, political discourse is inherently deliberative, as it weighs reasons and is oriented to a normative conclusion, even in the cases of ‘undemocratic’ deliberation (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012: 27).

2.1.2. Political discourse and PDA

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) examines ways in which power, domination, and inequality are constructed and reproduced discursively (van Dijk 1997: 12). It addresses the discursive conditions of social and political inequality as well as consequences resulting from these dynamics (van Dijk 1997: 12). Thus, the lexical items in political discourse may not only be selected because of formal conventions of decorum, but also because “they effectively emphasize or de-emphasize political attitudes and opinions, garner support, manipulate public opinion, manufacture political consent, or legitimate political power” (van Dijk 1997: 25).

Fairclough and Fairclough (2012: 17) furthermore argue that PDA is concerned with how political power is reproduced and contested through political discourse. Political discourse, therefore, must be studied within the broader political context, including the settings, participants, and processes involved. For example, political rallies each revolve around various political processes, such as dissent, and include multiple participants who play a role in shaping the discourse. In this regard, the structure of argumentation plays a crucial role, as political speech often aims to demonstrate to the audience how a particular action or a certain perspective is rationalized (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 18).

Political discourse constitutes the interaction between political actors (e.g., politicians) and the recipients of political messages in political communicative events and encounters (van Dijk 1997: 13). These events often serve to project political agendas, either overtly or covertly (Reyes 2011: 783). As for politicians, they act as the “shapers of specific public opinions and interests and as seismographs, that reflect and react to the atmospheric anticipation of changes

in public opinion and to the articulation of changing interests of specific social groups and affected parties” (Wodak 2001: 64). In this role, political figures not only influence shifts in public sentiments, pushing their own political agendas, but also respond to these shifts, adjusting their rhetoric accordingly.

2.1.3. Legitimation in political discourse

A key practice that is frequently employed in political discourse is that of legitimation. According to Reyes (2011: 782), it refers to a justification of a behavior that is typically enacted through argumentation. Arguments of varying nature may be presented in order to legitimate an action or a position, ranging from empirical evidence to personal experiences (Reyes 2011: 782). Rheindorf and Wodak (2020: 121) further argue that legitimation is accomplished by means of persuasion and, in some cases, manipulation.

There are four broad types of legitimation that are outlined by Rheindorf and Wodak (2020: 122): authorization, moralization, rationalization and mythopoesis. Legitimation by authorization is principled on “the personal, impersonal, expert or role model authority” as well as on an appeal to tradition (Rheindorf & Wodak 2020: 122). Legitimation qua moralization depends on moral values (religious, justice, etc.) whereas legitimation via rationalization is based on goals, means or outcomes – “the utility of the social practice” (Rheindorf & Wodak 2020: 122). Finally, legitimation through mythopoesis is realized via cautionary tales (Rheindorf & Wodak 2020: 122).

2.1.4. Semantic and syntactic strategies

While the topics covered can vary widely in political discourse, the underlying structures tend to follow consistent patterns. Van Dijk (1997: 31) refers to these as “local semantics”, where meanings are influenced by the political context. The meanings are constructed through various semantic strategies, which politicians employ to perpetuate ideologies and appeal to their audiences.

One of the primary strategies of political discourse is partisan polarization, which involves the use of contrastive meanings, portraying the in-group more positively than the out-group (van Dijk 1997: 28). This polarization also applies to the degree of specificity in the descriptions of people, actions, and events. Thus, the deeds of the political in-group are often described in a thorough manner, whereas the actions of the out-group are essentially glossed over (van Dijk 1997: 28). This creates a skewed representation of reality, in which the in-group is admired, and the out-group is criticized or simply ignored.

The next semantic strategy is local discursive coherence. Van Dijk (1997: 31) points out that local coherence depends on politically biased explanations of social and political facts. These explanations tend to support a certain ideological conception of the world. For instance, if a political viewpoint ascribes high minority unemployment to the failure of minorities to perform, rather than to the systemic discrimination and social inequality, a different organization of local relations between propositions is expected (van Dijk 1997: 32). This view may downplay the role of discrimination, offering a biased explanation of the issue.

The next semantic category that is typically employed is that of Specification and Generalization. This implies that a misguided action by the political in-group is deemed an isolated incident rather than a systematic transgression, with minimal emphasis or detail provided in order to downplay its significance (van Dijk 1997: 32). In contrast, the negative actions of the political out-group are framed as typical and thus generalized to establish and reinforce a negative stereotype about the group as a whole (van Dijk 1997: 32). This selective emphasis is further reinforced through specifications, where the negative behavior of the out-group is illustrated with detailed examples or anecdotes to support the negative generalization.

The strategies of positive self-representation and negative other-presentation can influence the local semantics of text and speech in various ways. A common technique is the use of disclaimers, which serve to mitigate the effect of negative statements about others (van Dijk 1997: 32). These semantic moves are used to prevent creating a negative impression while still conveying critical or discriminatory views. For example, in discourse related to racism, disclaimers like “I have nothing against Blacks, but...” or “There are also smart Blacks, but...” are typical examples (van Dijk 1997: 32). Such strategies are frequently found in political discourse when referring to political opponents or out-groups, such as communists, fundamentalists, or terrorists, particularly in dominant US political discourse (van Dijk 1997: 32).

Syntactic structures like word order also serve political functions. Emphasis or mitigation is achieved by placing certain words or phrases in prominent positions, focusing on either positive attributes of the in-group or negative actions of the out-group (van Dijk 1997: 33). For example, in active sentences, the subject is associated with agency and responsibility, whereas passive sentences may obscure or downplay the agent’s role (van Dijk 1997: 34). This can be observed in headlines like “police killed demonstrators” versus “demonstrators killed by police” or simply “demonstrators killed” (van Dijk 1997: 34).

These syntactic choices contribute to semantic emphasis, helping reinforce the speaker's message or bias.

2.2. Text genres in political communication

The following section outlines the text genres that are analyzed in the present study – political interviews and political speeches – emphasizing their communicative purposes within the context of presidential elections. Both genres function as platforms for candidates to establish their public identity, communicate their agenda, and engage with potential voters. They both contribute to shaping political discourse in their own right.

2.2.1. Political interviews

A political interview is a mediated dialogic communicative genre, in which the interviewer seeks information and opinions by asking questions, and the political figure responds by providing them (Fetzer and Bull 2012: 87). Political interviews serve as a means of translating politics into a text, of carrying out a political action and thus shifting the perspective from macro to a micro view in a “public, mediatized arena” (Fetzer and Bull 2012: 85). Political parties first co-construct, contextualize, and negotiate their agenda, which is then transmitted by a politician to a heterogeneous audience, ensuring that it is done in a credible and responsible manner (Fetzer and Bull 2012: 85).

In interviews, there is a public-private interface, wherein the politician (interviewee) has a chance to utilize the private domain to leverage in order to construct their identity as someone who is credible and relatable to the audience (Fetzer and Bull 2012: 96). Fetzer and Bull outline the key aspects of a political interview as follows:

(1) clear-cut tasks and purposes, that is asking questions and giving answers, and eliciting information and providing the requested information, (2) clear-cut discourse roles, that is a journalist as interviewer and a politician as interviewee, and (3) a clear-cut use of language, that is non-emotional, neutral language.

The present study will specifically focus on campaign interviews, which feature political candidates rather than political office holders. Clayman and Romaniuk (2011: 16) argue that this subgenre of interviews is particularly interesting for several reasons. First, these interviews are usually conducted at “a moment of heightened political engagement”, attracting a larger audience than usual due to intensified public scrutiny of the candidates (Clayman and Romaniuk 2011: 16). What the latter say in these interviews may greatly sway the opinion of their potential voters one way or the other.

Second, a campaign interview is a means to vet the leading contenders on the behalf of the audience, and not only to passively transmit the message of the candidate to the audience (Clayman and Romaniuk 2011: 16). The interviewer therefore takes on the role of a ‘watchdog’, rigorously scrutinizing the candidates that are more likely to be the frontrunners in the presidential race (Clayman and Romaniuk 2011: 16). The ultimate goal is to develop a holistic public portrait of the candidates, with questions conveying information about the candidate in an implicit way.

According to Fetzer and Bull (2012: 77) interviews can be analyzed employing a number of approaches, including the conversation-analytic approach and CDA. A CDA-informed analysis “examines the specific functions of language regarding language production and language reception, such as medialization, conversationalization and ideology” (Fetzer and Bull 2012: 77). In this research paradigm, political interviews as a genre are viewed through a top-down lens, considering the socio-cultural context in which they were produced, and are also a “multi-voiced encounter and media event” (Fetzer and Bull 2012: 77).

2.2.2. Political speeches

Political speeches can be defined as “a coherent stream of spoken language that is usually prepared for delivery by a speaker to an audience for a specific purpose on a political occasion” (Charteris-Black 2018: xiii). Similarly to a political interview, a political speech is an instrument aimed at not merely informing the audience, but also at establishing identities, strengthening convictions, altering attitudes, and, ultimately, creating a shared reality (Forchtner 2013: 254). The speaker attempts to be perceived as the voice of a social group, framing the conveyed message as the message of the whole group.

Going back to ancient Greek rhetoric, a vital element of a political speech is *ethos*, which is essential for initially establishing a relationship with the audience (Charteris-Black 2018: 8). This necessitates the orator to demonstrate that they prioritize the interests of the people and appeal to a sense of goodwill in order to gain ethical credibility. For instance, Trump sought to establish *ethos* through his increasing use of the slogan ‘drain the swamp’ – the removal of corruption on a government level (Charteris-Black 2018: 12). This functioned on two levels: semantically, the phrase implied actions aimed at restoring the moral integrity of the government; rhetorically, it depicted Trump’s alignment with his audience, as he claimed to have embraced the slogan only because of its popular appeal (Charteris-Black 2018: 12).

Another integral aspect of a political speech is *logos*, or the appeal to arguments grounded in reason (Charteris-Black 2018: 12). This often follows the structure of a syllogism, consisting

of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. For a conclusion to be accepted, it has to be based on premises that are already accepted by the audience as true (Charteris-Black 2018: 13). Moreover, refuting an argument in a speech is generally predicated on *logos* – the speaker first presents a counterposition, then refutes it, and finally offers an alternative position (Charteris-Black 2018: 14). For instance, when responding to accusations of sexual misconduct during the 2016 presidential debate, Trump first denied the accusation, then normalized it by framing it as “locker room talk” and finally mitigated it by apologizing without directly accepting responsibility (Charteris-Black 2018: 14).

The third key element of a political speech is *pathos*, which foregrounds the appeal to the audience’s emotions. These can be evoked through sympathy for the affected party, anger as a result of an injustice, and humor (Charteris-Black 2018: 16). Although it has been debated whether *pathos* is an appropriate way of developing arguments, Aristotle maintained that cognition and emotion are interrelated. He argued that a thought could evoke an emotion, which in turn can contribute to creating a reasonable response (Charteris-Black 2018: 16). For instance, Boris Johnson appealed to *pathos* during a referendum campaign by referencing the Brexit campaign’s slogan ‘Take back control’ and eliciting laughter from the audience (Charteris-Black 2018: 17).

3. Theoretical foundations: CDA and the DHA

This chapter explores the theoretical underpinnings of the present study, focusing on the key concepts and frameworks that inform the research. Specifically, the subsequent section delves into the theoretical basis of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), the primary methodological approach employed. The core concepts, such as ideology and power are also examined, along with the key notions of discourse, text, interdiscursivity, and context.

3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is distinguished from areas of study mainly due to its interdisciplinary nature and a lack of a fixed research methodology. Rooted in Western Marxism, this field of social sciences emerged around the critical turn in linguistics in the 1990s and the early 2000s (Lin 2014: 213). However, Wodak (2001: 5) notes that CDA can be traced back to the 1970s, with the advent of “a form of discourse and text analysis that recognized the role of language in structuring power relations in society”.

Central to CDA is the notion that social and power relations, as well as cultural values, are in part semiotic (Fairclough 2013: 13). Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak (2011: 357) similarly emphasize that the overarching objective of CDA is to examine “the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic or cultural change in society”. In the same vein, Wodak (2001: 2) points out that CDA studies both opaque and transparent relationships between these concepts. Additionally, according to Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak (2011: 370) the three aspects of social life that are discursively constituted include representations of the world, social relations between people, and individuals’ social and personal identities. Discourse plays a crucial role in not only reflecting these domains but also defining them.

Due to its socially committed nature, CDA aims to uncover unequal power dynamics within social structures. It takes the side of the oppressed or dominated group, attempting to reveal the manner in which the social structures of inequality are established (van Dijk 2001: 96). Moreover, CDA underscores the importance of researcher reflexivity and thus contributes to dismantling systems of oppression via their research, with Meyer (2001: 15) stressing an “advocatory role” that the researcher plays while engaging in CDA. Wodak (2015: 1) highlights the fundamental aim of CDA in uncovering how language perpetuates exclusionary societal structures. She notes that “CDA aims to denaturalize the role discourses play in the (re)production of noninclusive and nonegalitarian structures and challenges the social conditions in which they are embedded” (Wodak 2015: 1).

CDA challenges the notion that language is a static and neutral entity. In CDA, it is a form of social practice, such that every social and political process possesses a linguistic-discursive dimension (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak 2011: 368). Moreover, as Wodak (2001: 11) argues, texts are rarely a work of one single individual but instead are a site of discursive negotiation of differences in power. This is evident in political interviews: on the surface, the interviewer holds the power over the politician as the former is in charge of the topics covered, and the time allotted for each question (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak 2011: 369). Nevertheless, the interviewee often does not comply with these ‘policing’ attempts, leading to a struggle for the control of the narrative.

3.1.1 Three central notions of CDA

The three notions that are central to CDA are those of critique, power, and ideology. ‘Critique’ or ‘being critical’ refers to not only distancing oneself from the data but also embracing and articulating a certain explicit political stance (Wodak 2001: 9). The aim of critical theory lies

in assisting with “‘remembering’ a past that was in danger of being forgotten, to struggle for emancipation, to clarify the reasons for such a struggle and to define the nature of critical thinking itself” (Wodak 2001: 9).

Power can be defined as the unequal dynamics between social actors that belong to different social classes (Wodak & Reisigl 2011: 88). There are four distinct ways by means of which power may be realized: ‘actional power’, i.e., via physical force and violence, the control of people through threats or promises, attachment to authority, and technical control through objects. Wodak (2001: 11) further argues that language does not necessarily directly give rise to power; rather, language can be employed to subvert power, challenge it, as well as change how power is distributed. CDA therefore focuses on linguistic forms as a means of manipulations and expressions of power (Wodak 2001: 11).

Reisigl and Wodak (2008: 88) define ideology as a “one-sided perspective or world view composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group”. Ideologies are a means to establish and maintain unequal power dynamics by those in control of the discourse, with language being an apparatus via which ideologies are perpetuated in various social institutions. Researchers employing the CDA are ascribed with the responsibility of using it to “demystify the hegemony of specific discourses” (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 88).

3.1.2 Approaches to CDA

The field of CDA encompasses multiple theoretical approaches, developed by three seminal researchers: Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak (Lin 2014: 214). Fairclough’s dialectal-relational approach draws on Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics and pragmatic theories to analyze modality, turn-taking, and topic control (Lin 2014: 214). In this approach, CDA is the “analysis of the dialectical relationships between semiosis (including language) and other elements of social practices” (Fairclough 2001: 123). His theoretical model consists of three layers of social reality: social structures, practices, and events. Notably, Fairclough’s approach “oscillates between a focus on structure and a focus on action” (Meyer 2001: 22).

Van Dijk’s approach incorporates cognitive theories; he foregrounds the “importance of the study of cognition in the critical analysis of discourse, communication and interaction” (van Dijk 2001: 97). For instance, through his research, he showcases that racism and ideology are both social and cognitive phenomena, emphasizing the need for a solid linguistic foundation in the structural-functional sense (Lin 2014: 216). Van Dijk proposes a three-layer model which

consists of the discourse-cognition-society triangle (Lin 2014: 215). The discourse layer refers to any communicative event, e.g., social interaction; the cognition layer implies personal and social cognition, whereas the third layer of society revolves around “local, microstructures of situated face-to-face interactions, as well as the more global, societal and political structures variously defined in terms of groups, group-relations” (van Dijk 2001: 98).

The third approach to CDA is the Discourse-Historical Approach, developed by Wodak. The DHA is the most suitable for the present study, as in line with Wodak (2019), one of its focal points is to examine how the politics of the far-right parties establish and reproduce ideologies and exclusionary politics through various forms of communication, including media, campaigns, and speeches. The DHA framework, along with its interdisciplinary focus, will be explored in greater depth in the following sections.

3.2. The Discourse-Historical Approach

The present study is grounded in the tenets of Wodak’s Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). The DHA was shaped by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and rooted in the traditions of Bernsteinian sociolinguistics (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak 2011: 364). What led to the eventual development and cementing of the DHA as one of the core approaches to CDA is the study of the “antisemitic stereotyped image” that was prominent in the public discourse in the 1986 Austrian presidential campaign of Kurt Waldheim (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak 2011: 364). Reisigl and Wodak (2008: 94) outline the integral characteristics that emerged as a result of this study as follows: “(1) interdisciplinary and particularly historical aims and interests; (2) teamwork; (3) triangulation as a methodological principle; and (4) an orientation towards application”. These features were later employed in various studies, such as one focusing on discrimination on the basis of racism against migrants from Romania (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 94). As Wodak and Rheindorf (2022: 6) assert, studies informed by the DHA go beyond mere research; they aim to “formulate interventions in political discourse”, such as in the form of workshops or educational material.

In adhering with the socio-philosophical orientation of critical theory, the DHA takes into account three dimensions of critique: discourse-immanent critique, socio-diagnostic critique, and future-related critique (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 88). The first level of critique attempts to uncover inconsistencies, paradoxes, and dilemmas within the text or the discourse under consideration. The second level aims to reveal the “manipulative character” of certain discursive properties, drawing on the contextual knowledge. The goal of the last level is to aid in improving future communication practices (e.g., reducing language barriers in hospitals and

schools) (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 88). Therefore, the positionality of the researcher should always be made transparent, as well as the justification of why a particular interpretation of a discursive event is more valid than others (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 88).

The DHA stands out within the interdisciplinary nature of CDA due to its integration of political, sociological, and psychological dimensions (Wodak 2008: 2012). It is characterized by a comprehensive and systematic incorporation of all available background information in the analysis and interpretation of the many layers of text (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 95). Rheindorf (2022: 45) further describes this approach as ‘eclectic’, imploring the researcher to begin with a concrete problem and develop a research design accordingly. In the same vein, Meyer (2001: 22) highlights the need for conceptual tools that directly address particular social problems, rather than concentrating on abstract, grand theories that are often impossible to operationalize. This pragmatic focus allows the DHA to remain grounded in the realities of political discourse, while providing a framework that is adaptable and applicable to real-world issues (Meyer 2001: 22).

When applied to political discourse, the DHA is frequently employed in research focusing on far-right politics, populism, identity politics, gender and body politics, the politics of memory and commemoration, climate change, migration and integration, racism and antisemitism (Rheindorf & Wodak 2022: 6). Political figures often present immigrants, elites, or foreign nations as “others” who threaten national unity or prosperity. The DHA provides tools to examine these strategies in a structured way, revealing how the political figures manipulate discourses to construct boundaries between “us” (e.g., the American people) and “them” (various out-groups) (Rheindorf & Wodak 2022: 6).

The next subchapter covers the concepts of discourse, text, and context, which are vital for a comprehensive understanding of the DHA. These elements will provide the necessary theoretical foundation for the analysis that follows and offer an insight into how language interacts with the broader social and political environment within the framework of DHA.

3.2.1. Discourse, text, and context

In the DHA framework, discourse is defined as a “cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action” (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 89). Discourse is organized around a macro-topic and linked to the argumentation involving validity claims, such as those connected to truth and normative legitimacy; it also engages multiple social actors who may hold differing points of view (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 89). Moreover, discourses and societal structures are mutually constitutive: discourses influence discursive and

non-discursive social and political actions and processes, which, in turn, shape and effect discourses themselves (Wodak 2001: 66).

When delineating between the notions of discourse and text, it is necessary to understand their distinguishing characteristics. Reisigl and Wodak (2008: 89) argue that texts “make speech acts durable over time”, making them more tangible compared to discourses. Wodak (2008: 6) further highlights that texts are “specific and unique realizations of discourse”. According to Paltridge (2012: 191), texts should be analyzed in relation to the ones that came before and after them as their temporal context explicates their meaning within the broader discourse.

Texts are then organized into genres, which are defined as “socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity” (Wodak 2001: 66). A genre is a conventionalized use of language that follows a particular schematic structure and is associated with a specific social activity (Wodak 2001: 66). For example, a proposal aimed at combating unemployment adheres to certain conventions, both in terms of structure and content. It employs distinct textual devices and reflects ideological views associated with a specific political group, such as a trade union (Wodak 2001: 66). Importantly, it is through genres that power is often exercised, as genres are often associated with a particular social occasion which has limited access to participation. (e.g., speaking at a commemorative event) (Forchtner 2013: 247).

Rheindorf and Wodak (2020: 122) point out that social actors play an important role within discourse as they “constitute and negotiate knowledge, identities, social relations and, in the special context of politics, political measures and policies”. They may occupy more hegemonic and marginal positions within discourse (Rheindorf 2022: 46). It is also worth noting that the boundaries of discourse are partially fluid and cannot be perceived as a closed unit (Wodak 2001: 66).

Given the fluid nature of discourse, understanding context becomes essential. In the DHA, context plays a crucial role in shaping how social actors engage and how meaning is constructed. Reisigl and Wodak (2008: 93) outline the four dimensions of context as follows:

1. the immediate, language or text-internal co-text and co-discourse;
2. the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses;
3. the extralinguistic social variables and institutional frames of a specific ‘context of situation’;
4. the broader sociopolitical and historical context, which discursive practices are embedded in and related to.

3.2.2. Intertextuality and interdiscursivity

Following the second dimension of context, the DHA takes into account the relationships between discourses and texts, which is evident in their interconnectedness - intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Intertextuality refers to the way texts are connected to each other by means of explicit reference to a topic or main actor, through references to the same events; by allusions or evocations; by the transfer of main arguments from one text to the next, and so on (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 90). When an argument or an idea is placed into a new context, whether within the same context dimension or across different dimensions, from immediate co-text to broader sociopolitical context, recontextualization occurs (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 90). According to Fairclough (2023: 14), it can be perceived “as ‘colonization’ of one field or institution by another, but also as “appropriation ‘of ‘external’ discourses, often incorporation of discourses into strategies pursued by particular groups of social agents within the recontextualizing field”. For instance, in the case of a political speech or interview, certain phrases are subject to this process as part of “selective reporting” for newspapers or other media outlets, whereby the phrases are placed in different genres of text. As for interdiscursivity, it refers to ways discourses are linked to each other (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 90). Following Wodak (2001: 66) interdiscursivity becomes apparent when “a racist argument (taken from the discourse on immigration restrictions) is used while arguing for other policies to combat unemployment”.

The following diagram showcases the interdiscursive and intertextual relationships between discourses, discourse topics, genres, and texts (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 92):

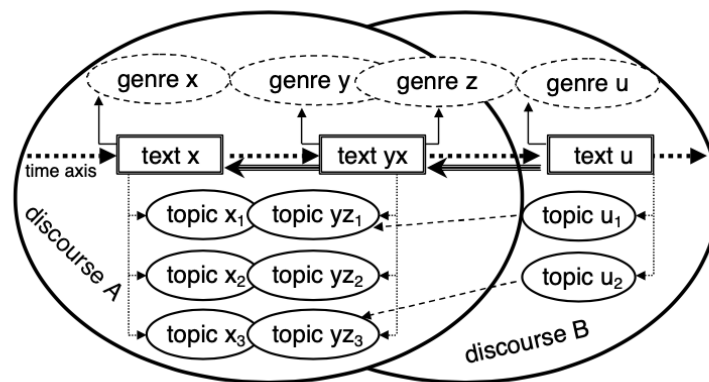


Figure 1. Interdiscursive and intertextual relations.

The diagram illustrates how discourse A and discourse B, which are two different yet overlapping bodies of communication, share texts, genres, and topics. Each discourse contains various texts that belong to specific genres (such as speeches or interviews in the case of the

present study) and discuss particular topics. The intersection of these discourses through shared topics and texts showcases intertextuality, where one text may reference or influence another across different discourses. Interdiscursivity is demonstrated by the intersection of discourses, as both discourses share and transform common ideas and topics. The inclusion of a time axis emphasizes that discourses evolve over time, adapting and reinterpreting their content, with texts undergoing recontextualization.

Another facet of the approach is the notion of ‘the field of action’. It refers to a segment of social reality that serves as a frame for a particular discourse (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 90). Different fields of action are characterized by the distinct functions of the discursive practices within them. For instance, the field of formation of public attitudes includes a range of political subgenres: press conference, interview, state of the union address (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 90).

3.2.3. Three dimensions of analysis

The DHA is a triangulated approach, incorporating multiple methods, empirical observations, and contextual information. Rheindorf (2022: 49) explains that triangulation should be understood as a ‘methodological strategy’, rather than a rigid or fixed methodology. It promotes “reflection, deliberation and purposeful choices on the methodological level” and aims to offset the drawbacks of one perspective with the strengths of the other(s) (Rheindorf 2022: 49).

Although triangulation does require exactly three dimensions, the DHA often adopts a three-step analysis. The first step involves identifying the discourse topics, which essentially convey the central ideas that capture the ‘gist’ of a sequence of sentences (Barakos 2020: 58). Political discourse encompasses a wide range of discourse topics, often incorporating issues from various societal domains, which frequently leads to interdiscursivity (Wodak 2001: 66). These topics typically comprise both macro-topics and subtopics. For example, the macro-topic of ‘unemployment’ covers a number of subtopics, such as ‘trade unions’, ‘social welfare’, and ‘global market’ (Wodak 2001: 66).

Once the topics have been identified, the next step is to analyze the discursive strategies. These refer to the means by which the information is ‘packaged’ to achieve political, social, or linguistic goals and to pursue certain agenda (Barakos 2020: 51). There are five discursive strategies in total: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation/framing, and mitigation (Lin 2014: 217). The final dimension focuses on the linguistic realizations through which the previously mentioned discursive strategies are implemented.

The aim of the nomination strategy is to identify and label the central social actors, processes, phenomena, and objects discussed in the text. This discursive strategy can be

realized linguistically through the use of metaphors, membership categorization tools, metonymy, and synecdoche (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 95). These realizations are typically grouped into categories, such as proper names and anthroponyms. For example, Reisigl and Wodak (2008: 112) illustrate this with professional and ideological anthroponyms, as well as collectives, in their analysis of discourse on climate change.

The predication strategy involves attributing positive or negative qualities to social actors, processes, phenomena or objects through evaluative descriptions, either explicitly or implicitly. This strategy aligns with the PDA strategies of partisan polarization and specification/generalization, as it categorizes social actors and phenomena by evaluating them positively or negatively. Linguistic realizations of predication include relative clauses, adjectives, collocations, and predicates (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 95). For example, the environmentalists might be constructed using negative attributions, such as being described as “irrational” and “wasteful” (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 95).

Argumentation relies on topoi and fallacies (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 95). Topoi (singular: topos) are key ideas that connect an argument to its conclusion, with the aim of persuading the audience (Žagar 2010: 6). This strategy is analogous to the PDA’s concept of local coherence, as it examines how arguments are structured to seem logically sound and convincing. Rheindorf and Wodak (2020: 123) note that “the analysis of topoi may reveal flawed logic, manipulative and erroneous conclusions inasmuch as what they ignore or sidestep can be fallacious”. In their analysis of the Austrian media discourse during the ‘refugee crisis’, Rheindorf and Wodak (2020: 124) provide several illustrative examples of topoi. For instance, the warrant of the topos of reality is as follows: “The universal human right to asylum is a theoretical ideal, not a reality like limited resources; therefore, granting this right is optional for Austria”. Another notable example is the topos of burden, wherein the warrant is that “providing for so many refugees places an inordinate burden on Austria and Austrians; therefore, Austria should only accept a limited number”.

Perspectivation/framing serves to examine the perspective from which a certain opinion or viewpoint is expressed, and the way in which discourse topics are framed in the text. This strategy parallels the PDA strategy of syntactic emphasis, as syntax shapes the way the agent’s role is underscored or downplayed. Perspectivation/framing is primarily realized through deictics, direct and indirect speech, and metaphors (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 95). For instance, in her study of language policy in Wales, Barakos (2020: 83) points out that the personal pronoun “we” and the possessive determiner “our” are utilized to construct group identity as well as to establish a sense of control and ownership. Reisigl and Wodak’s (2008: 113) study

on climate change discourse highlights ideological framing, namely the opposition between neo-liberal and communist viewpoints versus environmentalist-protectionist perspectives.

Lastly, the discursive strategy of intensification and mitigation, which is focused on modifying the illocutionary force of an utterance, often manifests through modal verbs, verbs expressing thought and emotion, tag questions, or general hesitations (Reisigl & Wodak 2008: 95). Barakos (2020: 86) shows how intensification is realized via positively connoted adjectives, such as “genuine”, “real”, “helpful” when characterizing a telecommunications business that has Welsh as one of its working languages.

4. Review of relevant studies

The following chapter reviews the relevant studies that inform the present research. The selection is based on their alignment in terms of the methodology employed, particularly the use of the DHA and PDA, as well as the focus on the discursive construction of right-wing populism across various geographical contexts, but particularly within the US political landscape.

4.1. Studies employing the DHA

The DHA has been applied in various contexts to investigate how linguistic means are used to contribute to discourses, which subsequently reinforce ideologies. For instance, Yang and Chen (2021) employed the DHA in their study on media representations in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. They analyzed two corpora of English and Chinese news texts utilizing corpus linguistics tools like KH Coder, identifying themes and examining the discursive strategies of nomination, predication, and argumentation. Their findings revealed a dual discourse of globalism and nationalism in Chinese official media, demonstrating how these narratives coexist to reinforce the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) domestic and international political agendas (Yang & Chen 2021). While the context differs, this study arguably proves useful to the examination of political discourse in the US, particularly to how US politicians balance nationalist rhetoric and international cooperation. Similar to the Chinese media’s use of discourses to reinforce national legitimacy, US presidential candidates also employ discursive strategies to address internal challenges and engage potential voters.

In European context, Rheindorf and Wodak (2020) employed the DHA in conjunction with the analysis of legitimation strategies to investigate discriminatory and exclusionary rhetoric surrounding immigrants in Austria. Their study combined quantitative and qualitative methods, following the principle of triangulation. Rheindorf and Wodak (2020) used statistical

analysis to identify the recurring nominations of refugees and collocational patterns, which were in turn categorized into semantic fields. The results demonstrated that media reports were sites for legitimating and delegitimizing refugees' status. Most notably, they were primarily constructed as a burden and less so as a humanitarian obligation, as evidenced by the shift towards the use of the topoi of nature and culture, as well as the conspicuous use of the topos of the real (Rheindorf & Wodak 2020: 142). The latter was primarily justified by the economic and resource limitations. The study reinforced the DHA's instrumental role in revealing how topoi employed in legitimation can inform legal regulations, which may subsequently shape policy.

Forchtner (2013) similarly applied the DHA to analyze Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen's legitimation of the war in Iraq. Central to the study is the notion of "judge penitence", which virtually allows the speaker criticism of the opposition as morally inferior when engaging in self-criticism. Forchtner (2013) used the DHA alongside Toulmin's model of argumentation to analyze the rhetorical structure of the last two paragraphs of Rasmussen's commemorative speech in August 2003. The analysis revealed how contextualizing oneself in the problematic historical past helped shift the blame from the in-group (center-right) onto the out-group (center-left) and rationalize political decisions that may be controversial. Forchtner (2013: 242) also demonstrated how past wrongdoings were reframed to signal moral superiority over the out-group, resulting in "positive self-representation as a penitent sinner".

4.2. Studies on right-wing populist discourse

Shifting to the study of far-right populist discourse, Wodak's (2019) extensive study offers an analysis of the development of far-right populist rhetoric using data drawn from texts across various genres, such as political speeches, campaign rallies, posters, and slogans. Applying the DHA, Wodak (2019) traced major discursive shifts in far-right parties' rhetoric in relation to socio-political tipping points in the European and the global context. She identified several such points, including the fall of the Iron Curtain, 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, and the 2015 refugee crisis, during which the xenophobic and anti-Muslim narratives intensified, often framed through appeals to national identity, traditional values, and cultural homogeneity. Wodak (2019: 28) also demonstrated how far-right politicians employed argumentation strategies like *ad hominem* attacks and scapegoating of the minorities, while relying on dichotomous constructions, such as 'the people' vs. 'the elites' – a key feature of far-right populist discourse.

Building on this trajectory, Cammaerts (2022) showcased in his study how the anti-woke culture war discourse has become instrumental in contemporary right-wing political rhetoric in the UK. Applying the DHA as well as the PDA, Cammaerts (2022: 733) analyzed a corpus of texts produced by Conservative party politicians and right-wing media journalists active in the UK public sphere. The study revealed that social justice movements were discursively constructed as an imminent threat to British society. This abnormalization of anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-LGBTQ-phobia movements was realized by the social actors through weaponization of free speech and instigation of moral panics. More importantly, this discourse extended over several fields of action: party-political internal communication, shaping of public opinion as well as propaganda (Cammaerts 2022: 740).

4.3. Studies on US political rhetoric

The study of Trump's rhetoric has played a key role in understanding US political discourse, namely in how right-wing populist rhetoric is propagated in the US and globally. Kreis's (2017) applied the DHA to analyze over 200 of Trump's tweets collected from his account between his inauguration on January 20, 2017 and his first address to Congress on February 28, 2017. In this study Kreis revealed how the platform's format allowed him to bypass traditional media, presenting himself as an authentic voice of the people. His communication style, marked by the use of capitalization, exclamations, and personal pronouns, constructed an 'us versus them' dynamic, where immigrants and other marginalized groups are scapegoated and depicted as threats to national unity. Moreover, Trump's use of Twitter as a 'top-down tool' for broadcasting messages, rather than engaging in meaningful conversations with his audience, is comparable to the tactics employed in other populist governments, such as in Poland. Kreis's study provides a new angle in demonstrating how social media has become an essential tool for right-wing populists to normalize their polarizing rhetoric and to advance their agenda.

Konrad's (2017) study explored another facet of Trump's rhetoric – his legitimization of white supremacy by framing minority groups as a threat to society and by reenforcing harmful stereotypes (Konrad 2017: 25). Konrad employed the social psychological theory in the analysis of Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric to demonstrate how he attempts to distance himself from the racist label. This distancing was achieved by means of denying the occurrence of a racist statement, denying its racist undertones, and/or deflecting responsibility. The study revealed that this emboldened white supremacist groups, as they felt legitimized by an authority figure. (Konrad 2017: 14). Furthermore, Konrad (2017: 18) pointed out a link between anti-socialism rhetoric and racist narratives, particularly the implication that primarily the out-group

(Latino immigrants, African Americans) benefits from the socialist welfare programs, thereby further alienating the out-group and leading to binary opposition between the ‘deserving’ in-group and the ‘undeserving’ out-group.

Garcia (2019) applied the CDA to explore how similar binary oppositions (e.g., insider vs. outsider) are constructed discursively, specifically within the US/Mexico border discourse. This study analyzed 30 videotaped speeches across various genres such as presidential campaign rally speeches, congressional committee hearings, Senate debates, and federal administration press conferences, with participants of various ranks, including President Trump, members of Congress and the Senate, journalists, and immigration experts. The analysis examined how participants employ techniques such as membership categorizations to construct the debate in oppositional dichotomous categories. Garcia (2019) showcased that discursively constructed binary framing may be effective in persuading, contributing to the maintenance of the divisions between segments of the US government, the media, and the general public.

Binary constructions were also investigated in the study conducted by Biria and Mohammadi (2012), who drew on CDA to examine the presidential inaugural addresses. The study revealed that both George W. Bush and Barack Obama utilized rhetorical strategies such as positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Their approaches, however, differed. Bush utilized these strategies to hide his nationalist and Republican ideologies, discursively constructing non-Americans and non-Christians negatively and presenting a positive image of Americans and their government. Obama, on the other hand, discursively distanced his party from the previous administration by attributing negative qualities to the latter (Biria & Mohammadi 2012: 1301). Despite their differences, both speakers employed similar strategies on issues like Americanism due to shared cultural sentiments. The study showcased ways in which CDA can uncover the covert ways in which politicians navigate face-threatening situations through linguistic means.

The strategies identified in Biria and Mohammadi’s (2012) study remain relevant in recent political discourse. Lafta (2024) employed van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach to analyze the rhetorical approaches employed by Donald Trump and Joe Biden in the 2024 US presidential debates. By examining strategies such as positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, rhetorical devices (e.g., metaphors, hyperbole), and implicit presuppositions, the study further demonstrates their role in shaping ideology within the context of a debate. Trump frequently uses hyperbole and repetition to highlight his past achievements, portraying them as significant contributions to national success. His strategy focuses on constructing a strong, positive narrative of himself while framing the current administration as a threat to national

stability and economic prosperity. In contrast, Biden's rhetoric draws on specific achievements and personal anecdotes to establish a more proactive and relatable image. He uses irony and implicit meanings to shift blame onto Trump's administration for the country's problems.

5. Research context and study design

This chapter situates the analysis within its historical, economic, and socio-political context, outlines the data types used for the present study and the steps undertaken for their analysis, with the DHA serving as the primary analytical framework.

5.1. Research context

This subchapter details the historical, economic, and socio-political setting of the present study, providing the necessary context for the subsequent analysis.

5.1.1. Historical context

To understand the public opinion leading up to the 2024 US elections, it is necessary to examine the historical developments in the preceding years. A particularly important period was Trump's first presidential term (2016 – 2020), which marked a new shift in US far-right politics and the rise in populism, fueled by the anti-immigration and nationalist sentiments (Wodak 2019: 23). His promises of simple solutions to nation's complex issues resonated with the disaffected members of the American public (Wodak 2019: 23).

Trump's campaign entitled "America First" appealed to voters' sense of national pride and seemingly addressed their fears of job loss as a result of globalization (Olsen 2021: 76). His political rhetoric leveraged globalization shocks – such as increased immigration and trade-related economic dislocation – to deepen cultural divides and drive up support for populism (Rodrik 2021: 140-141). Trump's inward-looking nationalist and even isolationist stance became more evident when he refused to endorse Article V of the NATO Treaty, showcasing his unwillingness to participate in multilateral defense agreements and his move towards unilateralism (Olsen 2021: 77).

5.1.2. Economic context

Economic decline, exacerbated by globalism, remained a central issue in the 2024 US elections. While the inflation had been steadily declining, and the economy showed strength across major indicators, it still remained a sore point for many Americans, particularly after the inflation

spike of 2022 (Schneider 2024). This discontent fed into the growing skepticism about the effectiveness of the Biden administration's economic policies, which were termed "Bidenomics" (AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research).

Trump's earlier rhetoric capitalized on American' fears that global trade agreements, such as NAFTA, had led to job losses, wage stagnation, and economic decline in the US (Stiglitz 2018: 524). Although these arguments appeared in previous political discourse, they remained relevant in the economic discourse of 2024, in connection to the wider anxieties about globalization. Stiglitz (2018: 525) contends that the root cause was not necessarily globalization, but the "corporate-driven trade agenda", which favored outsourcing of labor and thus lowering of wages. This, along with automation, deindustrialization, deunionization, further raised concerns about job security and contributed to the decline of the middle class, influencing voter sentiments (Rodrik 2021: 158).

5.1.3. Socio-political context

Reproductive rights, specifically the right to an abortion, turned out central in the political discourse in the 2024 election. The Supreme Court's landmark reversal of *Roe v. Wade* provided a pathway for individual states to decide on the legality of abortion (Coen-Sanchez et. al 2022: 1). As a result, this right has risen to the forefront of the political agenda, with an increasing number of voters, especially in swing states, citing it as a decisive issue (Pell 2024). The three candidates took firm anti-abortion stances, reflecting the broader views of the Republican Party.

The next focal issue deemed important among the voters was that of accessibility to healthcare. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the disparity of the access to healthcare, particularly for the low-income and marginalized communities (Tai et al. 2020: 703). This revealed that they were disproportionately affected by the pandemic because of lack of access to healthcare. This contributed to it being one of the top issues for the voters, who are advocating for universal access to healthcare and affordability.

Immigration and national security similarly remained on top of the politicians' agenda. Wright and Levy (2018: 78) contend that the public discourse surrounding immigration was increasingly vitriolic, with the landscape being described as "tethered to tribalistic notions of "us" against "them"". Many Americans held reservations about immigration and opposed highly permissive policies. Republicans took an anti-immigration stance, with Trump building a wall between Mexico and the US in his first term.

Climate change skepticism had been on the rise among Republicans and their supporters, perplexing climate and political scientists. According to Merkley and Stecula (2021: 1453), Republicans became increasingly more skeptical throughout the decades, largely due to the partisan messaging and out-group cues from Democratic elites (Merkley and Stecula 2021: 1439). These cues caused an attitudinal backlash from Republicans, undermining their persuasion efforts. This polarization intensified Republican skepticism compared to earlier decades, deepening the divide on the issue.

Finally, social and racial justice, while important to many voters, was generally rejected by the Republicans and is labeled as part of the “woke ideology”. This characterization led to deepening societal divisions as it framed advances toward achieving equity as too radical and harmful. According to Ashbee and Waddan (2024), Republicans increasingly embraced “conspiracism”, rallying around protection of people, especially children, against perceived threats such as progressive sex education and LGBTQ+ rights. Moreover, due to the multinational corporations’ widespread support for the “woke ideology”, Republicans have generally rescinded their support of these corporations (Ashbee and Waddan 2024: 148).

5.2. Study design

The following subchapter outlines two data types and their sources, presents a visualization of the database, and details the steps of the analysis, including coding and interpretation.

5.2.1. Data types

The data for this study comes from two primary genres – interviews and political speeches – to capture various rhetorical strategies used by the candidates in different communicative events and contexts. For each political candidate, two texts from each genre are selected for analysis, with the interview durations ranging from 20 to 80 minutes and speeches from 30 to 90 minutes.

The main criterion for selection is that the texts must include discussions pertaining to at least three key issues identified earlier in the context subsection. In order to ensure comparability and relevance of the texts, the selected speeches and interviews had to take place in the period between February 2023 and March 2024. The selected sources for this study should represent a diverse range of media outlets, ranging from left-leaning outlets, such as NBC to more conservative platforms, such as CBN. Finally, this selection is to comprise a mix of both large national networks, and small, local platforms in order to

provide a more accurate representation of political discourse across various audiences and perspectives. The table following illustrates the data set of the study:

Politician	Text Type	Title	Length	Date Posted	Source
Donald Trump	Speech	<i>Donald Trump Host First 2024 Presidential Campaign Rally in Waco</i>	1:21:52	March 26, 2023	KPRC 2 Click2Houston
	Speech	<i>President Trump to Speak at Iowa Commit to Caucus Event in Waterloo, Iowa</i>	1:04:29	December 20, 2023	Right Side Broadcasting Network
	Interview	<i>Full Measure: September 24, 2023 - Candidate Trump</i>	23:21	September 25, 2023	Full Measure with Sharyl Attkisson
	Interview	<i>Full Trump Interview: 'I Don't Consider Us to Have Much of a Democracy Right Now'</i>	1:18:19	September 17, 2023	NBC News
Ron DeSantis	Speech	<i>Florida Governor Ron DeSantis Kicks Off His 2024 Presidential Campaign in Iowa</i>	1:19:35	May 21, 2023	Reuters
	Speech	<i>DeSantis Unveils Economic Plan Slamming 'Failed Elites'</i>	41:35	August 1, 2023	CNN-News18
	Interview	<i>Extended Interview: Ron DeSantis on Trump's Legal Troubles, Issues Important to Voters and More</i>	31:12	September 15, 2023	CBS Evening News
	Interview	<i>Ron DeSantis—The FULL Interview on 2024, Donald Trump, COVID, the Border Crisis, Education & More</i>	42:36	May 23, 2023	John Stossel
Nikki Haley	Speech	<i>Nikki Haley's Full Speech Announcing Presidential Run</i>	26:03	February 15, 2023	NBC News
	Speech	<i>Economic Speech on The Freedom Plan</i>	31:45	September 23, 2023	Nikki Haley (channel)
	Interview	<i>Full One-on-One Interview with Presidential Candidate Nikki Haley</i>	21:09	May 5, 2023	WSPA 7News
	Interview	<i>CBN's Exclusive with 2024 Presidential Candidate Nikki Haley FULL Interview</i>	24:54	February 17, 2023	CBN News

Figure 2. Overview of the speeches and interviews of the three politicians.

5.2.2. Steps of analysis

The analysis begins with the transcription of the selected speeches and interviews, which is done using transcription software, such as Otter.ai and Revoldiv to ensure accuracy. Each transcript is reviewed to correct any errors. Because of the length of some of the texts, the analysis focuses on one segment at a time. Only those segments of the interviews and speeches pertaining to the previously discussed key issues are analyzed. Other discourse topics, such as the discussion of the 2020 elections, are excluded as they are outside the scope of the present study. Once transcribed, all the discourse macro- and subtopics pertaining to the key issues are identified in the texts. This involves singling out broader discourse topics and narrower, more focused supporting subtopics that underpin the major themes. They are then displayed in a bubble diagram, with larger green circles representing the macro-topics, smaller blue circles – the subtopics, and interconnected topics capturing interdiscursivity.

Next, the data undergoes both deductive and inductive coding (Armat et al. 2018: 219-220). The deductive approach is applied to the established categories, such as deictic forms (e.g., pronouns indicating “us” versus “them”), negative and positive attributions, and general discursive strategies that are expected to appear based on the previously discussed theoretical foundations. These categories are drawn from the DHA analytical framework to examine how the three politicians use language to frame the various issues, construct in-group and out-group identities, as well as assign responsibility.

Conversely, inductive coding is employed to identify emergent patterns, such as the various kinds of topoi that develop through close readings of the data. This approach allows for more flexibility and receptiveness to the unique features of the candidates’ rhetoric. The data is then color-coded according to the various categories of discursive strategies and linguistic features, with the corresponding colors indicated in the analysis table, sourced from Reisigl & Wodak (2008: 95), in Appendix 1 in subsection 13.1. This visual coding serves as a tool for recognizing patterns within and across the selected texts.

Finally, the data interpretation incorporates the previously examined historical, social, political, and economic context, as the candidates’ rhetorical choices are heavily influenced by the surrounding political environment. The research questions are addressed by analyzing the recurrent discursive strategies and with regard to the three candidates’ socio-political and economic goals, highlighting both the similarities and

differences across their rhetoric. The findings are additionally evaluated against the relevant studies discussed earlier and connected to the various dimensions of context.

5.2.3. Potential limitations of the findings

There are several potential shortcomings and limitations to the results of the present study. First, the range of text genres may limit the comprehensiveness of the findings, as other forms of political communication, such as presidential debates and social media content may reveal more exhaustive insights. Another possible limitation concerns the fact that all selected texts address an external audience, as they may not account for rhetorical strategies employed in party-internal communication. The process of text selection may also introduce selection bias and may reduce the overall representativeness of the data. Lastly, my personal political bias cannot be entirely ruled out. Although the aim of the study is to remain as objective as possible in the analysis and the interpretation, the inherently political nature of the texts makes it challenging to completely avoid bias, and personal beliefs and convictions may still influence the results.

6. Analysis of Donald Trump's speeches and interviews

This chapter presents the analysis findings of two of Trump's speeches and two interviews that cover a range of issues, focusing on the macro- and subtopics, as well as the discursive strategies, and their realizations.

6.1. Analysis of Trump's speech 1

In this speech, titled *Donald Trump Host First 2024 Presidential Campaign Rally in Waco*, Trump addresses the voters of the Republican Party in Waco, Texas. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.2.1. and the analysis table in 13.2.2. The macro- and the subtopics are illustrated in the diagram below.

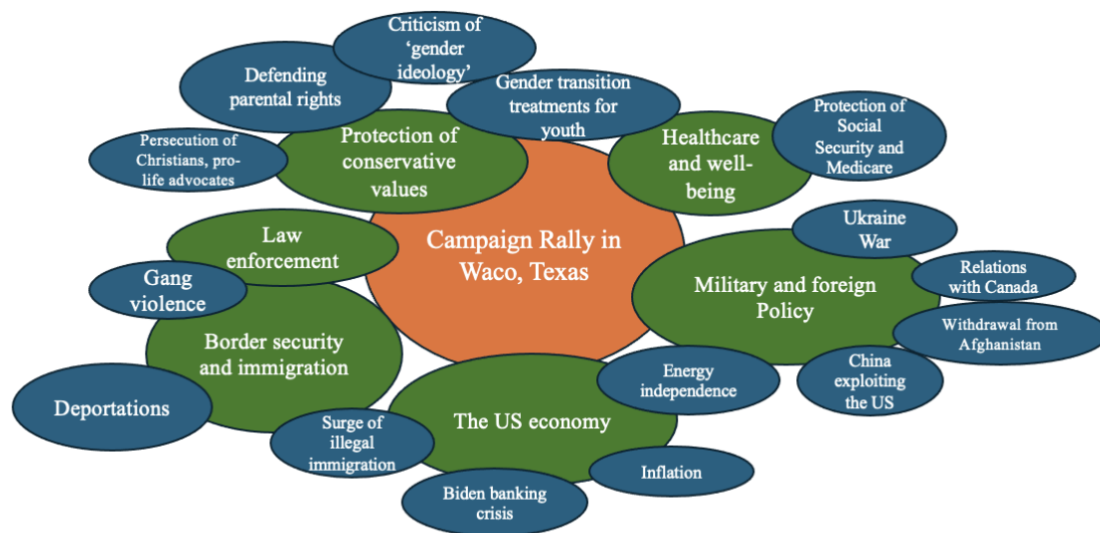


Figure 3. The discourse topics in Trump's campaign rally speech in Waco, Texas.

The diagram showcases that the discourse macro-topics in the campaign rally speech include the US economy, immigration, national security, and conservative values. Interdiscursivity is evident in the overlapping discourse topics. For instance, gang violence links law enforcement and immigration, highlighting the need for more strict border control to combat crime. The aim to be energy independent also connects the US economy with foreign policy, emphasizing the necessity of consolidating US position on the global arena with regard to energy production.

In terms of **nomination**, he utilizes ideological anthroponyms to contrast in-groups and out-groups. For example, "pro-life activists" are placed in opposition to "leftist thugs". Other ideological anthroponyms he refers to in the text include "the Marxists" and "the open border zealots". Furthermore, Trump refers to his opponent DeSantis using labels

like “Sanctimonious” and “DeSanctus”, allowing his followers to be part of the in-group because of the shared criticism and contempt for his opponent. As other internal threats include Nancy Pelosi and the Justice Department, as well as the “cult of gender ideology” and critical race theory. Trump also uses second-person possessive pronouns like “your job” and “your children” to establish an in-group that is being threatened by the out-group referred to as “them”.

With regard to **predication of social actors**, Trump constructs China highly negatively, stating that it “was ripping us off”. Likewise, the EU is depicted as “almost as bad as China”, broadening the scope of US adversaries. He describes himself using positive attributes: “I am a loyal person”. As for his administration, he emphasizes their achievements in his statements: “gave you the largest tax cut” and “achieved more than virtually any administration”. In contrast, his opponents are ascribed negative qualities, such as “stone cold criminal” for Joe Biden. The latter is portrayed by Trump as someone who deliberately “restricted energy”, thus hindering America’s energy dominance. Via the use of metaphor, “they pulled the wool over his eyes”, Trump also constructs him as an incompetent and naïve leader in his dealings with Canada. As for illegal immigrants, he attributes to them negatively connoted verbs, such as “*flooding* out towns” and “pouring in”, which he also uses for drugs, highlighting the overwhelming and harmful nature of both the former and the latter. In contrast to illegal immigrants, Trump portrays ICE and Border Patrol officers as “great American heroes”, which elevates them to the status of saviors. By pointing out that they will aid the US “to clean up our country”, Trump implicitly dehumanizes immigrants, suggesting that they are ‘filth’ in need of purification.

As for **predication of processes and phenomena**, the Paris Climate Accord is depicted by Trump as “unfair” and ridiculous, suggesting climate measures are unnecessary. The Green New Deal, which is another policy aimed at tackling environmental degradation, is similarly portrayed as detrimental, with Trump stating that “it will lead to our destruction”. Likewise, electric cars are deemed too costly and ineffective, depicted as one of the symbols of reliance on China. Conversely, oil is referred to by using a highly positive metaphor as “liquid gold”, highlighting its economic value and positioning it as a vital resource to the country’s prosperity. Energy independence and dominance is highlighted as a solution for inflation. In terms of addressing social issues, Trump characterizes ‘the cult of gender ideology’ as something that has to be defeated. His stance on abortion is relatively vague; nevertheless, he does underscore the importance of ‘having babies’, and casts ‘baby boom’ as something that is welcome under his leadership.

As for **argumentation**, Trump invokes the topos of danger stating that “we’re keeping Bagram because of China, one hour away from where they make their nuclear plants”. Here, he rationalizes US military presence in Afghanistan and taking defensive action against China by portraying China as a national security threat. Through the use of the topos of historical dissimilarity in the statement “if you go back to those earlier days [...] we had a country the likes of which nobody has ever done before, and China wasn’t a threat”, Trump legitimizes his contempt for the Biden administration through contrast between the US in the past, when the country was more powerful, and the present. Furthermore, Trump employs the topos of law and order to praise legal immigration, emphasizing the importance of adhering to the legal process: “They came in, if they came in legally, we liked it”. Invoking the topos of historical authority with his statements “And Eisenhower did it, so we don’t have to feel so bad”, Trump relies on the actions of a respected leader of the past to rationalize the necessity to carry out the domestic deportation operation. As for climate measures, Trump justifies the potential exit from the climate agreement through stressing how the US is unfairly financially targeted.

As for **perspectivation/framing**, Trump uses deictics to position himself as the only defense against the collective enemy of the people, which is “them”. Furthermore, he expresses his alignment with values deemed universally positive, such as “good education” for our children” and “real strong military” as well as with his supporters through the unifying first-person pronoun “we”. In a similar vein, he aligns himself with the interests and the needs of the elderly via first-person pronouns (“our great citizens”), stressing the need to preserve Social Security and Medicare. He consequently frames himself as a protector of this in-group from the threat of the out-group, which is “the radical left and the Republican establishment”. At the same time, he expresses distance from the media, that are supposedly against these ideals, framing them as the irrational out-group. As for the Russia-Ukraine war, by stating that “I got along well with Putin. I used to talk to Putin about it”, Trump frames himself as a mediator or a bridge between the US and Russia – one of the adversaries of the US. By means of this he highlights his abilities to effectively establish rapport with world leaders.

With regard, to **intensification**, Trump tends to resort to absolutes. For instance, he highlights his achievements by stating that he challenged China “like no other president has ever stood up before”. His use of emotionally charged language is also prevalent, exemplified by verbs such as “flooding”, “setting fire”, “releasing violent criminals” to heighten the sense of imminent danger, and terms like “mutilation” and “disfigurement” to portray gender-affirming care in a highly negative light. To convey his dedication to his agenda, he utilizes

hyperbole “a quantum leap”. Within the discourse on oil production, Trump employs hyperbole to liken the oil potential of the US to that of Saudi Arabia. As for **mitigation**, Trump poses rhetorical questions, such as “What other country would do such a thing?” in the context of stopping drilling for oil. By means of this, Trump avoids directly blaming the nation and instead urges the audience to draw their own conclusion regarding this issue.

In conclusion, Trump’s employs ideological anthroponyms to construct in- and out-groups, using labels like “pro-life activists” versus “leftist thugs”, as well as derogatory attributions for DeSantis and Biden. He negatively predicates adversaries, such as China and illegal immigrants, and opposing liberal policies, while portraying himself and his administration as successful and highlighting their achievements, such as tax cuts. Moreover, Trump rationalizes his stance on immigration through the topos of law and order and justifies his policies through historical comparisons. He positions himself as a defender of Americans against “the radical left” and as a mediator between the US and Russia. Moreover, he uses emotionally charged language to heighten the sense of fear and urgency, and employs rhetorical questions to mitigate blame.

6.2. Analysis of Trump’s speech 2

The following speech, entitled *President Trump to Speak at Iowa Commit to Caucus Event in Waterloo, Iowa* and posted by the Right Side Broadcasting Network YouTube channel, was delivered by Trump at the Iowa Caucus addressing his Iowan supporters. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.2.3. and the analysis table in 13.2.4. The macro and the sub-topics are illustrated in the diagram below.



Figure 4. The discourse topics in Trump’s caucus event in Waterloo, Iowa.

The macro-topics in the diagram are similar to those in the previous speech, including the US economy, immigration, foreign policy, and protection of conservative values. Interdiscursivity can also be observed here. For examples, the subtopic of negative effects of electric vehicles is interconnected with the US economy in terms of job loss and foreign policy in relation to China.

With regard to the **nomination** strategy, Trump puts his administration and “Americans of faith” in opposition to Joe Biden’s and the Democratic Party, the ‘department of injustice’, which is a play on words, as well as Ron ‘DeSanctimonious’ DeSantis. He refers to ‘Bidenomics’ which opposes the ‘American Dream’. He nominates “communists”, “Marxists”, and “fascists” as out-group social actors, positioning them as adversaries to Christians and conservative parents, who are perceived by Trump as victims. As for illegal immigrants, he refers to them exclusively using the third-person pronoun. In contrast to them Trump nominates the Border Patrol and the legal migrants. As for external social actors, Trump nominates the politician Viktor Orbán, and the countries Russia, Ukraine.

As for **predication** of social actors, Trump utilizes explicit negative attributions to construct President Biden as a leader that failed in his duties, referring to him as “crooked”, “corrupt”, and as a “low IQ individual”. The illegal immigrants are described as “hordes”, “ruining our country”, “destroying the blood of our country” and their movement “an invasion”. Governor DeSantis is depicted negatively, with claims that he is intentionally targeting the Iowa farmers (“wants to literally bankrupt Iowa farmers”) and the American seniors (“was against social security”), which are the vulnerable groups, as Trump argues. Conversely, Trump engages in positive self-representation, with his own administration leading to “you”, “your family, and “our country” being “better off”. Similarly, he employs positive attributions to construct the identity of Orbán, including “the leader”, “the boss”, “tough guy” – all of the qualities Trump deems commendable. Legal immigrants are also constructed as hard-working and patriotic, with verbs like “studied”, “worked”, “had to talk about the flag”. As for the police officers, they are cast in a highly positive via means of adjectives, such as “the greatest” and “incredible”.

The **processes and phenomena** Trump nominates are primarily constructed using explicit predication. For instance, as a direct result of Biden’s policies, the inflation is predicated as “sky-high” and a “catastrophe”, while the southern border is described as virtually nonexistent. Similarly, Biden’s electric vehicle mandate is constructed as the cause of job losses in the US and them being outsourced to Mexico, China, and Canada,

with Trump categorically stating that it is “going to kill all jobs”. Electric cars are likewise presented as ineffective, with negative evaluations like “don’t go far”, “cost too much”, “made in China”. What children are taught at schools, repeatedly referred to as “filth”, suggests that sex education and similar topics are morally objectionable.

In terms of **argumentation**, Trump invokes the topos of burden, claiming that “families all across America are struggling under the brutal weight of crooked Joe’s failures”. By means of this, Trump emphasizes the burden that Biden’s economic policies are imposing on ordinary Americans, rationalizing the urgent need to remove him from the office. Moreover, Trump resorts to the use of the topos of numbers, thus providing concrete evidence to support his claim of Biden’s economic failures, while celebrating his own accomplishments with his statement that “under my leadership, inflation was non-existent, and we had gasoline at \$1.87 a gallon”. In addition, Trump frequently invokes the topos of danger in the discourse around the border wall. For instance, he depicts illegal immigration as an existential threat, stating, “We have a border catastrophe like nobody’s ever seen.” Here, the warrant is that the immigration, requires urgent action to be taken, justifying the need for mass deportation and border wall. Additionally, Trump employs the topos of reality, asserting that no country can sustain this”, referring to the influx of illegal immigrants. In doing so, he highlights that the debate extends beyond the ideological dimension and presents it as an objective reality that is not sustainable for any nation, thereby rationalizing the necessity for his hardline policies. Resorting to the topos of burden, Trump highlights the strain that illegal immigration has on the education system, especially because of the language barrier: “and they’re sitting in classrooms and there’s no room for our students in the classrooms”.

As for **perspectivation/framing**, Trump frames the current economic success as a byproduct of his past leadership, referring to it metaphorically as “the fumes of what we left them”. This strengthens his argument that Biden was incapable of accomplishing anything himself. Furthermore, in his statement, “I’ll catch them, and we’ll send them home”, Trump frames immigrants as intruders, with the use of the first-person pronoun “we” to reinforce the idea of a unified in-group standing against the perceived threat of “them”. When discussing parental rights, “They want people to take your children and do things with your children that are not even speakable”, Trump employs “They” with reference to the Marxists, the fascists – the out-group, with them being presented as a direct threat to “your children”. With regard to the Democrats, Trump establishes a sense of shared threat between his supporters, whom he addresses using the second-person pronoun “you” and himself, casting them as the target of the Democrats. He discursively constructs himself as a barrier from the opposition, claiming

that “they're not after me. They're after you. I just happen to be standing in their way, and I always will stand in their way”. To legitimize his leadership and capabilities, Trump employs the perspective of Orbán, whom he deems competent, by means of indirect speech. The Hungarian prime minister praises Trump by stating that during the Trump presidency, the global leaders “feared the United States” and that “they respected him [Trump]”.

Regarding **intensification**, Trump employs hyperbole in his statements “the whole world is up in flames” and “our country has been in hell” to amplify the negative consequences of Biden’s actions and the subsequent suffering of Americans under his leadership. To further shift blame onto external actors, such as Mexico and Honduras, Trump uses hyperbole in claiming that “they’re emptying out their prisons into our country”. Furthermore, at the end of the speech Trump utilizes emotionally charged verbs like “demolish”, “expel”, and “drive out” to further emphasize his struggle against the enemies (i.e., Biden, the communists, and the globalists) and to mobilize the audience to his cause. In terms of **mitigation**, Trump notably uses humor to allay the harsh criticism of Biden by saying that, “other than that, I think quite a bit of him”, which is an evidently ironic statement. In addition, he employs hedging, “they [illegal immigrants] could be healthy”, to soften the categorical nature of his harsh denouncement of illegal immigration.

To summarize, Trump establishes a sharp divide between the in-group, which includes his administration, conservative Christians, and legal immigrations – and the out-group, comprising Democrats, Biden, and ideological enemies, such as “fascists”. Moreover, he depicts processes like inflation as a “catastrophe” and condemns electric vehicles as job-killing. Via means of the topoi of burden and danger, he justifies mass deportation, framing illegal immigration as an existential crisis. To legitimize his leadership, he often mentions the perspectives of other world leaders, who praise him, such as Viktor Orbán. Trump employs hyperbole to amplify the sense of urgency and humor to mitigate his harsh criticism of Biden.

6.3. Analysis of Trump's interview 1

The following interview, captioned *Full Measure: September 24, 2023 - Candidate Trump*, was conducted by Sharyl Attkisson in Mar-a-Lago and was posted on the Full Measure YouTube Channel. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.3.1 and the analysis table in 13.3.2. Below is the diagram of the discourse topics.

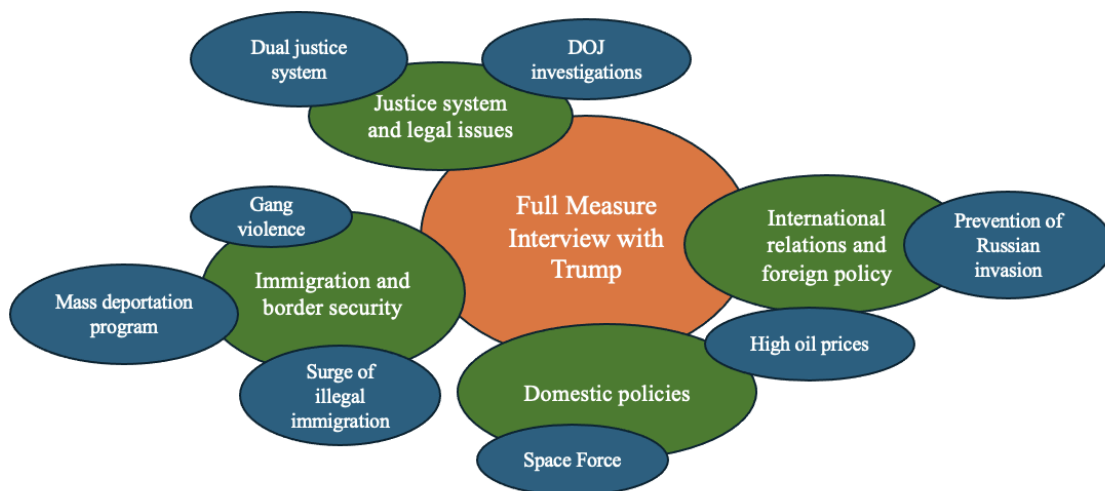


Figure 5. The discourse topics in Trump's Full Measure interview.

In this brief interview, Trump highlights the macro-topics of domestic policies, international relations, immigration, and the justice system, as illustrated in the diagram above. The overlapping subtopic is high oil prices, which impacts both the US economy and foreign policy, particularly as it relates to Russia's exploitation of the war in Ukraine to increase oil prices.

As for **nomination** strategy, Trump refers to both national and international political figures, including Biden, Putin, and Elon Musk. Here, he clearly delineates the in-group (himself and Musk) and the out-group (Biden, Putin, the Department of Justice). As for processes and phenomena, Trump references important issues, such as the Ukraine war, which is metaphorically referred to as "the apple of his [Putin's] eye". Trump also highlights his mass deportation program and his own indictment.

With regard to **predication**, Trump constructs President Biden as a destructive force, claiming that Biden is "destroying our country". To further reinforce his criticism of the Biden administration as incapable and dangerous, he argues that Biden allowed the Ukraine war to begin and Putin to then exploit the situation. Trump emphatically characterizes the Russian President as someone who "is making a fortune" off of the war. Trump also labels the members of his own administration such as Bill Barr as "stiff" and "afraid of being impeached". He describes the Russia and Ukraine scandals as "hoaxes" and portrays his political opponents

highly negatively. For instance, he refers to Nancy Pelosi as “horrible” and uses the pejorative adjective “shifty” to describe Adam Schiff, who led his first impeachment trial. As for illegal immigrants, Trump depicts them as “rough people”. Conversely, he constructs his own actions as exemplary, especially in reference to the phone call with Zelensky, which he describes as “absolutely perfect”, reinforcing his positive self-representation as a capable and blameless leader.

In terms of **argumentation**, Trump employs the topos of urgency to establish a sense of the need for immediate action. For instance, with his statement that “if you take a look at what’s happening with oil, it’s going up rapidly, again, very rapidly”, Trump justifies the pressing need to address the issues of the war and rising oil prices. Furthermore, he invokes the danger, claiming that “these are people that are as rough as you get. These are real serious criminals” with regard to the illegal immigrants. Through this, he highlights the severity of the threat posed by illegal immigration, thus rationalizing the stringent measures he plans to take to counter it.

As for **perspectivation/framing**, Trump frames himself as the sole deterrent of the war in Ukraine, claiming that President Putin “wouldn’t have done it because of me”. In the statement “one of the reasons I was successful is they knew it was going to be very, very hard to come in” he uses the third-person pronoun “they” to refer to the immigrants, further framing them as an out-group. Trump also frames the awareness that the immigrants had of his capabilities as a deterring factor, suggesting that his policies effectively dissuaded immigration. Furthermore, by stating that “there were people that told me we’re dealing with fascists”, he ensures not only distance from the “fascists”, but also positioning himself as an outsider who is informed by others and a target of a corrupt system.

In terms of **intensification**, Trump utilizes repetition to emphasize his points. For example, when discussing the Ukraine war, he repeatedly asserts that “it should have never started”. By means of this, he amplifies his criticism of Biden’s leadership and simultaneously reinforcing his self-representation of a strong leader who could have prevented the war. Moreover, he reiterates that “I did nothing wrong”, underscoring his innocence and depicting himself as a victim of political prosecution.

In conclusion, Trump contrasts himself with political figures such as Biden and Putin, placing himself and Elon Musk in the in-group. He predicates Biden negatively, with claims of his responsibility for the war in Ukraine. Trump also utilizes pejoratives to label his political opponents, such as Pelosi and Schiff. He frames himself as a competent leader and employs

the topos of urgency and danger to rationalize his stance on illegal immigration and oil prices. Via intensification through repetition, Trump highlights his innocence and blame of others.

6.4. Analysis of Trump's interview 2

The following interview, titled *Full Trump Interview: 'I Don't Consider Us to Have Much of a Democracy Right Now'*, was lead by Kristen Welker was posted on the NBC News YouTube channel. The target audience for this interview is undecided voters and politically interested individuals. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.3.3. and the analysis table in 13.3.4. The diagram below captures the range of discourse topics discussed in interview.



Figure 6. The discourse topics in Trump's interview with Meet the Press on NBC News.

In the diagram above, there are five macro-topics identified: Roe v. Wade reversal, foreign policy and national security, US economy, January 6th US Capitol attack, and border security and immigration. Within the macro-topic of the US economy, the subtopic of high interest rates is linked to that of discrimination against conservatives, emphasizing their perceived victimization within the economic structures. Moreover, the loss of autoworkers' jobs is attributed to China, establishing a connection between the two subtopics.

In this interview, Trump **nominates** himself and his administration using the first-person singular and plural pronouns. To refer to the US he uses the possessive pronoun “our” and the noun “country”. He utilizes the pronoun “they” to refer to individuals and groups that he deems not favorable, such as the illegal immigrants and his opposition. Following this, he nominates two opposing groups: people that participated in or were associated with the January 6 insurrection and the Antifa. He notes that the former group of individuals encompasses a wide

range of professions, from accountants to firemen, whereas the Antifa is a collective group. His constant emphasis on the phenomenon of retribution constructs him as self-professed hero fighting for justice.

With regard to **predication**, the former president constructs illegal immigrants in an extremely negative manner, claiming that “They come from mental institutions, insane asylums” and that they are “terrorists at a level.” Moreover, he employs positive predication to present law-abiding citizens as unfairly targeted, while negatively predicating Antifa as destructive. He states that “They burned down Portland. They burned down Minneapolis. They took over Seattle.” The contrast serves to reenforce the narrative that the legal system is biased towards the individuals associated with January 6, thus evoking sympathy from the listener. Within the discourse topic of the economic standoff with China, electric cars are negatively framed as expensive and foreign made, posing a threat to US jobs. The United Auto Workers union (UAW) leadership is criticized for failing to protect workers, framing it as ineffective. China is constructed as a threat, accused of taking American jobs and undermining the economic stability of the US. As for the banks, Trump constructs them negatively, claiming that they “discriminate against conservatives” and that “it’s a disgrace”. Within the discourse topic of energy, the politician characterizes oil as a resource extremely positively, stating that it “liquid gold”, “the finest”, “the best”, reiterating that it is the solution to reducing the high inflation. With regard to abortion, Democrats are negatively constructed – according to him they are morally objectionable, to the extent that they support infanticide.

With regard to **argumentation**, Trump utilizes the topos of numbers to underscore the scale of the issue of illegal immigrants. “I think the number is going to be 15 million people by the time you end this. By the end of this year, I think the real number is going to be 15 million people.” Moreover, he uses the topos of justice, stating that “these people on January 6th, they went, some of them never even went into the building and they’re being given sentences of, you know, many years”. Here, the former president suggests that the punishment does not fit the crime. The topos of numbers is utilized once again when discussing the national debt. Here, it is used by Trump to justify drastic measures like government shutdowns, depicting them as necessary to save the country. Moreover, the politician rationalizes his critique of the banking system by arguing that banks are failing to lend due to high interest rates, which harms the economy. Trump argues that achieving energy independence will be a solution to economic issues, using the depletion of the strategic oil reserves as evidence of poor current policy. Within the discourse topic of abortion, Trump utilizes the slippery slope fallacy to appeal to emotion, creating extreme scenarios to argue that abortion policies must be restricted.

As for **perspectivation/framing**, Trump frames himself as the protector of justice, saying that “we have to protect all people”. With his statement that “These are Biden indictments. This isn’t God coming down and very fairly said, oh, you spoke badly about an election”, he positions Biden as the antagonist – someone who is using political power to unfairly prosecute people. This framing aims to portray Trump as the advocate for the ordinary citizen against political persecution. With his statements “I had the best economy in history” as well as “I’m on the side of making our country great”, Trump frames himself as the savior of the American economy and emphasizes his past successes. He positions himself as a protector of national interests and someone who aligns with the American workers, thus contrasting his leadership with the current one. Trump expresses his direct involvement in debt reduction, stressing the energy dominance as the main contributor to strengthening the economy by utilizing the first-person pronoun in the statement “we are going to reduce our debt because we’re also going to become energy dominant”. The former president distances himself from the Biden administration and frames them as incapable and unwilling of addressing the important issue of reducing energy prices by stating that “we have to get the energy down, which they will never do”.

The use of **intensification** is notable, as Trump utilizes exaggeration and dramatic language to highlight the fact that the Antifa goes unpunished for the seemingly heinous acts of destroying whole cities of Seattle and Minneapolis. When discussing illegal immigrants, the president employs repetition, reiterating that they are “flooding” the cities and the countryside. Moreover, in the relation to foreign policies, Trump engages in positive self-representation via repetition, reiterating that “I got along well” with world leaders, such as Putin and Kim Jong-Un to underscore and amplify his diplomatic competencies. As for **mitigation**, he has a tendency to utilize the phrase “it depends”. For instance, within the discourse topic of inflation, Trump softens his stance on whether he would direct the Federal Reserve Chair to lower interest rates, leaving space for flexibility based on inflation conditions. His use of vague language, such as “I guess” and “something like that” helps him avoid committing to a decision and gives him room to maneuver.

In this interview, to align himself with the American people, Trump employs first-person pronouns like “we” and “out”. Negative predication is prevalent, with illegal immigrants constructed as “terrorists” and the Antifa blamed for “burning down cities”. China is portrayed as a social actor that actively undermines the economic stability of the US. Moreover, Trump invokes the topos of numbers to emphasize the scale of illegal immigration and national debt, rationalizing his hardline policies. He frames himself as the defender of justice and national

interests, contrasting his leadership with the Biden administration, which is depicted as incompetent. There is marked use of intensification, which is realized through repetition to underscore threats as well as contribute to positive self-representation.

7. Analysis of Ron DeSantis' speeches and interviews

The chapter provides insight into the CDA findings of DeSantis' speeches and interviews, focusing on the discourse topics covered, the discursive strategies, and their linguistic realizations.

7.1. Analysis of DeSantis' speech 1

The first speech, titled *Florida Governor Ron DeSantis Kicks Off His 2024 Presidential Campaign in Iowa* and posted by Reuters on its YouTube channel, was delivered by Governor DeSantis at the launch of his presidential campaign in Des Moines, Iowa. The audience for this speech is his potential voters – the Republican electorate and conservative-leaning individuals in general. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.4.1 and the analysis table in 13.4.2. The diagram below illustrates the discourse topics discussed in the speech.

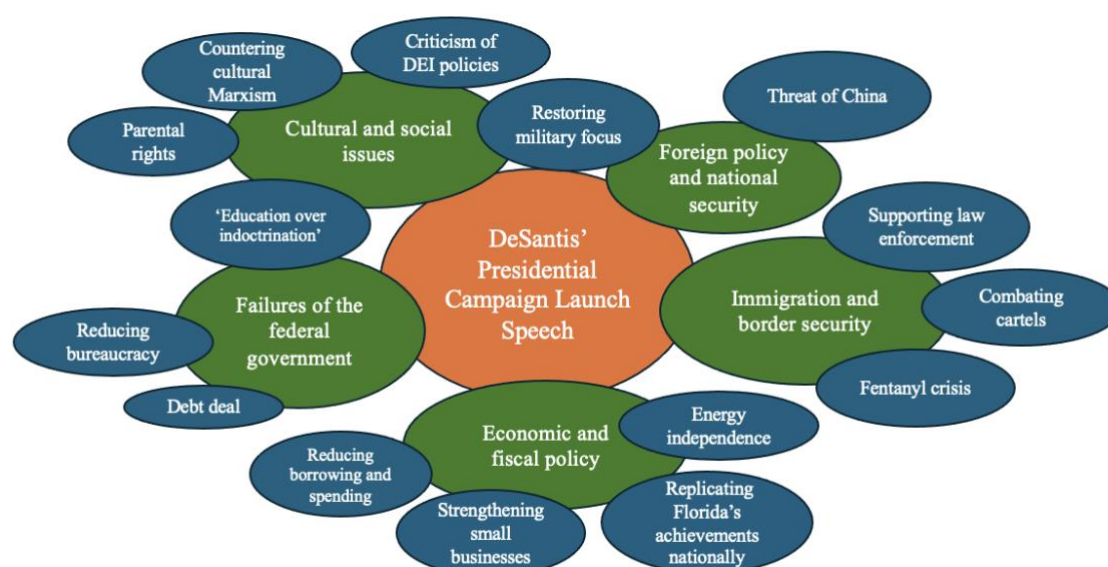


Figure 7. The discourse topics in DeSantis' presidential campaign launch speech.

The diagram demonstrates the discourse topics covered in the speech, organized into five macro-topics, which are economic and fiscal policy, immigration and border security, foreign policy, cultural and social issues, and failures of the federal government. There are a few notable overlaps between discourse topics. For instance, the subtopic of restoring military focus

spans both the domain of national security and the domain of social and cultural issues, as DeSantis' maintains that the focus on gender ideology diverts attention from military's priorities. This perceived shift establishes an interconnectedness between the two domains, with concerns about 'woke ideology' influences in the military indicating wider cultural debates on social justice. Additionally, the issue of indoctrination is a social issue which DeSantis deems a failure of the federal government.

In terms of **nomination** discursive strategy, there is conspicuous use of negatively connoted nominations to represent the social actors, linking to negative phenomena of crime as well as economic and cultural decline. Ron De Santis uses labels like the ambiguous nonpartisan label "the elites in Washington, DC", as well as pars pro toto with "some nameless, faceless bureaucrat working in Washington DC". The latter is employed to represent the bureaucratic government structure as a whole and makes it appear impersonable and detached. Immigrants are referred to as "individuals on the terrorist watch list", "illegal aliens", and "criminal aliens". As for the objects, phenomena, and events, DeSantis nominates the "woke ideology", "bureaucracy", and "cultural Marxism". On the other hand, he presents himself as a "Navy veteran" and a "blue-collar kid" to help establish his identity as relatable to ordinary Americans. The 9/11 tragedy is central to his narrative as he refers to it as an event that resulted in him serving in the military, allowing him to resonate emotionally with the audience.

As for **predication**, Ron DeSantis employs negative attributions to construct the Biden administration and the elites as social actors that are intentionally undermining the US economy as well as national security. For example, the governor employs a metaphor when describing the elites in Washington, DC, stating that they "continue to plunge this nation into the abyss". This underscores the severity of the situation, thus painting an intense mental image. Another illustrative example is the negative discursive construction of Joe Biden, with the governor contending that the former president is "doing all it can to make it harder for the average family to make ends meet". Here, DeSantis claims that Biden is deliberately worsening the life of the average American. Immigration is cast in a negative light, with the governor stating that "foreigners" and "illegal aliens" are "pouring into our country illegally". This suggests that immigrants are perceived as a threat to the sovereign US. As for the objects/phenomena/events, the governor negatively constructs "leftism", as it, akin to a disease, "infected institutions across our nation". Social Marxism is also ascribed using negative qualities. Here, these social movements are made responsible for the cultural deterioration of the American society and the divisions.

To contrast the perceived ineffectiveness of Biden, the politician casts his own state in a positive light, highlighting that Florida has “budget surpluses”, is “the 13th largest economy in the world if we were a separate country” and “second lowest per capita state debt”. Moreover, the governor discursively creates opposition between the negatively constructed prosecutors who “refuse to enforce the law” and law enforcement officers who ensure the safety of citizens. As for himself, he positively constructs his experience, emphasizing “I had to earn what I got”; “serving in an honorable institution”. He constructs the military as deviating from its core mission, noting that the “morale is declining and recruiting is suffering”.

With regard to **argumentation**, there are several topoi that the governor employs in his speech. First, the use of the topos of threat is notable. DeSantis states that “The Mexican drug cartels have more control over what goes on at the border than our own United States government” and “Biden is trying to force Americans into electric vehicles”, emphasizing that the drug cartels and overreliance on electric vehicles imported from China as an existential threat to the country’s stability. By means of this topos, DeSantis justifies the need for decisive defensive action. Moreover, the governor uses the topos of responsibility, arguing that the Biden administration’s economic policies are harming the ordinary middle-class American citizens, stressing that Biden failed as a leader whose responsibility was to ensure the financial well-being of the citizens. In addition, DeSantis enacts the topos of authority, evident in his portrayal of bureaucracy as one “our Founding Fathers would find unrecognizable”. Here, he invokes the Finding Fathers as authoritative figures that help lend credence to his claim, implying that nowadays bureaucracy has deviated from the path these figures originally envisioned.

In terms of **perspectivation/framing**, in his statement “these elites are not enacting an agenda to represent us. They are imposing their agenda on us” Ron DeSantis expresses his closeness and solidarity with the Americans via first person pronoun “us” and frames himself as a member of the group affected by the harmful actions of the elites, with the word “agenda” taking on a negative connotation. The future of the country is presented in a dichotomous manner, with the governor noting that “it is a choice, and we must choose a new direction for our country”. He frames the possible future of the country as a choice between decline under Biden and the “elites” or the “revival of the American greatness” by embracing the conservative values. Moreover, DeSantis frames his perspective as rooted in reality and facts, as opposed to “every major institution” who is conversely disengaged from the needs and interests of the nation. The politician reiterates it later in the text, stating that “we chose facts over fear”. He pointedly distances himself from the ideologically driven “woke Olympics” that

are detrimental to the American society in his view. He frames the cultural issue of ‘woke ideology’ in education as a matter of parents’ rights, portraying the left as antagonists, intentionally undermining the well-being of children. Moreover, he argues that even the “revered military” has become entangled with the negatively connoted issues like gender ideology and global warming. DeSantis thus positions himself as deeply emotionally affected by the state of the military, which he frames as having deviated from its core mission and having shifted away from traditional values.

As for **intensification/mitigation**, DeSantis’ use of intensification, especially surrounding the issue of immigration, is prevalent. For instance, his hyperbolic statement that “our southern border has collapsed” aids in intensifying the severity and urgency of the illegal immigration issue. When discussing energy production, the governor argues that Biden “deliberately” tries to sabotage the economy by kneecapping energy production. This emotive language implies that the Biden administration is intentionally working against national interests. In a similar vein, within the topic of ‘woke’ ideologies, DeSantis amplifies the sentiment of desolation employing phrases like “American cities have been hollowed out” as well as loaded language, suggesting that the ideologies are virtually enabling crime. Further reinforcing this mental image, DeSantis uses ostensibly ominous labels like “dystopia” and how “livelihoods were destroyed” and positions himself as an individual who was able to prevent that. When describing himself, he stresses that he “was given nothing”, which implies that he came from a humble, disadvantaged background. This hyperbole aids the DeSantis in connecting with the ordinary hard-working Americans by presenting himself as an individual who achieved everything solely through his personal effort.

To summarize, DeSantis employs negatively connoted labels to portray the Washington DC elites as detached from reality, and illegal immigrants and leftist ideologies as threats to the US. In contrast, he engages in positive self-representation, highlighting his blue-collar background and military service. Using negative attributions, DeSantis depicts Biden as intentionally harming the American families and portrays leftist movements as a disease infecting the country. To justify his stances on immigration and economic policies, he invokes the topoi of threat and responsibility. As for intensification, DeSantis tends to resort to emotive language and hyperbole to amplify the sentiment of desolation and to position himself as the only solution.

7.2. Analysis of DeSantis speech 2

The following speech, entitled *DeSantis Unveils Economic Plan Slamming ‘Failed Elites’* | *Desantis Vs Trump*, was delivered by Governor DeSantis in New Hampshire to the Republican and swing voters, and was posted on the CNN-News18 YouTube channel. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.4.3. and the analysis table in 13.4.4. The following diagram illustrates the discourse topics covered in the speech.

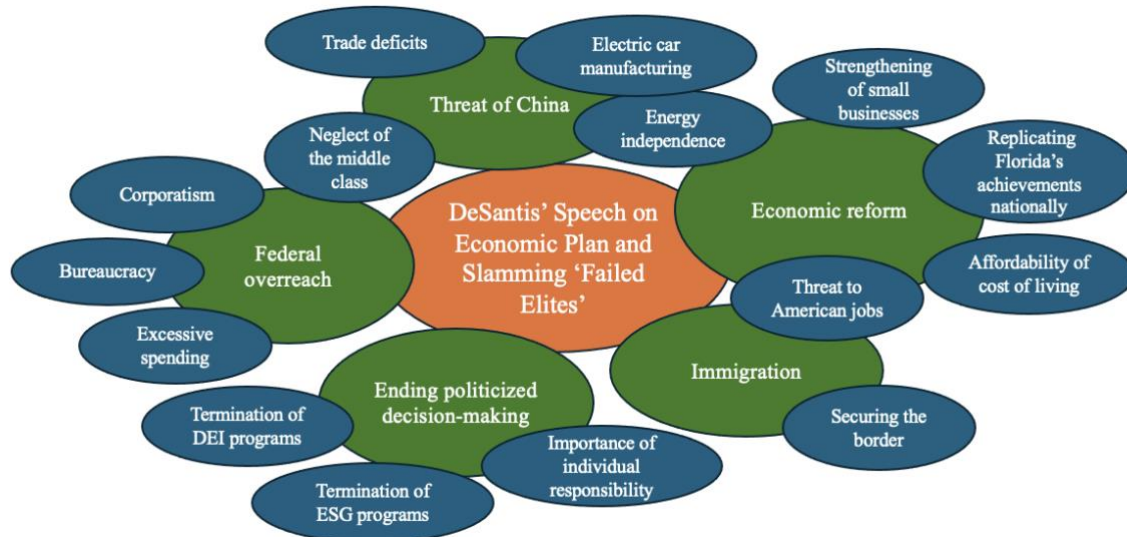


Figure 8. The discourse topics in DeSantis’ speech on his economic plan.

The diagram demonstrates the discourse topics in the speech, delineating five macro-topics: proposed economic reforms, the threat of China, immigration, federal overreach and politicized decision-making. There is clear interdiscursivity that can be observed; for instance, the subtopic of undermining the middle class is connected both to the federal government’s monetary policies, which intentionally undermines the middle-income individuals, and to the threat of China, which DeSantis argues negatively impacts the middle class.

With regard to **nomination**, the governor employs the first-person pronoun “we” to refer to both him and the Florida state government and also to the US as a whole. DeSantis establishes a clear opposition between the political elite and corporations, referred to through metonymy “Wall Street”, “ruling class”, “largest corporations”, “Washington politicians” and the in-group of social actors that include “American working families”, “middle class”, “small businesses”. Similarly, he draws a distinction between “free market economy” and “corporatism”. A phenomenon that DeSantis frequently refers to is the idea of ‘the American Dream’, which is a shared value that aids in widening to gap between the in- and out-group, placing those who are hindering the realization of this dream in the out-group.

As for **predication**, DeSantis notably constructs the ruling party as “failed” and serving the interests of corporations and the banking sector, expressed through verbs like “kowtow”. Moreover, the Congress and ‘the Fed’ are depicted as social actors that are “spending us into oblivion”. Multinational corporations are likewise characterized negatively, namely as social actors that “have caused our economic malaise” and are “selling our assets”. The governor directly links the corporations to China, which he characterizes using explicit negative attributes, such as “powerful” and “authoritarian”. In contrast, Florida is portrayed highly positively, as a state that “leads the way” and runs “big budget surpluses”. Similarly, he characterizes himself as the defender of the interests of ordinary Americans, who “will stand up for” taxpayers and the next generation. The current economic situation is constructed in negative attributions, such as “gone through the roof”, and “major challenge”. Finally, DeSantis depicts the diversity, equity, and division (DEI) using negative attributes such as “discriminatory programs” “ideological agenda”.

As for **argumentation**, DeSantis first invokes the topos of burden, claiming that “We cannot have policy that kowtows to the largest corporations and Wall Street at the expense of small businesses and average Americans” and “the average person is the one that ends up holding the bag for that”. By means of this, he highlights the burdens which are placed unjustly on ordinary Americans as a result of current economic policies. Employing the topos of danger in his claim that mass immigration threatens “American jobs and wages, the rule of law, and our very social fabric”, DeSantis rationalizes the need to urgently curtail it, depicting it as an existential threat. Additionally, the governor employs the topos of history by referencing the “Wall Street bailout in 2008 during the great financial crisis”. Here he highlights how the past policies have had a long-term effect on Americans, thereby legitimizing the need for change in the present. Another instance of the topos of history in the text is DeSantis drawing on the historical precedent of Ronald Reagan who “leaned in against Congress overspending”. In doing this, the governor suggests that returning to his monetary policies will benefit the current economic situation.

With regard to **perspectivation/framing**, in his statement that “we have to defeat those individuals and institutions” DeSantis uses deictics (“we”) to align himself with the ordinary Americans that should counter the ambiguous ‘individuals and institutions’. This reinforces the narrative that he and his potential voters should take defensive action against the internal adversaries in order for economic prosperity to be achieved. He frames himself and his supporters as defenders of freedom, opposing the ‘elites’ in his statement that “we beat the elites. We showed the way forward to restore freedom and opportunity for people all

throughout this country”. DeSantis also tends to express his agenda and goals through the lens of what he argues ordinary Americans want for their country, with his statement “I think people want to see a restoration of sanity to the society” exemplifying this. Moreover, DeSantis frames the COVID lockdown not as public health measure but as a deliberate tool of the Biden administration to shift the wealth from ordinary Americans to large corporations. When discussing environmental social governance (ESG), DeSantis invokes the topos of reality, asserting that ESG is “a cover for people in large companies to depart from their obligations to their shareholders and to use that financial power to advance an ideological or political agenda”. He draws on a constructed version of factual reality to argue that ESG is in fact ideologically driven, questioning its legitimacy and effectiveness in ultimately combating climate change.

DeSantis utilizes **intensification** conspicuously, namely emotionally charged language. This is evidenced by terms like “selling out the country”, as well as “kowtow” to underscore a sense of betrayal and the extent to which the government serves the corporate interests over interests of its people. Furthermore, DeSantis employs humor to amplify the absurdity of excessive spending in the interrogative statement: “let’s just borrow another 10, 30 trillion, 50, why not?”. The governor additionally realizes intensification through anaphora, reiterating that “we will declare our economic independence”. Through this, he reinforces his resolution to distance himself and the in-group (the ordinary Americans) from all the members of the out-group (i.e., China, ‘failed elites’). Another example to illustrate this is his statement that “I am going to fight...”. **Mitigation** is not employed much in the speech; however, DeSantis does ostensibly soften his criticism of electric cars and their link to China by highlighting the right to choose for Americans.

In conclusion, DeSantis the first-person pronoun “we” to align himself with the in-group of ordinary Americans and small business, placing them in the opposition to the political elite and the corporations. He constructs corporations as harmful to the economy and China as an “authoritarian” external threat, while positioning himself as a defender of Americans against the elites and framing COVID lockdowns and ESG as ideologically driven. In terms of argumentation, DeSantis invokes the topos of burden to highlight the unjust targeting of ordinary Americans, and the topos of danger to justify the curtailing of illegal immigration. Intensification is prevalent in this text, with DeSantis frequently employing anaphora, humor, and emotionally charged language. In doing so, he emphasizes his pledge to restore economic independence of the US.

7.3. Analysis of DeSantis' interview 1

The following interview, titled *Ron DeSantis on Trump's Legal Troubles, Issues Important to Voters and More* and conducted by Norah O'Donnell, was posted on the CBS News YouTube channel. The target audience consists of undecided voters and potential supporters of DeSantis. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.5.1. and the analysis table in 13.5.2. The diagram below details the discourse topics discussed in the interview.



Figure 9. The discourse topics in DeSantis' extended interview on CBS News.

The diagram demonstrates the topics covered in the interview, categorizing them into six macro-topics: economic policies, social and racial inequalities, national security and foreign relations, climate change and environmental policy, and immigration and border security. Interdiscursivity is evident here; for example, the discourse on electric vehicle manufacturing is interconnected with both the domains of environmental policy and the threat of China, with DeSantis maintaining that electric cars as a measure to combat climate change pave the way for the US to be overly reliant of China.

In terms of **nomination**, DeSantis frequently utilizes deictics, using personal pronouns such as “I” and “we” to refer to both his campaign team and the nation as a whole, thus creating a sense of collective identity. He also utilizes this pronoun to refer to the Florida state government. He contrasts this with the pronoun “they,” which he uses to refer to other Republicans. He also names key political figures directly, such as “Donald Trump” and “Joe Biden,” while using collective terms like “voters”, “people”, “a lot of these women” to refer to the American public and the social groups within it. Use of toponyms is also notable, with the governor nominating countries like North Korean, Russia, and Iran as an adversary group to

the US. Additionally, DeSantis nominates actions and processes, discussing topics like elections, domestic energy production, inflation, and his tax plan.

With regard to **predication**, DeSantis positively frames himself and his campaign team, with statements like “We’re getting all the buzz,” and “We’re going to get the job done”. The state government is also constructed positively in the context of climate change, with DeSantis pointing out that his government is taking all the necessary measures to combat environmental degradation. Conversely, he casts Biden in a negative light by accusing him of “focusing on other issues,” and making the US dependent on China within the discourse topic of energy production. Similarly, DeSantis criticizes Donald Trump by highlighting the legal challenges Trump faces, stating that he has been “dominated by these legal cases” and pointing out that Trump “added almost 8 trillion to the debt.” The governor also criticizes members of his own party, suggesting that they “don’t put their money where their mouth is” and claiming that “they did the opposite”. DeSantis also negatively constructs the media, employing implicatures, such as “narratives that are put out” and “termed by the media” to suggest that they fabricate false narratives. As for women who seek abortion as social actors, the politician constructs them as vulnerable, ostensibly taking away their agency and construct them as being victim to circumstance, thus even dehumanizing them.

As for **argumentation**, the governor utilizes the topos of reality, stating that “if you look at national security, we will be stronger in terms of national security if we are energy dominant”. According to DeSantis, there is an evident link between energy production and security to justify energy dominance as a policy goal. He frames energy independence as a tangible and achievable strategy to defend the US against external threats. Moreover, DeSantis resorts to the use of the straw man fallacy. He characterizes the position of climate change advocates as ideological rather than based on empirical data, which arguably misrepresents their position. Furthermore, DeSantis evokes the topos of danger by enumerating all the dangers that are entering across the border with the immigrants, such as “human trade”, and “sex trafficking” to amplify the threat and thus rationalize stricter border control.

In the realm of **perspectivation/framing**, the marked use of the first-person plural “we” serves to create a sense of unity, as it refers both to his campaign team and, at times, to the country as a whole. This reinforces a sense of shared purpose, especially when he says, “everybody there has said we’ve done better there than anyone”, suggesting widespread support for his campaign. At the same time, DeSantis uses the third-person plural “they” to distance himself from fellow Republicans, as seen in his criticism of their actions, asserting that “they don’t put their money where their mouth is” and “they did the opposite”. DeSantis

also frames key issues in simplistic terms, stating “it’s very simple” regarding the election and depicting the US as capable of leading global energy production with pointing out that the country needs to “just simply embrace that”. DeSantis frames war prevention predominantly through the lens of military power, which is arguably a simplistic dichotomy of strength versus weakness. He argues that projecting strength – especially military strength – will deter adversaries like North Korea, while weakness or indecisiveness will conversely invite conflict. When addressing racial inequality and hostility claims towards African American individuals, DeSantis reframes the issue as a matter of merit and individualism to avoid directly addressing racial injustice. Within the discourse topic of climate change, the governor utilizes personal anecdote of his friends’ children being “worried about even having families now because of climate change” to frame the issue not as a scientific debate but as a topic that needlessly impacts the individuals’ emotional states, thus downplaying the urgency of the issues.

Finally, DeSantis employs **mitigation** strategies throughout the interview. For instance, when he states, “You have to be willing to veto bills”, he emphasizes the necessity of a decisive leader who can take firm actions, such as vetoing legislation. However, he mitigates this statement by not committing to always vetoing bills but instead asserting the importance of being “willing to” do so, leaving room for flexibility. This approach allows DeSantis to preserve a strong stance without appearing rigid or inflexible in his decision-making. Furthermore, within the discourse of abortion rights, DeSantis states that he supports pro-life policies but at the same time he has “to chart the course” as a way to mitigate the hardline nature of his pro-life stance.

To summarize, using deictics, such as “I” and “we” to refer the Florida government and the nation, DeSantis creates a sense of collective identity and “they” to distance himself from the elites, other Republicans and foreign adversaries. He constructs his leadership highly positively, while casting Trump, Biden, and the media in a negative light. To rationalize energy dominance DeSantis employs the topos of reality, and the straw man fallacy to frame climate change advocates as ideologically driven. Moreover, he frames concerns about social justice as issues of merit, and present complex issues in a simplistic manner. DeSantis resorts to mitigation to avoid directly committing to vetoing bills and to soften his stance on abortion.

7.4. Analysis of DeSantis’ interview 2

The second interview, titled *Ron DeSantis—The FULL Interview on 2024, Donald Trump, COVID, the Border Crisis, Education & More*, was conducted by journalist John Stossel and posted on his YouTube channel. This interview targets right-leaning undecided voters. The

transcription can be found in subsection 13.5.3. and the analysis table in 13.5.4. The following diagram captures the discourse topics in the interview.



Figure 10. The discourse topics in DeSantis' interview with John Stossel.

The diagram above illustrates the discourse topics in the interview, categorized into four macro-topics, including social issues and education, immigration, economy and tax policies, as well as foreign policy and defense. Each macro-topic encompasses various subtopics.

As for **nomination**, De Santis frequently utilizes first-person singular and plural pronouns. He refers to asylum seekers as “they” and “these people”. Furthermore, he uses ideological anthroponyms, like “liberal elites”. To present ideological and political opposition, DeSantis names the Florida government and the federal government. The politician also nominates a number of processes, such as diversity lottery versus merit-based immigration, border wall, traditional education, matters of transgender and sexuality, the media, the bureaucracy.

With regard to **predication**, the governor constructs himself and his administration with statements like “we have got a strong base, but we’re winning decisively amongst independents”, highlighting them having decisive victories, especially with the subset of Hispanics. DeSantis also notably promotes himself and his administration through his simplified approach to education, emphasizing that his administration is “focusing on the basics”. The governor arguably dehumanizes asylum seekers by referring to them using the collective “what’s coming” and as “abusing asylum”. However, he does rid them of agency to an extent, when he states that “they’re basically being promised an ability to stay in America, you know, work, and they’ll make more money here, even if they’re working illegally, than they will there”. Moreover, DeSantis casts a negative light on Biden, stating that the former president is responsible for the immigrants brought to Martha’s Vineyard not being treated well.

Within the discourse topic of economy, Florida is characterized in a positive light – the state is “instructive” and has “the second lowest debt per capita” while the federal government “spends like drunken sailors”. By positively constructing Florida and doing the opposite for Congress and federal government, Ron DeSantis creates a clear us-vs-them dynamic. Federal government is ostensibly vilified by the governor, rendering everything else to be so by association (e.g., Department of Education).

The governor juxtaposes two immigration systems; By praising the merit-based immigration and condemning the diversity lottery, he emphasizes his dichotomous view of immigration. As for sex education, especially as it pertains to transgender identity and sexual orientation, it is characterized in a negative light. Governor DeSantis contrasts these subjects with traditional education. The politician constructs the media negatively, stating that it tries “to kind of caricature things”, insinuating that the media hyperbolizes and distorts issues.

With regard to **argumentation**, Ron DeSantis employs the topos of normality by highlighting that “normally, if you’re seeking asylum, that first safe country you go to, that’s when you apply”. This topos is employed to appeal to the listeners’ sense of an established legal order that should be followed, with any deviation from it deemed undesirable. Moreover, the use of the topos of national interest is notable, framing the discourse in such a way that it is of utmost importance to prioritize what is best for the country. By stating that “In terms of serving our national interest”, the governor suggests that immigration and asylum policies should prioritize national security and overall domestic benefit over everything else. A slippery slope fallacy is evident when the politician suggests that time spent on topics like gender identity detracts from core academic subjects, stating, “every minute you’re gearing towards that... you’re not doing the math”. This argument implies that any inclusion of gender- and sexuality-related topics directly impacts academic performance, though no evidence is given to support this claim. Finally, there is a straw man fallacy present in the text: “now you see what they’re doing to try to get involved in youth sports with the transgender athletes”, misrepresenting the opposing argument by exaggerating the position of transgender inclusion in sports. Instead of having a nuanced discussion, DeSantis simplifies the point of view to focus on interference, making it easier to disprove.

As for **perspectivation/framing**, Ron DeSantis employs indirect speech, which is exemplified by “people are like, You know what? Florida is, doing it right”. Thus, the politician praises his own actions from the perspective of others, adding credibility to the praise. DeSantis expresses involvement by implying a close connection to the rest of Americans, aligning himself with the concept of freedom. This framing emphasizes his shared responsibility with

fellow citizens and positions himself as deeply engaged in national issues. He frames liberal elites as unwilling to confront the real-world consequences of their policies, distancing himself from those advocating for open borders. Furthermore, DeSantis frames himself as a responsible, disciplined leader who stands in opposition to the ostensibly dysfunctional federal government. He frames Florida's policies as sensible and effective, contrasting them with the federal government's unsustainable practices. By highlighting that "what the taxpayers are funding, you just have to make a choice about what you want to do", the governor gives agency to taxpayers to make key decisions regarding the education, directly addressing the audience with the use of second-person pronouns to further reinforce this. He expresses his close relations with the state governments and positions himself as the champion for their rights by utilizing first-person pronouns in his statement: "do other things that really impinge on our rights as states".

Ron DeSantis' use of **intensification** is notable. Within the discourse topic of sex education, the governor uses intensification conspicuously, in the form of "let's focus on" repeatedly urging to focus on "core subjects" and "the curriculum", emphasize the importance of the core subjects, drawing attention away from sex education. Furthermore, Ron DeSantis emphasizes that the support for his approach goes beyond one political group and instead resonated with a wider range of parents by reiterating that "there were parents across the board...". In the discourse topic of the economy, Ron DeSantis has a tendency to utilize adjectives and intensifier adverbs, such as "huge increases", "massive line item", "totally gratuitous", thus highlighting the incompetencies and the ineffectiveness of the federal government with regard to the budget. Within the discourse on immigration, the governor **mitigates** his statements by using hesitations and verbs of thinking "probably", "kind of", "I do think" to softens the harshness when talking about reducing immigration. In addition to that, he mitigates the negative construction of illegal immigrants by using the constructions "There have been folks...There have been".

In the interview, DeSantis distances himself from asylum seekers through the use of third person "they" and dehumanizing language, thus ridding them of agency. He constructs the Florida government as successful, contrasting it with the dysfunctional federal government. Through the topoi of national interest and normality DeSantis rationalizes his hard stance on immigration. He justifies his educational policies that underscore exclusion of gender- and sexuality-related topics through slippery slope and straw man fallacies. Via perspectivation, DeSantis aligns himself with voters' values, framing himself as a reasonable and pragmatic

leader. He emphasizes the ineffectiveness of the federal government with regard to the budget by employing intensifiers and the importance of core subjects via repetition.

8. Analysis of Nikki Haley's speeches and interviews

The following section will present the CDA findings of Nikki Haley's speeches and interviews with regard to the discourse topics, the five discursive strategies, and their realizations.

8.1. Analysis of Haley's speech 1

In the following speech, titled *Nikki Haley's Full Speech Announcing Presidential Run*, addressed to her supporters, Haley announces her candidacy for Republican nomination during a campaign event in Charleston, South Carolina. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.6.1. and the analysis table in 13.6.2. The following diagram illustrates the macro- and the subtopics covered in the speech.

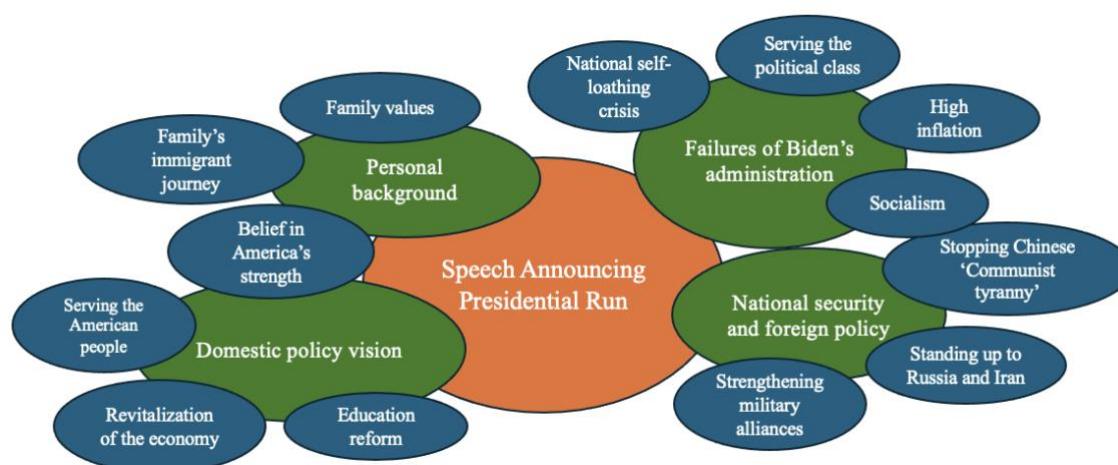


Figure 11. The discourse topics in Haley's speech announcing presidential run.

The diagram presents the key discourse topics in Haley's speech, highlighting the interconnectedness of her personal background and vision for the country through her parents' belief in America's strength. Other macro-topics include the failures of the Biden administration as well as national security and foreign policy. These macro-topics are linked by the subtopic of socialism, where Haley connects Biden's perceived push towards socialism with the broader discourse of Communist China.

In terms of **nomination** strategy, she refers to herself as "the proud daughter of Indian immigrants" and highlights that she is "the first minority female governor in history". She utilizes deictics, particularly the pronoun "we", oscillating between the inclusive "we" as a nation, and the exclusive "we" referring to her state administration as well as referring to her

alignment with the Republican party. Furthermore, Haley discursively establishes contrast and opposition between Americans, namely, “families”, “mothers”, and “small businesses” and Biden, along with the “big government”, the vague collective noun “our leaders” and “politicians”. Haley identifies “China” and “China’s dictators” as main adversaries of the US. As for processes and phenomena, she identifies socialism as a significant issue facing the US. Haley refers to self-loathing using a metaphor, likening it to a virus worse than any pandemic. Here she taps into the discourse of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, drawing on the fear and urgency associated with it. Haley is also resolute in placing the vision for America in opposition to the current state of the country.

As for **predication**, Haley utilizes evaluative attributes when comparing the US across two time periods. The US then was a country that was “gaining strength and growing in confidence”, whereas the US now is “on a path of doubt, division and self-destruction”, which helps establish the context for the hardships the US is experiencing as well as underscore the overall decline. Moreover, Haley claims that socialism is “weakening America from within”, essentially ascribing to it the domestic issues facing the US. Using implicit negative attribution, she argues that socialism equates to excessive government spending, stating that the American leaders “have us spiraling toward socialism with a new trillion-dollar spending bill”. Haley depicts “China’s dictators” as the major external threat accusing them of wanting to “cover the world in Communist tyranny”. As for President Biden, she constructs him as an incompetent leader, claiming that he is not leading the country at all. In contrast to him, she constructs her own identity positively, using a simile “tough as nails” to portray herself as resilient and capable. This aligns with the vision that Haley has for America, which she depicts under her leadership using adjectives like “strong” and “proud”.

With regard to **argumentation**, the topos of burden serves as a means to rationalize the need for removal of President Biden from power as his economic policies are portrayed as having a negative impact on vulnerable individuals and groups, with the repetition of phrases such as “too many mothers”, and “too many small businesses” underscoring these burdens. Furthermore, Haley invokes the topos of history when she states that “it ignores the values that have sustained America since our founding”. By means of this, she stresses that the current state of the nation should be rejected as it is harmful and deviates from the long-standing traditions and values of the nations. Moreover, Haley employs the topos of reality in her statement, “We won’t win the fight for the 21st century if we keep trusting politicians from the 20th century” to rationalize the idea that in the modern era, in order to succeed, the nation must turn to new leaders for fresh perspectives.

In terms of **perspectivation/framing**, the first illustrative example is in her statement about her parents, “every day they reminded my brothers and my sister that even on our worst day, we are blessed to live in America. They were right then and they're right now”. Here, Haley presents the immigrant experience from the perspective of her parents, situating it within a larger context of how the American immigrant experience should contribute to the vision for the US as the land of opportunity. Her use of deictics like “here”, “today”, “this”, and “we” helps emphasize her active involvement and responsibility in shaping the country’s future. Moreover, she frames her identity as a daughter of immigrants to appear more credible and relatable to the ordinary Americans. Haley’s indirect speech usage “Joe and Kamala even say America’s racist” shifts the responsibility of negative claims onto the leaders of the US and helps distance her from this perspective. In her statement, “America is not past our prime. It’s just that our politicians are past theirs”, Haley aligns herself with Americans by using the pronoun “our”, further distancing herself away from the ‘politicians’ and reinforcing the “us vs. them” dynamic. Furthermore, she frames the future of the US in a binary way: either “strong and proud” under her leadership, or “weak and woke” under the current leadership. Likewise, she defines the outside world in dichotomous terms, presenting it as allies in the face of Ukraine and Israel versus enemies in the face of Russia and Iran. When discussing her accomplishments, she frames herself as an underdog by employing indirect speech “people said, Nikki who?”, implying others being initially critical of her. She then highlights how she overcame their doubts despite their criticism and puts emphasis on unity with her statement “together we won”.

There are few instances of **mitigation** in the speech, but Haley does acknowledge the fact that “America isn’t perfect”, positioning herself as an objective politician, and recognizing the existence of flaws. Haley utilizes **intensification** by invoking absolutes in her characterization of Biden, stating that “no one embodies that failure more”, highlighting that he not only systematically fails as a leader but personifies the notion of failure itself. When discussing the perceived internal threat, Haley utilizes hyperbole when she characterizes self-loathing as a “system of a lack of pride in our country”, thus exaggerating its pervasiveness and highlighting its entrenched nature. The use of phrases like “let me be clear” heightens the importance of the forthcoming statement, drawing the audience’s attention to it.

To summarize, Haley constructs herself positively as a minority and a child of immigrants and establishes an opposition between ordinary Americans and the “big government”. Via deixis like “we”, she seeks to create a sense of unity, while framing socialism as an internal threat and China as the principal external adversary. Haley invokes the topoi of

burden, history, and reality to rationalize the rejection of current leadership. She highlights her relatability and credibility through personal experience and depicts America's future in a dichotomous manner. Absolutes and hyperbole are employed to intensify the systematic failure of Biden and the urgency of the self-loathing crisis.

8.2. Analysis of Haley's speech 2

The following speech, entitled *Economic Speech on The Freedom Plan*, was delivered by Haley at Saint Anselm College in New Hampshire. In this address, she targets undecided voters and Republican constituents. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.6.3. and the analysis table in 13.6.4. The discourse topics discussed in her speech can be observed in the diagram below.

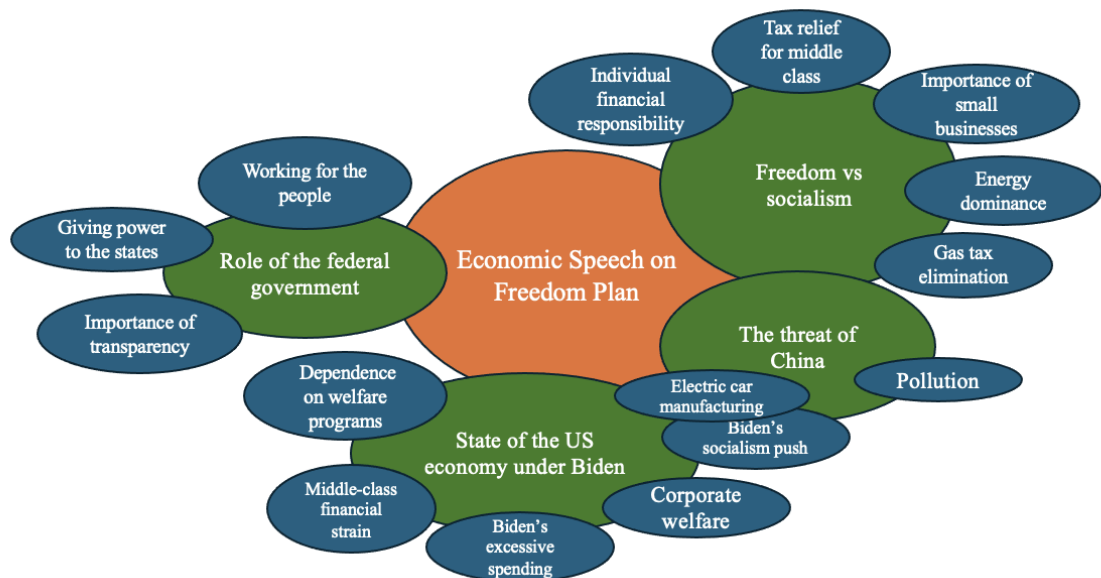


Figure 12. The discourse topics in Haley's economic speech on Freedom Plan.

The diagram presents the various macro-topics and subtopics in Haley's speech focusing on the US economy. The four macro-topics include the role of the federal government, the state of the economy under the Biden administration, freedom versus socialism, and the threat of China. The latter two are interconnected, as Haley creates a clear opposition between freedom – a core principle in her vision for America – and socialism, which she attributes to Biden's policies. She further conflates his perceived push for socialism with his complicity with China, framing the two as undermining both America's collective identity and economic progress.

There are several cases of intertextuality in the text, namely the reference to the Inflation Reduction Act and the American Rescue Plan. Haley characterizes them as "grossly misnamed"

and “so-called”, drawing on the existing discourse around the economic issues to enhance her criticism of the Biden administration’s policies in their contribution to economic decline.

With regard to the **nomination** discursive strategy, Haley constructs an opposition by identifying China and the Communist Party as the main adversaries of the US, especially in the realm the economy. She also nominates Joe Biden as complicit in the decline and contrasts him with “the American people”, using first-person pronouns to align herself with them. Moreover, Haley employs metonymy by referring to the federal government as “Washington” and a collective “central planners”. Furthermore, she extends a similar treatment to her fellow Republicans and the Congress. In opposition, she nominates the economic anthroponyms such as “small businesses” and “the taxpayers” as positive social actors. As for the phenomena and processes, she nominates the concept of freedom, Bidenomics, bailouts, and socialism.

As for **predication**, in the speech China is constructed negatively, as “existential threat” and as a powerful and stealthy enemy. According to Haley, its government actively undermining the US economy as it has “taken our manufacturing jobs” and “taken our trade secret”. Joe Biden is also predicated negatively, with Haley accusing him of being an accomplice to President Xi as well as an active contributor to the country’s economic decline. He is criticized as someone who “has done more damage than anyone thought possible” and is “milking taxpayers”. The concept of freedom is constructed highly positively, with Haley using attributes such as “our secret weapon” and “made America the world’s leader”. Freedom is perceived by Haley as a counterweight to China, employing the metaphor “leaving Chinese communism on the ash heap of history” in order to evoke a sense of national pride, where freedom trumps everything else. Likewise, ordinary Americans are placed in opposition to China because they will “out-compete and ultimately defeat communist China”, as Haley posits. In doing so, she inevitably shifts the responsibility for countering this major adversary onto the unified American people. Conversely, socialism is constructed as a hinderance and is described as a force that “kills the middle class”. Small businesses are constructed positively, metaphorically presented as “the heartbeat” of the US economy. Haley implicitly suggests that President Biden’s goal is to hinder this vital source of economy’s health.

There are a number of examples of **argumentation** strategies employed in the text. First Haley invokes the topos of threat, stating that China is “sending spy balloons” and “building a spy base just off our shores in Cuba”. Here, the presidential candidate rationalizes the taking a hard and more protective stance in relation to China as it is perceived as a real threat. Later in the text, she employs the same topos in her statement, “Our biggest enemy is getting our tax dollars, all while being the world’s worst polluter”. Haley draws on interdiscursivity, whereby

she weaponizes the argument of economic exploitation and environmental degradation to take a stance against America's enemy. Furthermore, Haley justifies the urgent need to embrace the principle of freedom by utilizing the topos of history in her statement that "it [freedom] broke the Soviet Union's back without firing a single shot". By referencing this historical moment, she stresses the pivotal role that freedom played in the downfall of the Soviet Union. Additionally, the topos of numbers is prevalent in the text. For instance, Haley states that there are "more than 42 million Americans on food stamps and nearly 100 million people on Medicaid", rationalizing her critique of Biden's arguably ineffective economic policies that force ordinary Americans resort to welfare. The use of the topos of justice is also notable as Haley calls for "an honest and fair tax code" that would benefit the middle-class as the current tax system ostensibly subsidizes Americans in wealthier states. Here, she adds a moral dimension to an already existing political one.

In terms of **perspectivation/framing**, with her statement that Biden is "swapping freedom for socialism", Haley presents a dichotomous perspective on the future of the US. According to her, the country faces the choice of either taking the road to freedom or the 'condemned' path to socialism, which Biden is actively following, as Haley argues. Likewise, she frames government's role in an individual's professional success in a binary manner, attributing negative qualities to the reliance on government while casting self-sufficiency in a positive light. Biden is thus framed as a hindrance to not only to the prosperity of the whole country but also to individual Americans' professional success. When discussing 'Bidenomics', Haley states that it is "a political subsidy economy" and "is taking from the middle class". This helps frames Biden's economic policies as ones that deliberately target ordinary Americans and the government as an entity that unfairly distributes wealth, reinforcing and perpetuating the ideology of the free market. Additionally, Haley claims that "the US is led by a president and a party who believe Washington should have more power than the American people", positioning the government as power-hungry and virtually an adversary to the US citizens.

The framing of the role of the federal government in national prosperity is a prevalent topic in the text. In order to condemn its actions, Haley uses indirect speech to indirectly frame it as an entity that encourages Americans to relinquish personal responsibility. When stating that "they're telling single moms... just be dependent on welfare" and "They're telling college students, don't work hard", Haley implies that the federal government urges those social groups to be lazy and wholly dependent on the government. This framing supports Haley's view of the importance of individual responsibility and freedom. Later in the text, she positions the freedom of personal decision-making as a key contributing factor to economic growth, shifting

the responsibility from the government to individuals. This frames individual freedom as not only a right, but also as vital to economic prosperity.

With regard to **intensification**, there is conspicuous use of emotionally charged language in the text, such as “kills”, “spending binge”, “pushing the truly vulnerable”, “blatant”, “make poverty permanent”. By means of this, Haley heightens a sense of injustice, framing Biden as someone intentionally working against the interests of ordinary Americans. She maintains that the former president engages in coercive methods, arguing that he is “pushing us to buy expensive electric cars”. Moreover, Haley uses hyperbole when claiming that for Congress, taxpayers’ money is “pretend money”, amplifying Haley’s point of their ineffectiveness and wastefulness. As for mitigation, Haley employs a question instead of an assertion: “Do you really think Washington knows how to pick the right winners of the economy?”. This is done to downplay her own stance and to prompt the audience to reach this conclusion independently.

In conclusion, Haley establishes clear opposition between the American people and the perceived adversaries of the US, such as the federal government and China. She creates alignment with ordinary Americans using first-person pronouns and characterizes small business employing positive attributions, constructing them as vital to the economy. Socialism, in contrast, is framed as detrimental to the middle class. Haley uses the topoi of threat, history, and numbers to criticize Biden’s policies, which are depicted as harmful to national prosperity. Moreover, she frames America’s future as a choice between freedom and socialism and emphasizes individual responsibility. Using emotionally charged language and hyperbole Haley amplifies the sense of injustice, while questions are used to urge reflection on government ineffectiveness.

8.3. Analysis of Haley's interview 1

The first interview, called *Full One-on-One Interview with Presidential Candidate Nikki Haley*, was posted on the WSPA 7News YouTube channel. As a local South Carolina-based news network, its audience primarily consists of local viewers and conservative-leaning individuals. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.7.1. and the analysis table in 13.7.2. The discourse topics are shown in the figure below.



Figure 13. The discourse topics in Haley's interview on the WSPA 7News Channel.

The figure above outlines the four main macro-topics discussed in the interview, ranging from economic policies to border crisis to Haley's abortion stance. Interdiscursivity can be observed in the subtopic of rising fentanyl deaths, linking the macro-topic of illegal immigration and cartels trafficking drugs to that of national security threats, namely with Haley's claim that China is responsible for sending the drug.

With regard to **nomination**, Haley nominates the abortion issue, placing the federal government and the state government that are social actors on the opposite sides of it, with a consensus in the middle. As for external threats, Haley refers to China as the "number one security threat" and Russia as another key adversary. Within the macro-topic of economy, Haley nominates two opposing groups: the first group consisting of Republicans, Biden, and the IRS agents versus the group that she terms "middle America". With regard to immigration, there are collectives: illegal immigrants, cartels, and sheriffs and Border Patrol to counter this issue. As for processes and phenomena, Haley identifies spending and borrowing as principal root causes of economic problems in the country. She also explicitly mentions earmarks as a symbol of excessive spending of the Republican Party.

In terms of **predication**, Haley constructs ‘unelected justice’ as someone who should not have the authority to make key decisions on abortion. She portrays herself as open-minded and fair, despite her stance, by noting that “I don’t judge people for being pro-choice”. Haley depicts China using the idiom “eating our lunch”, suggesting that the country may be taking advantage of the US, exploiting its weakness. In contrast, the US is characterized as a passive social actor, effectively enabling China, with Haley claiming that “we’re handing it to them on a silver platter”. As for economic issue, both Republicans and Biden are blamed for excessive ‘spending’ and ‘borrowing’, which is “out of control” and is explicitly constructed as one of the main reasons for the inflation and economic problems in general. Fentanyl is portrayed as the main cause of death, with Haley portraying China, the main adversary, as being indirectly complacent in causing these deaths.

Haley employs various **argumentation** strategies in her rhetoric. For instance, the topos of human rights is illustrated by her question “how do we save as many babies as possible and support as many moms as possible?”. In doing so, she ensures her alignment with humanitarian values and the importance of protection of vulnerable lives to further rationalize her pro-life stance. Moreover, Haley engages in a straw man fallacy in her statement that “we shouldn’t have abortions up until the time of birth”, thus misrepresenting the pro-choice position. Additionally, Haley invokes the topos of danger, claiming that “If Ukraine loses, then we’re looking at Russia going into Poland and the Baltics and we’re looking at World War III”. Through this, she justifies taking action against Russia, which is a specific danger that has to be countered. Moreover, in her statement, “Congress needs to stop the spending, stop the borrowing because we know 15% of our budget is interest for \$31 trillion in debt”, Haley invokes the topos of numbers to rationalize curtailing of government spending and borrowing. To further underscore the direness of the economic situation, Haley draws on the topos of burden, noting that “one in six Americans can’t pay their utility bill”, justifying cuts in spending and prioritizing the difficulties facing ordinary Americans.

As for **perspectivation/framing**, Haley highlights the need for consensus on the discourse topic of abortion, stating, “let’s focus what we can agree on”. In doing so, she positions her view as one stemming from shared values and aims to be perceived as someone who prioritizes finding common ground. Furthermore, via her use of deictics (e.g., “our taxpayer money”) Haley positions herself as a victim of the of President Biden’s economic policies, aligning herself with the regular Americans.

Regarding **intensification**, Haley’s use of repetition is evident. She utilizes anaphora, “we all agree” to assert the necessity of collective action and consensus. Later in the text, she

reiterates that “we need” within the discourse of military and national security to amplify the importance of military strength. Haley employs hyperbole when she notes that fentanyl “would kill every single American last year”. Regarding **mitigation**, she employs the phrase “I wish that were different” to soften her criticism of states with pro-choice policies. Additionally, Haley mitigates by distributing responsibility for excessive spending and borrowing among several social groups.

In this interview, Haley constructs opposition on several key issues. For instance, places the federal government in opposition to the state governments with regard to the abortion issue. As for the economy, she establishes the in-group, consisting of “middle America”, and the out-groups, which comprises Biden, Republicans, and the IRS. She portrays herself as fair, uses idioms to portray China as exploitative, and attributes the responsibility for economic decline to both the Democratic and the Republican parties. Haley invokes the topoi of human rights, danger, burden, and numbers to further justify her stances on abortion, the Ukraine war and government spending. Finally, she employs repetition to underscore the importance of consensus.

8.4. Analysis of Haley's interview 2

The second interview under consideration, *CBN's Exclusive with 2024 Presidential Candidate Nikki Haley FULL Interview*, was posted on the CBN YouTube channel at the outset of Haley's presidential campaign in Charleston, South Carolina. The target audience of this interview comprises conservative Christian viewers. The transcription can be found in subsection 13.7.3. and the analysis table in 13.7.4. The diagram below illustrates the macro- and subtopics discussed in the interview.



Figure 14. The discourse topics in Haley's interview on CBN.

The diagram delineates the various discourse macro-topics covered in the interview, which are economic struggles of the US, cultural issues, the threat of globalism and elitism, the role of the federal government, abortion stance, as well as foreign policy and military. Interdiscursivity here is substantiated by the debate over federal versus state role, which permeates several discourse topics, including abortion. Similarly, the subtopic of Americans' needs is emphasized in the discourses of elitism and the economy.

In this interview, Haley provides an illustrative example of intertextuality by explicitly referencing Florida's Don't Say Gay Bill, which restricts the discussions of LGBTQ+ issues in the classroom for kindergarten to third grade (Phillips 2022). She builds on this law, arguing that it is still not sufficiently strict, emphasizing the need for more stringent measures to ensure parental agency and to maintain traditional values.

In terms of **nomination** discursive strategy, Nikki Haley nominates the officials in Washington, DC as "Washington insiders" and "people in DC" in opposition to herself and the

American people as well as “our country”. In a similar vein, she constructs a dichotomy between “unelected justices” and “elected officials”. As for objects and phenomena, she refers to national self-loathing as “the biggest crisis”. Within the discourse topic of woke ideology, Haley refers to school officials as “school bureaucrats”. Furthermore, she refers to the World Economic Forum (WEF) participants collectively as a “bunch of elitists”.

As for **predication**, Haley constructs the elites in Washington as detached from reality and social actors that engage in brain washing, as they are trying “to tell the American people what to think and what to feel”. Similarly, the media is predicated negatively as according to Haley, it perpetuates a false narrative of America being “bad”, “racist”, and “rotten to the core”. Moreover, Haley casts the woke ideology in a negative light, arguing that it “is trying to change the core of what the family is” and portraying it as detrimental to traditional family values. Conversely, parents are predicated positively as they are knowledgeable and “do know how to raise their children”. Here, the politician contrasts “school bureaucrats” that are severely lacking in parenting expertise and the parents who should rightfully have full agency and parental authority over their children. Negative qualities are similarly attributed to Joe Biden, who has “a spending addiction” and has “sent us into inflation”, as Haley argues. He is seemingly intentionally working against the interests of the American people. Within the discourse of the war in Ukraine, the former president is constructed as “slow to the take”. The portrayal of Russia as an unrelenting aggressor is reinforced by warnings that Ukraine’s defeat could lead to another world war. Ukraine is predicated positively, as a country that has “a passion to fight for their own freedom”. As for NATO, Haley blames the organization for not doing nearly enough to help the cause. The WEF and the UN are similarly predicated negatively, with Haley portraying them as having “no idea what real Americans are going through”, “completely out of touch” as well as “a complete farce”, thus discrediting them.

In terms of **argumentation**, the politician notably uses the topos of burdening: by enumerating the problems that are plaguing the American people, such as unaffordable groceries, crime, and open borders, she emphasizes the need for the government to work in order to diminish them. Moreover, Haley employs the topos of humanitarianism, emphasizing the necessity “to save as many babies as possible”. She insinuates that infanticide by pro-choice supporters does not conform to humanitarian values, thus their actions should be condemned. The next topos Haley invokes is the topos of threat and danger in her statement, “we’ve got to stop these spy balloons and all of these threats that are coming in from around the world”, justifying the need for stronger national defense policies. Moreover, when discussing the Ukraine war, Haley utilizes the topos of justice, emphasizing that “this is a war about freedom”.

Here, she rationalizes the moral obligation of Americans to support Ukraine through the principle that is a core part of their collective identity – freedom. Additionally, Haley uses the topos of numbers in her statement to highlight the sheer excessiveness of federal government spending, implying that they need to be stopped.

With regard to **perspectivation/framing**, Haley distances herself from the elites in Washington DC by stating that she has “never been to Washington”. On the other hand, she expresses solidarity with the ordinary Americans. When discussing the abortion issue, Haley invokes personal experience to frame her pro-life position as relatable to many as well as emotionally driven. By highlighting that this is not a partisan issue for her, she expresses her distance from the GOP. Haley frames the abortion debate by portraying her side as compassionate and considerate, while subtly casting the opponents (i.e., Democrats) as being on the opposite side of the spectrum, implying that they may even be endorsing infanticide. Furthermore, she frames the sex education debate as “spiritual warfare” – not merely a policy debate but a broader struggle between the “school bureaucrats” and parents for control over parental authority, with a distinct spiritual dimension. She also expresses distance from the elites of WEF that are disconnected from the ordinary people, reinforcing the ‘us versus them’ dynamic while downplaying the issue of climate change. Moreover, by providing a personal anecdote in her statement, “when I was growing up, you didn't have sex ed until seventh grade”, Haley positions her perspective as one that resonates with her audience, grounded in her own lived experience.

In terms of **mitigation** and **intensification**, she mitigates her ostensibly excessive praise of America by acknowledging the existence of flaws, as evident in her statement, “America’s not perfect”. Haley intensifies the weight of her message through the use of absolutes, describing the US as the “best country”, and characterizing the abstract crisis of national self-loathing as the worst crisis facing the nation. In a similar vein, she amplifies the severity of external encroaching on parents’ rights by employing the adjective “unacceptable”. Haley thus leaves no room for differing opinions on the sex education issue. In addition, she reiterates the need for the federal government to “get out of the lives of Americans” and “get out of the lives of small business”, strengthening her demand for the government to stop intervening in Americans’ lives. Moreover, she intensifies her contempt for Biden by using the superlative “the biggest problem we have”. In order to mitigate the American interventionist tendencies of the US with phrase “let them win”, positioning the US as an aide rather than an active participant in the war.

In conclusion, the elites in Washington, the media, and Biden are constructed negatively, whereas the US as a whole, parents, and Ukraine are cast in positive light. Haley also criticizes organizations like NATO, the WEF, and the UN for being out of touch. Government overreach, sex education, and woke ideology are framed as internal threats to the US. Through the topoi of justice and threat, and by invoking the principle of freedom, she justifies the need to aid Ukraine in the war. Haley amplifies the weight of the self-loathing crisis and importance of parents' rights by means of absolutes and repetition.

9. Discussion

The following section provides an interpretation of the findings in relation to the research questions, offering an examination of how the issues facing the US are framed, how the in- and out-groups are constructed, as well as how responsibility is attributed to various individuals and social groups by the three politicians. This examination is grounded in the DHA's multidimensional view of context.

9.1. Framing of issues

The findings showcase how the three political figures employ a variety of rhetorical strategies to frame the issues of economy, abortion, climate change, social inequality, immigration, and national security.

With regard to the economic challenges facing the US, Haley and DeSantis frame the issues such as inflation as the direct result of federal government's excessive spending. Through the use of explicit positive predication, which is the first dimension of context, namely co-text, Trump underscores the importance of drilling for oil as a principal solution for the high inflation the US is experiencing. This approach illustrates legitimation through rationalization, where Trump justifies the need for drilling by emphasizing its outcome – reducing inflation. Moreover, he frequently invokes the topos of burden to showcase the strain that 'Bidenomics' intentionally places on 'ordinary Americans'. This demonstrates interdiscursivity, wherein Trump draws on conservative media discourse that attribute economic decline to Democratic policies.

In terms of the abortion issue, all three politicians insinuate that Democrats support infanticide, invoking the pro-life movement's "infanticide" discourse. However, the ways in which the politicians legitimize their pro-life stance are vastly different. Donald Trump engages in a unifying rhetoric, stressing the importance of finding a compromise on this issue. Ron DeSantis, by contrast, tends to portray the women who resort to abortion as victims by

attributing their decisions to the lack of a support system rather than acknowledging individual agency. Nikki Haley invokes personal experience to frame the issue through a compassionate lens as she claims, calling for everyone to prioritize “saving babies”. Further drawing on her lived experiences, she shifts the focus to adoption, noting that her own husband was adopted.

With regard to the issue of climate change and environmental degradation, DeSantis frames it as an ideological and partisan issue, rather than an existential one, downplaying it. He uses legitimization qua moralization to highlight its impact on the emotional state of the future generation. Moreover, both Trump and DeSantis employ interdiscursivity to link Biden’s administration’s climate policies, namely those promoting increased electric cars usage, to China, thus treating the discourse on climate change as deeply intertwined with discourse on national security. Similarly, by drawing on the institutional frame of partisan polarization, Haley frames the issue of climate change as ideologically driven. Additionally, she invokes the discourse on conservative skepticism of globalist organizations, accusing the WEF participants of heavily focusing on it, instead of what she considers to be more urgent issues.

In terms of the social issues facing the US, such as social and racial inequality, LGBTQ+ issues in the US, Haley uses the legitimization through authorization strategy, framing these issues as part of the nefarious ‘woke ideology’ and presenting them as a threat to traditional family values. In line with Cammaerts (2022), this study demonstrates how DeSantis scapegoats ‘woke ideology’ as a threat to societal stability. Through intensification, DeSantis argues that the rise of ‘wokeness’ virtually enables crime in the US and negatively impacts the military by diverting their attention from their mission. He also claims that the promotion of sex education and gender ideology in schools undermines students’ performance in school, depicting these issues as hinderance of academic achievement. Trump further intensifies the rhetoric through emotionally charged language, contending that the ‘harmful gender ideology’ results in “mutilation” and “disfigurement” of the youth.

As for the illegal immigration issue, both DeSantis and Trump employ similar but also distinct strategies that frame immigration as an existential threat to the US. Trump portrays the influx of immigrants in hyperbolic terms, referring to illegal immigrants as “flooding our town”, “pouring in”, conjuring an image of a natural disaster. His framing of immigration consistently employs the topos of danger, reflecting the ‘scapegoating’ tactic discussed by Wodak (2019), where minority groups are blamed for a country’s problems. DeSantis extends the threat to the “very social fabric” of the US, drawing on right-wing populist discourse that sees immigration as a threat to cultural homogeneity and national unity, which is in line with the finding of

Wodak's (2019) study. DeSantis' framing, however, differs from Trump's, as the governor additionally portrays immigration through the lens of victimization, discursively constructing immigrants as victims of the circumstance, thus virtually stripping them of agency. This framing suggests that immigrants are exploited by more significant forces. While Haley does not extensively address illegal immigration, she frames the issue through the experience of her immigrant family, invoking the discourse on legal immigration and reinforcing the narrative of 'deserving' versus 'undeserving' immigrants.

Within the discourse topic of national security, Haley presents the external conflict in clear dichotomous categories, positioning the US and its allies against adversaries Russia and China. This binary framing taps into the discourse on the standoff between freedom and authoritarianism. In a similar vein, DeSantis' rhetoric places the US in a "strength vs. weakness" binary, arguing that that military strength is essential in deterring adversaries like North Korea. As for the Ukraine war topic, Trump's rhetoric centers around deterrence, presenting himself as the only figure who could have prevented the conflict. Through various topoi and repetition, Trump constructs the conflict as something that theoretically could have been avoided with strong leadership. In contrast, Haley presents the importance of defending Ukraine through the lens of legitimation via moralization, which puts at the forefront freedom as a moral value essential to the collective identity of America.

9.2. In- and out-group construction

The concept of in- and out-groups is integral in shaping the narrative of the three political figures. Each of them constructs these groups to reflect their ideology and to appeal to their target audience.

Trump distinguishes between in-and out-groups using charged language and deictics. For instance, to depict the supporters of open border policies and members of the radical left as threats to national stability, he refers to them as "zealots" and "thugs". Additionally, Trump uses implicit negative predication to strip the out-group of human qualities. For instance, illegal immigrants are referred to as something that needs to be cleaned out, presenting them as contaminant of the nation. In doing so, he portrays the immigrants as a problem that is in need of eradication, rather than individuals with rights. Scapegoating is another strategy that Trump utilizes, blaming larger issues, such as the drug issue, on out-group that are illegal immigrants.

Trump's marked use of derogatory monikers, such as "crooked Hillary", "crooked Joe", "shifty Shiff", and "DeSanctimonious" plays an important role in signaling mutual contempt for these politicians among his supporters. By means of this, Trump constructs an in-group

with his followers, symbolizing his appeal to ethos. Another discursive tactic he uses to establish the in-group is through explicit positive predication with regard to himself, his administration, and other social actors, including legal immigrants, police officers, and the Hungarian Prime Minister. For instance, he refers to himself as “loyal”, and “successful” and to the law enforcement officials as “the greatest”. By highlighting the qualities Trump deems integral to a true American citizen and patriot – such as conservatism in “conservative parents”, Christian values in “Americans of faith”, and adhering to laws in “law-abiding citizens” – he creates a shared collective identity with the in-group. Moreover, he frames himself as the buffer between “us” and “them” using deictic language. He continually frames the out-group which includes Biden and the Democrats, as intentionally undermining the American principles, morals, and national security, positioning himself as the necessary barrier to help preserve the values important to the US.

Similarly, Governor DeSantis employs a number of strategies to construct the in-and out-groups to appeal to his audience and perpetuate his ideologies. However, his rhetoric is less hyperbolic. Like Trump, he uses inclusive pronouns “we” and “our” to create a sense of shared purpose with the in-group. DeSantis frames himself as a representative of the “ordinary Americans” and the “working families” and refers to himself as “a blue-collar kid” to emphasize that his understanding of the struggles of the average American.

As for the out-groups, DeSantis employs nomination, particularly ambiguous labels such as “the nameless, faceless bureaucrat” and “liberal elites” that contribute to a construction of an out-group that is detached from interests of regular Americans. This echoes anti-elitism rhetoric that is at the core of far-right populism (Cammaerts 2022: 736). Frequent use of the negatively connoted terms describing the opposing ideology, such as “cultural Marxism” and “woke ideology” that are attached to the out-group reinforces his assertion of the out-group being a threat to the traditional values. To establish multinational corporations as an out-group, Ron DeSantis invokes the topos of burden and links them directly to China – the main adversary of the US – reinforcing his disdain for them. Like Trump, DeSantis strips illegal immigrants of human qualities. He also tends to rid the immigrants of agency, portraying them as victims of circumstance and the exploitative external forces.

Haley takes a slightly different approach compared to the approaches of the other two political figures, although there are some similarities among them. Much like Trump and DeSantis, she uses the first-person pronoun “we” to align herself with the plight of the ‘ordinary Americans’ – groups like “mothers”, “small business”. Moreover, she establishes a sense of shared burden, using deictic language in “our taxpayer money” to position herself and the

Americans as a victim of Biden's economic policies. By highlighting her Indian immigrant background and her role as a first minority governor, she constructs an in-group that is more inclusive, extending beyond the traditional conservative subset of voters to minority groups.

As for her out-group construction, Haley frames specific social actors and phenomena as adversaries to American values and prosperity. She first outlines the various phenomena that negatively influence American values, such as socialism, the crisis of national self-loathing, and 'woke ideology', then identifies social actors that contribute to the perpetuation of these negative forces.

9.3. Attributing responsibility

The analysis showcases that the political figures employ a number of strategies to attribute responsibility to various individuals and groups, including both internal and external social actors.

All the politicians under consideration attribute responsibility for the economic decline to China by constructing it as a powerful and relentless enemy. Haley in particular frames Biden as an active contributor to China's rise on the global stage. She nominates freedom as the main counterweight to China, placing emphasis on personal freedom that Biden, as she argues, is attempting to stifle. This legitimization by authorization strategy, as discussed by Rheindorf and Wodak (2020), shifts the focus from domestic policies onto an external adversary. This draws on the broader discourse on national sovereignty and economic self-sufficiency, with each politician positioning themselves as a protector of domestic and national interests.

Governor DeSantis has a tendency to ascribe responsibility not just to former president Biden and the Democratic Party, but also to the political elites in Washington, DC through negative predication and intensification. In line with Ashbee and Waddan's (2024) findings, which showcased Republicans' contempt for multinational corporations, DeSantis attributes responsibility to multinational corporations, by distancing himself through frequently resorting to perspectivation. Invoking the discourse of national security, he directly links them to China and thus deems them as traitorous. Moreover, DeSantis implicitly attributes responsibility to the Biden administration by framing the COVID-19 lockdown measures as an instrument by means of which a wealth shift from middle class to large corporations, like Amazon and Apple, was realized. According to him, the policies of the past administration ostensibly exacerbated the wealth inequality in the US. In a similar vein, Nikki Haley ascribes responsibility to the ruling class framing its members as detached from reality and disconnected from the interests

of ordinary Americans. She frequently emphasizes that the US is on a path to a decline, positioning herself as the social actor that can affect positive change and stop the decline.

Both Trump and DeSantis blame illegal aliens for high rates of crime, reinforcing the populist narrative. Trump's prevalent use of the topoi of burden, reality, and danger illustrates the strain that the immigrants have on both the economy, public safety, and the educational system. Through his use of hyperbole, Trump ascribes responsibility to external actors in the face of Honduras and Mexico for intentionally sending imprisoned individuals to the US.

Haley's approach centers around a distinction between the roles of federal government and individuals when ascribing responsibility. By framing personal responsibility as a key factor to economic prosperity of the country and the federal government as an actor that encourages the relinquishment of such responsibility, Haley indirectly blames the federal government for national decline. This narrative reinforces the broader neo-capitalist ideology which prioritizes personal accountability over government intervention and perpetuates an exclusionary stance towards individuals who rely on welfare. Moreover, she engages in distribution of blame among several social actors, ascribing responsibility for excessive spending and borrowing to Republicans, Congress, and Biden. In doing so, she positions herself as an outsider, and thus an objective critic of the political establishment.

The three politicians attribute the responsibility for causing moral decline among Americans to the Democrats and the radical left and their 'woke ideology'. Haley, for instance, frames it as a spiritual warfare, extending the debate beyond that of ideology. Through interdiscursivity, DeSantis maintains that cultural Marxist ideology permeates various domains, arguing that gender ideology diverts the focus of the military from its priorities and even influences national security. In addition, via fallacies DeSantis claims that 'woke ideology' detracts from the academic curriculum and interferes with youth sports. Thus, the candidates tend to avoid directly addressing the issues regarding marginalized groups, such as transgender individuals, choosing instead to engage in a more polarizing rhetoric towards these social groups.

10. Conclusion

The study aimed to examine how Republican presidential nominees Donald Trump, Ron DeSantis, and Nikki Haley framed key internal and external issues, constructed in- and out-groups, and assigned responsibility to various social actors in their rhetoric during the 2023-2024 election campaign. The database consisted of two interviews and two campaign speeches per candidate. By applying the CDA, namely the DHA, the study showcased how the three

politicians employed a number of strategies to fuel the ideology nationalist, conservative, and exclusionary ideologies within their campaign narratives.

The three political figures utilize discursive strategies and interdiscursivity to frame key issues of immigration, social issues, national security, and immigration in various ways, frequently presenting the issues in a dichotomous manner. Trump, DeSantis, and Haley ascribe responsibility to a number of internal and external adversaries, including both social actors, such as the political elites, the Democratic Party, and China, and phenomena, such as socialism and ‘woke ideology’. The three candidates often opt for emotionally charged, victimizing, and polarizing language to constructs clear in- and out-groups.

The findings of this research could have practical implications for a number of different groups. They may benefit political analysts and commentators in understanding how the campaign narratives of the politicians are constructed. Voters might gain insight into the manipulation strategies utilized to influence their opinion, which could allow for more informed decision-making in elections. Researchers in fields such as political science and political communication may also benefit from the findings, due to the study’s contribution to the broader exploration of political discourse in the context of US elections. The research could aid in understanding how language potentially functions as a means to perpetuate ideological stances and societal divisions.

With regard to limitations, the present study would benefit from a supplementary quantitative approach in order to measure the frequency of the various discursive strategies for a more accurate comparison across the three political figures’ rhetoric, particularly with regard to the frequency of each linguistic realization. While offering useful insights, the study is limited to textual analysis, and a more careful study of paralinguistic factors could prove valuable. Moreover, the process of identifying and categorizing discursive strategies as well as interpreting the results may have inevitably introduced a degree of researcher’s subjectivity and personal bias.

As for future research, one potential direction could be a longitudinal study focused on how the framing of issues, construction of in- and out- groups, and the attribution of responsibility evolved throughout the entire political career of these figures, especially seeing how Trump has become the president. Such a study would reveal how the rhetoric reflects the shifts in the political landscape over a period of several decades. Another way is to further explore interdiscursivity in various forms of political communication, particularly how discourse topics are interconnected to aid in perpetuating certain ideologies and power imbalances.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research that applies CDA and CDA-adjacent approaches to explore the political landscape of the US, particularly how language contributes to establishing power dynamics and cementing ideology. By examining how Trump, DeSantis, and Haley use language to shape public perception of them, the study foregrounds the role of language in negotiating their political identities, authority, and ideology within the field of modern US politics.

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13. Appendices

13.1. Appendix 1: Analysis Table

Topics		
Intertextuality		

Discursive strategy	Linguistic devices	Examples from the text	Explanation (what the candidate tries to achieve with these strategies/devices)
Referential/nomination (discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/ events and processes/ actions)	- membership categorization devices, deictics, anthroponyms, etc. - tropes such as metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches (pars pro toto, totum pro parte) - verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions, etc.		-
Predication (discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events/ processes and actions more or less positively or negatively)	- stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (e.g. in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctive clauses, infinitive clauses and participial clauses or groups) - explicit predicates or predicative	-	-

	nouns/adjectives/pronouns • collocations • explicit comparisons, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures (including metonymies, hyperboles, litotes, euphemisms) • allusions, evocations, and presuppositions/implicatures, etc.		
Argumentation (justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness)	topoi (formal or more content-related) used to justify political inclusion or exclusion, discrimination or preferential treatment and fallacies etc.	-	-
Perspectivation, framing (positioning speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance)	• deictics • direct, indirect or free indirect speech • quotation marks, discourse markers/particles • metaphors • animating prosody, etc.	- -	-

Intensification, mitigation (modifying (intensifying or mitigating) the illocutionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances)	• diminutives or augmentatives • (modal) particles, tag questions, subjunctive, hesitations, vague expressions, etc. • hyperboles, litotes • indirect speech acts (e.g. question instead of assertion) • verbs of saying, feeling, thinking, etc.		
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Appendices 2 – 7
 (See attached file)