The Evidence from Donald Trump: Changes to Campaign Strategy in US Presidential Elections.

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Abstract

This paper will present evidence of changes in campaign rhetoric, from US Presidential Elections. Using campaign rhetoric as a proxy for campaign strategy as a whole, the evidence seeks to address the paradox between perceptions of campaign strategy and what actually plays out during elections. Although campaign strategy should be fixed, unless there is "unrefutable evidence" that it is not working, media commentary and literature suggest that strategy changes much more frequently (Shea 1996: 173, 174; Thurber and Nelson 1995). The evidence has been gathered through content analysis of candidate speeches during the general election period of US Presidential Election campaigns from 1960. Evidence has been gathered on the use of issues, tone, party and character. The evidence presented in this paper will focus specifically on the use of character in rhetoric and will review the changes in the use of character in rhetoric of Presidential Elections.

<u>Introduction</u>

When Donald Trump announced his run for the Republican Party candidacy, many believed it was a joke; it would be another Bush versus Clinton perhaps, or Cruz versus Bernie. Yet despite these initial reactions by many worldwide, Donald Trump has become the Republican Party candidate, and currently is creeping back up in the polls to potentially win the US Presidency. Given the anomaly that is the Trump campaign, is there any evidence Donald Trump has changed his campaign strategy in regards to the portrayal of character in rhetoric?

The Trump campaign has always faced a high degree of media scrutiny. Combined with this, the past few months have seen Trump facing increased opposition attacks from Hillary, change in staff mid way through August to bring on board Kellyanne Conway as campaign manager, faltering August polls and repeated pressures to 'act more presidential'. There have been some points where it may be said 'reboots' of the strategy have occurred. This project hypotheses that there will be evidence that Trump has changed strategy during the time period of June to September 2016, given the volatility and pressures that Trump has been facing. This evidence will be explored based on campaign strategy, using message as a proxy for campaign strategy, and focusing specifically on Trumps portrayal of character within his campaign rhetoric. Following background information, it will present evidence that will attempt to give an answer to the question of whether there is evidence Donald Trump has changed his campaign strategy in regard to the portrayal of character in rhetoric.

Campaign strategy is the plan that "charts the path to win the election"; the "game plans, blueprints, and calculated efforts to convince the electorate to vote for a particular candidate" (Thurber and Nelson 1995: 4; Wayne 2008: 224; Greener and Arterton in Johnson 2009; Sides et al 2013: 122). It is comprised of a number of elements including the campaign message, and ideally takes a four year outlook, in line with presidential election cycles. This plan covers both the primary period and the general election, and should cover everything from answers to big questions such as what is the core message to give to voters, down to when an event should happen; the specific to the general (Jamieson 2001: 14-16; Wayne 2008: 224; Bike 1998: 176). Campaign strategy is designed to be fixed, and in an ideal world would rarely need to change because all eventualities would have been anticipated (Shea 1996; Thurber and Nelson 1995). As Shea highlights, strategy should not change where it is working correctly for the campaign, only doing so when there is "clear, unrefutable evidence that what you are doing is not working because the fundamental circumstances in which the race is being conducted have changed" (1996: 173, 174; Thurber and Nelson 1995).

However, within media commentary and in strategy literature there have been references made which imply that campaign strategy changes. Elections do not happen as planned, and some have even gone so far as to suggest campaigns may actually be "dynamic and in constant change, reacting to events and opponents" (Newman 1999: 77; Kessel 1974; Wayne and Wilcox 1992; Shea 1996; Caesar, Busch and Pitney Jr 2011). This paradox between the consensus that campaign strategy should be fixed, versus the reality that it is more fluid, is

the main idea for which the bigger project behind the evidence of change in campaign strategy presented in this paper from Donald Trump's general election campaign thus far.

<u>Investigating Campaign Rhetoric</u>

Campaign strategy as a whole is comprised of a number of elements; target voters, candidate message, candidate resources, tactics and timeframe. The element of message is the focus for this research. Message is expressed through campaign rhetoric and is a necessity in strategy that enables candidates to portray information about themselves to voters that focuses on their biography, experience, issue positions and more; it is important to give "the right message" in campaigns (Thurber and Nelson 2010: 19, 50, 51; Jamieson 2001: 86, 33, 37). "Carefully crafted from what the voters want, what your candidate has to offer and what the opponent brings to the table," the message is considered the "central idea that the campaign communicates to the voters" (Shea 1996: 149, 163; Thurber and Nelson 2004: 52; 2010).

In order to investigate change in campaign strategy, development of an empirical framework was necessary to capture the nature of strategy. However, campaign strategy as a whole is multi-faceted. As a result, message has been used as a proxy for campaign strategy as a whole. This is appropriate because message, as seen in rhetoric, is a measurable behaviour, is widely accessible, and has links to other elements of strategy. The framework gave a way of measuring change in campaign rhetoric and providing evidence of changes that occurred during the general election period.

<u>Measuring Rhetoric</u>

Content analysis was used to apply the framework to be able to explore message as a proxy for campaign strategy. It is a methodology considered to be a "quantitative technique for analysing communications", that can be undertaken both quantitatively or qualitatively (Burnham et al 2008: 248). It is a method that sees researchers content analyse something, in this case documents, to investigate it. As content analysis is a form of "systematic reading of texts", it is possible for "objective and systematic" research to occur under "clearly specified conditions" enabling replication, enhanced generaliseability of results and clarity in regards to what has been done (Krippendorff 2013: 10, 19; Burnham et al 2008: 259). . In relation to investigating change in campaign strategy through the proxy of message, it gives a clear way to be able to systematically read and analyse the text of speeches, and is ideal as the technique is good "for making replicable and valid inferences from texts... to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff 2013: 24).

There are a number of simple, general steps that are followed in content analysis. Firstly it is necessary to choose a topic and identify communication sources. For the framework used this is campaign strategy and the campaign rhetoric respectively. Then decisions on the sampling material, in relation to time and what the sample is must be made (Bryman 2012: 293). The sampling material used was an opportunity sample of Donald Trump's speeches throughout June, July, August and September 2016. The sample was all speeches available online in transcript format for this period.. Units define the sample, which are "wholes that analysts distinguish and treat as independent elements" (Krippendorff 2013: 98). According the Krippendorff there can be three degrees of unit: sampling unit, recording or coding unit, and

context units (2013: 99-101). The units of the sample are the individual speeches. Fourthly, definition of categories needs to be done, although this can be considered the same level as recording or coding units (Burnham et al 2008: 260; Krippendorff 2013: 100). The category that was investigated for the purpose of this paper was the use of character within the rhetoric, although the use of issues, tone and party are also being investigated within a wider project. These were determined initially based on the dimensions of rhetoric that could be used strategically by the candidate and which also could be measured. Fifthly a way to code needs to be established in regards to subjects or themes, and then finally a quantitative measure for analysing data needs to be established (Bryman 2012: 297; Burnham et al 2008: 260). The coding was done by developing a model for the use of character in rhetoric, which is comprised of three layers, each of which have subcategories that can be coded following a codebook. The quantitative measure was represented as the raw counts of the coding for the respective layers of the model, as a percentage of the total number of character paragraphs on a week by week and month by month basis. To get this data, content analysis occurred on each individual speech at the paragraph level, and then was analysed on a week by week basis across the election (dates for these weeks can be found in Appendix 1). Only the weeks with data available were included in the results. The data included in this paper is an opportunity sample from Donald Trump 2016.

<u>The Use of Character in Rhetoric</u>

There are many aspects of campaign strategy that are easily quantifiable in campaign rhetoric. For example, the issues a candidate stands for and what their views are on each issue are, relatively speaking, clear or 'easy' to identify, at least in some respect within campaign rhetoric. There are other

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core aspects to campaign strategy which, in relation to rhetoric, are not so clearly identifiable. Character is an example.

The literature highlights character, traits, qualities, biography and experience as core aspects that candidates for federal office should portray to voters (Hayes 2005; Petrocik 1996; Alvarez and Glasgow 2000). The literature does not use terms consistently to describe what, at times, may be the same thing. For example, Hayes (2005) proposes the trait ownership theory, the idea that

"perceptions of candidates' personal qualities are the product of strategic candidate behaviour and the nature of political information processing. During campaigns, candidates focus on issues their party owns, which prompts the public to make trait inferences associated with those issues" (2005: 912).

The model of measuring character was developed using data from the ANES (American National Election Study) questions on candidates' personal qualities. Hayes specifically tests the hypothesis on being a strong leader, moral, compassionate, empathetic, decent, intelligent, knowledgeable, and inspiring (Hayes 2005:913). Looking to these two aspects of Hayes' research, he uses in the excerpt the words 'qualities', and 'trait', and uses 'qualities' from the ANES to test his hypothesis. However, being a strong leader could be determined as experience, if experience has been gained by a candidate in a position of leadership. Similarly, 'intelligent', and 'knowledgeable', in certain contexts could be determined as biographical points about a person, and 'moral' and 'empathetic' could be considered character, traits, or qualities. In the same vein, Alvarez and Glasgow consider morality to be a personality trait, not a quality or character trait like Hayes (2000).

Given that the terms such as 'moral' and 'knowledgeable' are addressed using a variety of terms, it became necessary to distinguish the terminology to be used for the project. Character refers to

the general complex concept of the overall character of a candidate. That is, the use of character in

rhetoric therefore means the use of the general concept of character in rhetoric. The term qualities will

be used, to refer to specific aspects that candidates may be highlighting within rhetoric, such as

morality, and will be detailed further below.

Character is important within campaign strategy, firstly because it can enable a candidate to

highlight strong reasons why a voter should vote for them and why they believe they are best for the

job. It also speaks to the idea posed by Lim (2008) that rhetoric has become low in debate and

argument, instead being full of "linguistic simplicity" and appeals to ethos (emotion, persuasion) (Lim

2008: 22, 68). Character enables candidates to focus on ethos and move away from more intellectual

aspects of debate and argument. Locating rhetoric within the context of campaigns, candidates are

trying to win votes and thus aim to highlight aspects of themselves that would help with this; good

character, appeals to emotion, use of persuasion, rather than strong debate points. However, in order

for character to be investigated within rhetoric, it needed to be definable and quantifiable.

Character in Rhetoric Model

The character in rhetoric model (CRM) is a three layer model, which facilitates the analysis of

how character is used within rhetoric to fulfil the aim of convincing voters the candidate in question is

better for the job. Past research into character in general has identified a number of varying qualities

which comprise character (Kinder 1983;1986; Funk 1996a; 1997; 1999; Kaid and Chanslor 1995; Benoit

1999; 2001; 2003; Benoit and McHale 2003). However, as will be detailed below, each theory of

character had flaws in relation to using the definitions and typologies of character proposed to

investigate the use of character in rhetoric. What many of them had in common, however, were the

characteristics of leadership and competence, either as separate or combined categories (Kinder

1983;1986; Funk 1996a; 1997; 1999; Benoit 1999; 2001; 2003). Along with these two common

characteristics was the idea that candidates should project likeability, seen in Funk as 'warmth', potentially considered personal qualities in Benoit (2003). These three characteristics; leadership, competence and likeability, are proposed to be meta-characteristics, which comprise the first layer of the CRM.

The model proposes that the strategic aim of candidates during elections, in terms of the use of character in rhetoric, is to portray to the voter these three meta-characteristics of leadership, competence and likeability. The logic follows that if they can succeed in portraying themselves as having these three meta-characteristics, then this can help convince voters that they are the better candidate for the Presidency. Unlike what other theories have tried to do, this project proposes that the three meta-characteristics cannot be arbitrarily defined by other qualities successfully or succinctly. For example, leadership cannot be defined to be "inspiring" and "strong leadership" (Kinder 1983; 1986; cited in Funk 1999: 702). Instead these meta-characteristics are what the candidate is aiming to portray through the use of character in their campaign rhetoric. In proposing the concept of the use of character in rhetoric which starts from the point of view of the strategic aim of the candidate, this project differs from previous research further, which focuses on character from the point of view of what the voter looks for, with data based on polls or studies generally being used to help identify character.

The second layer of the CRM proposes that a number of rhetorical devices are used by candidates as ways for them to identify qualities of character, which portray the meta-characteristics of leadership, competence and likeability. The devices are a number of patterns of rhetorical construction. For example, candidates often tell stories about themselves or their families, and this is the personal or family stories device. They are devices because the different patterns recur consistently throughout campaign rhetoric. These devices were developed through investigation of what was occurring in speeches when candidates are speaking to, or portraying aspects of their character. Nine rhetorical

devices have been identified within campaign rhetoric: experience, personal or family stories, future projections, outright claims of character, stories of others, benchmarks against opponent, incumbency statements, courtesies and American values. It was proposed that the majority of campaign rhetoric could be analysed into these rhetorical devices, based on a detailed codebook of definitions. The first rhetorical device, experience, does not give evidence of qualities of character, however is a rhetorical device used by candidates to imply competence for the job of president, along with ability to lead. Any parts of the text which are identified as the experience device were not analysed in relation to the third layer of the model. An example of the detailed codebook definitions is the device of future projections:

Any paragraph which refers to the following is coded as projection of future America:

- where the candidate mentions the ideas or vision they have for, or about the country, and for, or about the next term
- where the candidate mentions beliefs for the country, the election, the future
- this excludes any reference to religious beliefs
- this can include any policy suggestions or issues for which they have ideas for the future or for their own future term.

The third layer of the model is the qualities of character. From the text identified as any of the relevant seven rhetorical devices; personal or family stories, future projections, outright claims of character, stories of others, benchmarks against opponent, incumbency statements and niceties, qualities of character are identified. Based again on investigation of what was occurring in campaign speeches, and on data from the American National Elections Study (ANES) exploring qualities voters perceived candidates to have, the qualities of character were developed. The logic followed that if voters believed candidates had certain qualities, these same qualities are what the candidates are portraying through their campaigns. The qualities of character are: integrity and morality, knowledge,

humility, work ethic, courage, decisive, empathy, empathic concern. The qualities of character are analysed based on criteria defined within a detailed codebook. An example is integrity and morality:

This category is used when paragraphs refer to:

- The words promise(d), pledge, vow, commitment, truth, ideals, trust, openness, transparency, facts, reality, moral, principles, ethics, conscience, values, right, fair, are words that may be used as individual indicators initially to help identify evidence of empathy in narrative
- Examples of keeping promises, doing what they promised or said they will do, making pledges, commitments or vows. This does not include phrases such as "I will do this" as this is a commonplace phrase in campaign rhetoric. Instead it focuses on the stronger guarantee that action will be undertaken. For example Barack Obama (June 16, 2008) "I'll make this pledge as President –if you commit your life to teaching, America will pay for your college education" . Including the words pledge/vow/make this commitment makes the point stronger than I will do this or that.
- Examples of, and talking about the truth, ideals, trust, telling the truth, practicing openness and transparency, and highlighting the facts and realities of a situation.
- Being guided by morals, principles, ethics.
- Conscience
- Living by values, not in reference to values in general that the country should follow though, or that there has been talk of values eg from the opposition.
- Reference to and examples of doing what is considered 'right'
- Reference to and examples of the candidate holding and believing in shared values, not reference to what "we" value, which focuses mainly on more general aspects such as jobs.
- The high road or the moral high road

- Reference to or examples of fairness, of being fair, of playing fair

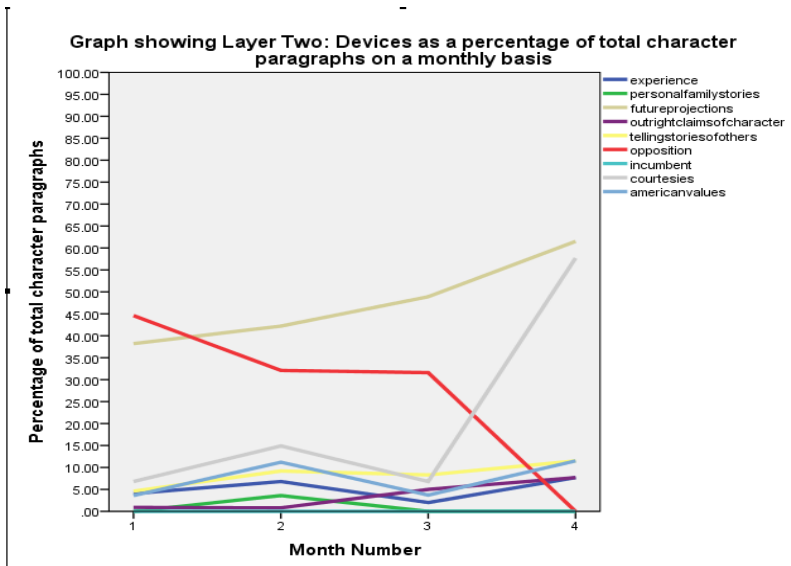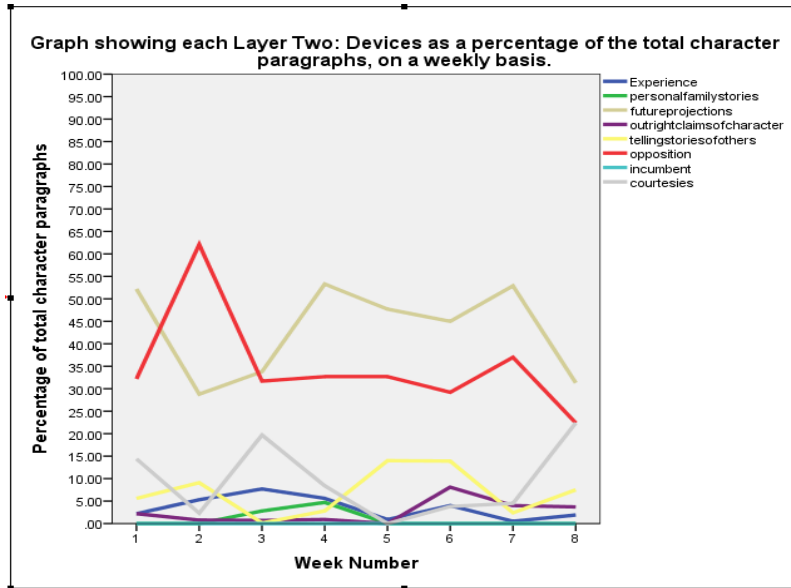- Family in relation to morals or family values.

Overall therefore, the proposition was made that the use of character in rhetoric is identified through specific rhetorical devices, with candidates highlighting qualities of character, which fulfil the candidates' strategic aims of portraying the meta-characteristics of leadership, competence and likeability to voters, to show they are the better candidate for the job of president. The character in rhetoric model enables easier, quantified analysis of changes in relation to the use of character for this project, as compared with previous definitions of character.
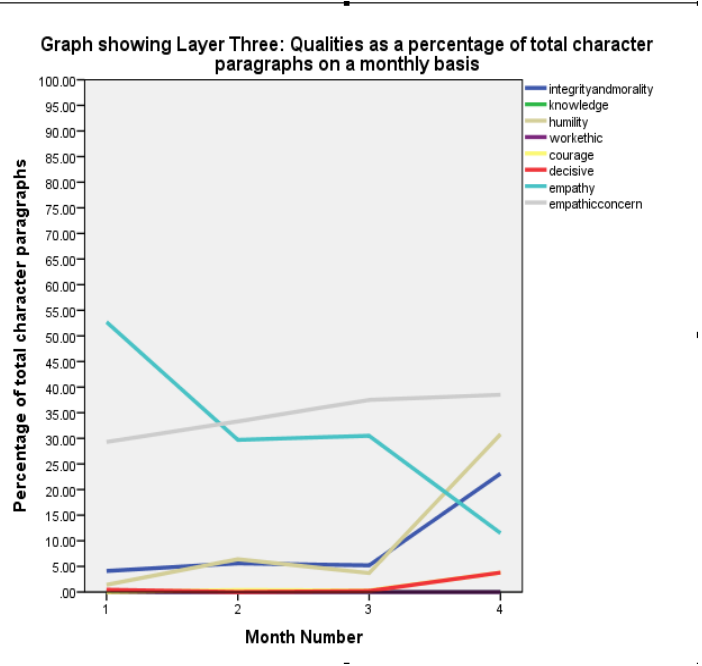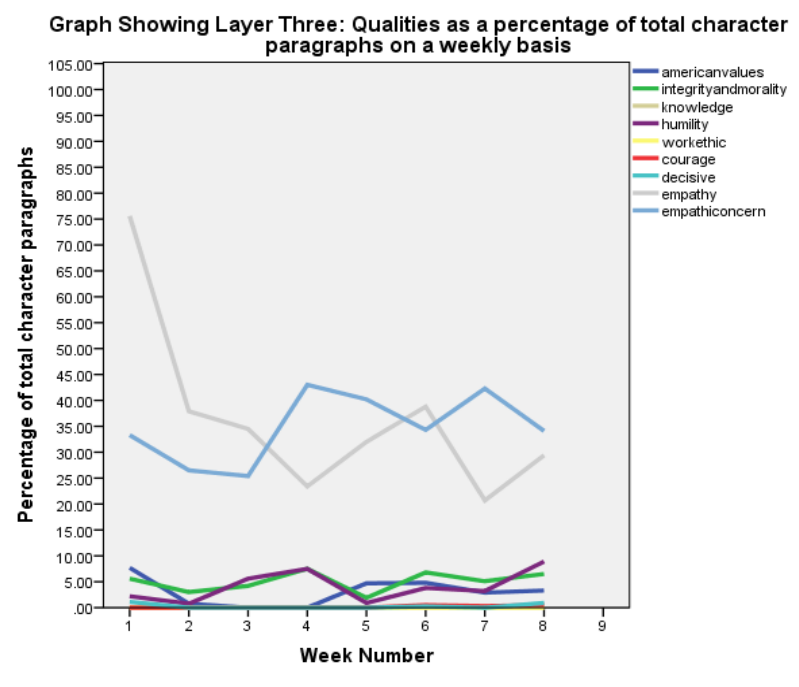
Data

It was expected that Trump would highlight the different devices and qualities of character in his rhetoric. Following the belief that change does occur in campaigns, it was expected that there would be drops or 'spikes' in data where there is a shift in strategy in relation to the use of character. Alongside it , it was expected that there would be a 'normal', from which the percentage changes occurred, given that strategically candidates was to portray the meta-characteristics to the public throughout the election. Visually, it was expected that the data would somewhat resemble the graph below:
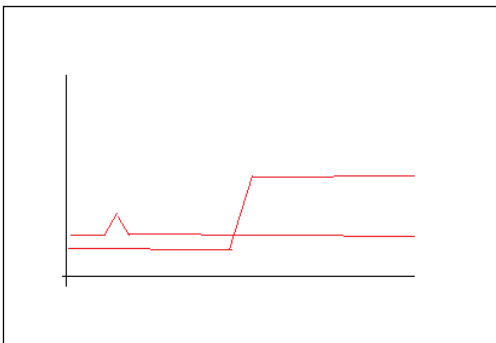
The results are presented in graph format, with Layer Two weekly then monthly data, followed by Layer

Three weekly then monthly data being presented below:

Graph showing each Layer Two: Devices as a percentage of the total character paragraphs, on a weekly basis.

Graph showing Layer Two: Devices as a percentage of total character paragraphs on a monthly basis

Graph Showing Layer Three: Qualities as a percentage of total character paragraphs on a weekly basis

Graph showing Layer Three: Qualities as a percentage of total character paragraphs on a monthly basis

Firstly taking the results as a whole, it is interesting to note that Trump actually does not seem to use character in the same way as is usually seen with candidates' campaign rhetoric. Future projections is, especially looking to the monthly data, consistently the most used device, with some

devices such as personal family stories barely being used by Trump. What is particularly interesting again from the monthly data is the clear drop in the use of the opposition device. This is especially unusual given that this occurs in month four, September, when generally campaigns are in full general election mode, and having already 'gone negative' on their opponent. Rarely do campaigns then turn back from 'going negative'. It could be argued that given that we are only just into September this impacts the data, but by converting the raw data to percentages, this accounts for differences such as number of speeches in each month, making the data comparable. Combining this with the increase from August both gradually in future projections and fairly sharply in courtesies, there is evidence that the campaign has decided to change strategy to become less 'negative', in order to improve standing with the electorate, instead focusing more on policy or what Trump wants to see in the future. Given the widespread press coverage of the Trump campaign in the US and indeed worldwide, usually in a more negative light, this could be seen as a reaction to, and attempt to disprove negative press remarks by the Trump campaign. Looking to events within the campaign, this could be evidence of the recent focus made by Trump on winning over the African-American vote. It would be interesting to follow this opportunity sample through to October to see if the move toward less opposition focus, more courtesies is a lasting change in strategy.

The qualities data from layer three also provides unusual findings. Generally campaigns see high levels of empathy and empathic concern throughout the campaign period, and it is the other qualities of character that tend to change, if change in strategy occurs. What is evidenced in both the monthly and weekly data from Trump is that in actuality, Trump rarely highlights any other character qualities. A handful of mentions occur for American Values, Integrity and Morality, and Humility, but these barely occur in 10% of character paragraphs. When undertaking the analysis, there seemed to be a correlation between courtesies, and evidence of humility, helped heavily by the fact Trump is very 'thankful' during his speeches, a key indicator for humility. Other than this, the opportunity sample does not show

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evidence of Trump really 'doing' character in the anticipated manner. To appeal to voters it would be presumed that Trump would highlight a larger range of qualities, and to a greater degree, in order to portray that he has the meta-characteristics perceived to be needed for the job of President. In accordance with Trump's anti-establishment campaign, it would seem that even in appealing to voters he is going against the grain of what usually works and is done be candidates in their general election rhetoric, at least in the months of June to September.

A final point to make is again in regards to empathy and empathic concern. Generally these qualities stay high throughout a campaign, given that this is a way for candidates to portray to voters that they understand what the electorate is going through and therefore will know what to fix when in office. Trump does not seem to subscribe to this idea so steadfastly either. Looking at the weekly data, Trump uses empathy the most in the first week, and following this the use of empathy drops to being no higher than 40% of character rhetoric for the rest of the period. To put this into perspective, Obama in 2008 generally had empathy as a percentage of character above 50%, across a period of 22 weeks (results based on pilot data for overall project). Looking to Trump's monthly data, it is clear that come September, empathy has fallen to just 11.5% of character paragraphs, from a starting point in June of 52.7%. This makes sense in terms of the idea that September is seemingly the month change occurs based on the Level Two data. However following the idea that this could be to try to appeal to a wider electorate such as African-Americans, the decrease in the use of empathy does not entirely fit. However this could be explained by the clear increase in empathic concern, which could indicate that rather than just empathizing with people, Trump is actually trying to show that he does have policies that will help the situation of voters, rather than just talking about their potential problems. It is important to note here that most of the paragraphs for empathy and empathic concern were identified from the descriptor of 'the challenges which face the country', in the codebook list. The codebook defines empathy to be paragraphs which refer to:

- Examples of knowledge of what the people are going through, or that they know what 'it' is like for voters

- Examples of those who are struggling or brave, or having a 'hard time', or facing challenges.

- Stories that refer to examples of people from the electorate who are struggling eg have lost their job, been fighting cancer, single moms, or success stories of those who have been through hard times and got better/ become better off etc, that the candidate has met.

- The challenges facing the country or the people.

- Situations where the candidate is doing very normal tasks/ events like the people for example, reference to taking children to school, or worrying about family members' health etc.

Yet the main indicator that Trump uses in his rhetoric is to talk about the challenges facing the country . It would be interesting in future projects to see how this differs from other candidates, both in 2016 and in previous elections, as to how empathy is used, but also more broadly as to how Trump does differ from the more 'typical' candidate.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is, based on the opportunity sample available, evidence that Donald Trump has changed his campaign strategy in regards to the portrayal of character in rhetoric. Along with evidence that the campaign is taking a different approach to the use of character in rhetoric, there is also evidence from the opportunity sample that Trump changed the use of character in rhetoric at the start of September.

Rather than focusing on highlighting many qualities of character, Trump instead focuses predominantly on highlighting his future projections. Instead of increasing, or maintaining the focus on opposition as a benchmark, Trump has appeared to change tactic and instead increase courtesies along with his future projections, as a potential response to media coverage, or as evidence of trying to

increase appeal to African American voters. Where empathy and empathic concern are usually found in high percentages of the character rhetoric, Trump has lower degrees of use, and where candidates highlight many aspects of character, to portray the meta-characteristics, Trump barely gives evidence of half of the qualities of character. He does however, give evidence that the campaign strategy has changed, whether how long this may last however, is another question.

Appendix 1 - Dates of Week by Week Analysis

Week 1 : Wc June 13

Week 2: Wc June 22

Week 3: Wc June 27 (excluded as no speeches available)

Week 4: Wc July 4 (excluded as no speeches available)

Week 5: Wc July 11

Week 6:Wc July 18

Week 7: Wc July 25 (excluded as no speeches available)

Week 8: Wc Aug 1 (excluded as no speeches available)

Week 9: Wc Aug 8

Week 10: Wc Aug 15

Week 11: Wc Aug 22

Week 12: Wc Aug 29