The Political Discourse of Donald Trump and its Implications:
An Examination of Authoritarian Speech

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Introduction

Students of politics, language and society are witnessing a 'sea-change' in political discourse with the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States. Whether the observer is conservative or liberal, it is clear the method in which Trump communicates is a clear break from previous presidents, albeit with distant echoes of populists from the past. While George W. Bush's gaffes and mispronunciations provided fodder for his critics and late-night comedians in America, Donald Trump's political discourse carries echoes from 20th century dictators and autocratic rulers. As many scholars have noted that while history does not repeat, there are often similarities in political movements with those that came before. These similarities can be taken as a warning of dangerous trends concerning political discourse in America and abroad.

There are three aspects to Trump's political discourse (spoken language as well as text 'tweets' on Twitter's social media network) addressed in this paper. These aspects can be broken down as follows:

a) simplified political discourse: *the use of simplified language (grammar and vocabulary that is simple and of relatively limited complexity)*

b) political discourse as an attack on elites and the 'other:' *inflammatory and derisive rhetoric that attacks immigrants, perceived elites and experts* and

c) ritualized political discourse: *the use of language to convey not concrete policies, but rather emotion and ingroup formation through ritualized use of words and phrases, chants, repetition and framing.*

Using historian Timothy Snyder's (2016) analysis to examine speech used

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by autocratic leaders in Russia and elsewhere, we can see that Trump not only speaks in a simplistic manner, but in an autocratic manner as well, regularly touching upon the points listed above.

While Trump has not carried out identical policies or programs in his first three years in office as extreme as tyrants and autocrats of the past, his use of language shares disturbing similarities with rulers who embraced aspects of fascism, totalitarianism and communism. This paper aims to propose a manner of examining Trump's political discourse based on the three concepts listed above.

Simplified Political Discourse

Trump's use of language is simplistic, often antagonistic, and lacking in nuance or detailed explanation. This seems obvious to many observers, while strenuously defended by his supporters. Linguists and journalists studying Trump's speech and tweets have found that his discourse is in fact at a lower level of lexical-grammatical complexity than his contemporaries, as will be demonstrated below.

An examination of Trump's Twitter feed shows simplistic and insulting adjectives and nouns to describe opponents, the media and agencies that Trump opposes. For example:

"clown" – 45 tweets

"disgusting" – 37 tweets

"fool" – 83 tweets

"haters" / "losers" – 64 tweets

"moron" – 52 tweets

"pathetic" – 72 tweets[1]

Such vocabulary is a departure from modern, presidential discourse. Additionally, the incendiary language did not decrease once Trump became President, as many theorized. His use of political discourse to goad and dehumanize both individuals and institutions such as the media continued apace during his presidency. While opponents, and those who wish for a return to civil and reasoned political discourse, are dismayed, Trump's

supporters feel spoken to in a language they understand and as by one of their own—a non-expert, someone who, despite his wealth, is not a member of 'the Establishment.'

In numerous instances Trump speaks and tweets about being able to "fix" or solve problems single-handedly and discounts the role of experts, scholars or military commanders as opposed to his own 'gut instincts,' 'very good brain' and even genetic superiority.[2] Expressions such as 'fix,' 'chaos,' 'sad' and 'bad-shape' are easy to understand. The incredible complexity of the U.S. government—the most complex and multi-layered governmental system in the world—as well as the multitude of policies, issues and problems facing the United States confuse experts who have spent decades studying them and yet when such terms are employed by Trump, it gives the appearance that they are simplistic; both easy to understand and easy to solve—if only there is a will to do so. The President declares he *alone* has this will and the power to solve these problems.

An analysis by the Boston Globe of all Presidential candidates, Republican and Democratic, in 2015, demonstrated that Trump employed vocabulary at a 4th grade level (vocabulary and sentence structure) based on the Flesch-Kincaid readability test algorithm. This was the lowest level of any of the nineteen candidates surveyed. Yet, of all these candidates, Trump secured not only the nomination of the Republican party, but the Presidency as well.[3]

Other research conducted into Trump's language, both spoken and in the forms of texts (primarily Tweets) shows what many casual observers have declared to be true: in a variety of contexts, Trump's speech patterns, with regards to vocabulary and syntax, show lower levels of lexical complexity in comparison with previous Presidents (Wang & Liu, 2018; Degani, 2016; Viser, 2015). This is not to claim that the basic grammatical-lexical abilities of Trump's political discourse won him the election but clearly it was not a hinderance, and indeed was very likely an asset, particularly with his supporters who mobilized to vote in key electoral states. The distrust of experts, policy makers and others who exhibit what many consider 'elitist' speech and values was a central element of the Trump campaign and has proven to be a major factor in the electoral success of other nationalist

or populist parties in America and Europe (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). Simplified speech makes it clear that Trump is a non-expert, a person of the people, and not a member of the distrusted elites.

Trump's use of the English language, both in its lack of complexity, or as his supporters would argue 'clear and straight-forward' manner, and its totalitarianism overtones in attacking both elites and immigrants, represents a change in political discourse in America. Trump demeans the 'other' in ways that appeals to his base supporters with repeated words and phrases such as 'animals,' 'lock her up' or 'build the wall.'

While it is tempting, it is important for the sake of impartiality not to entirely equate Trump with the ideology or actual crimes committed by totalitarian leaders in the past. But with this caveat out of the way, there are dangerous parallels in President Trump's use of language, both in spoken language and in written 'tweets,' with totalitarian leaders. Comparisons therefore can be made to the totalitarian leaders of the twentieth century as well as current far-right wing movements occurring outside of the United States.

Some citizens find Trump's simplistic language too humorous or incredulous to have any ideology or policy upon which it is based. In this sense the current president has found a strategy by either having his statements accepted by his followers as facts (regardless of truth) or to be taken as 'humor' as he and his spokespeople have claimed afterwards. In other words, Trump's language, if not too outrageous for public consumption, is taken as 'straight-forward,' simple English but if too outrageous or offensive it is seen as either entertainment or as humor or mockery. This pushing and pulling between what is acceptable and what goes beyond respectability achieves a general movement toward outrageous and previously unacceptable speech. If the political discourse used provokes feelings—even among supporters—that it has gone 'too far' then it is simply a form of joke or code that supporters understand and is not meant to be taken too seriously. Compare this method of communication with the clear analysis of Hannah Arendt more than sixty years before the 2016 election:

> *In an ever-changing, incomprehensible world the masses had*

reached a point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and that nothing was true. ... Mass propaganda discovered that its audience was ready at all times to believe the worst, no matter how absurd, and did not particularly object to being deceived because it held every statement to be a lie anyhow. The totalitarian mass leaders based their propaganda on the correct psychological assumption that, under such conditions, one could make people believe that most fantastic statements one day, and trust that if the next day they were given irrefutable proof of their falsehood, they would take refuge in cynicism; instead of deserting the leaders who had lied to them, they would protest that they had known all along that the statement was a lie and would admire the leaders for their superior tactical cleverness. (Arendt, 1951, pg. 500)

This dangerous ambiguity allows Trump to 'test out' language and pick and choose what might be considered an actual statement of policy and what is to be considered a form of entertainment and blur the lines between the two categories. What is a 'joke' or 'obviously meant to be humor' seems to be unclear—the use of sarcasm in other contexts might be a similar example: is what is being said mockery or a factual statement? It is up to the listener to decide.

David Runciman states:

The problem is what you see is so hard to fathom. He is both ludicrous and threatening, familiar and peculiar, inside and outside the bounds of what a democracy can tolerate. (Runciman, 2018, pg. 22)

As opposed to the use of facts, rational argument or logic, eliciting emotion is what Trump excels at. His language is not used to convey information in a sense but rather to express and share feelings of emotion, a sense of vengeance towards those that look down upon the 'common man' who make up his core supporters, by their enemy—the perceived elites.

While the simplistic and antagonizing character of the President's political discourse marks a change from past presidents, it is not without historical precedent, even within the United States. Religious movements, self-invention and re-invention, historical distrust of authority, experts

and a powerful state have strong undercurrents in the United States and even precede the forming of the country (Anderson, 2017). Trump has brought back many of the arguments and simplistic speechmaking of past demagogues but with a modern twist through his use of both mass and social media such as Twitter.

Trump repeatedly uses the noun 'animals' synonymously with 'immigrants' through his simplistic and repetitive manner of speech which brings home the notion of the 'other' that Arendt and Snyder demonstrate. This plays to the instincts of the group; making their worldview simple to understand, instilling an in-group bond and fostering a fear of outsiders (the outgroup), migrants 'invading,' and similar themes that other demagogues so successfully capitalized on especially in the early and mid-20th century.

> *"We have people coming into the country or trying to come in—and we're stopping a lot of them—but we're taking people out of the country. You wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals."* (https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-remarks-roundtable-sanctuary-california-may-16-2018)

Current research utilizing technology patterns with statistics compiled on hate crimes demonstrates that inflammatory language made or disseminated by the president (in this case Twitter usage rather than political speeches or spoken language) can be linked to direct violent action (Müller and Schwarz, 2018). This means Trump's words and tweets matter, despite the claims of those who merely dismiss them.

Examining Trump's simplistic speaking (and tweeting) manner allows some to speculate that the 45th President suffers from some form of neurological damage or diminished speaking capacity due to possible senility or other medical factors.[4] While this is an interesting hypothesis (and terrifying considering his immense access to both political and military power) it is beyond the scope of this article. Additionally, these claims—while tempting to believe—are still unproven. We have no choice, at least at the present juncture, but to believe that the President speaks and tweets in a manner that reflects his true intentions and thoughts.

Trump's speech, while often lacking nuance, detail or clarity, is not seen as

a negative among many who see him as an outsider battling against a corrupt system of elites, often described as a 'deep state.' In this view, Trump's language, while simplistic, demonstrates a hatred of elitist Orwellian, bureaucratic speech. His simple speech patterns, for a sizable number of Americans, are an asset—proof that he is a non-elite.

Political Discourse as an Attack on Elites and the 'Other'

Trump again and again attacks the 'elites' which scorned his campaign and were shocked by his electoral victory. These 'elites' morph and are generally what might be described as a mixture of the higher-educated, scholars or experts in a given field, long-term bureaucrats, political operatives, and those in media or the entertainment industry. However, *anyone* might be considered an 'elite' based on Trump's ever-changing whims and feelings. Defense Secretary Mathis is an individual who went from ingroup Trump official to an outgroup 'elite' over a period of mere weeks.[5]

Trump has no need for experts. He and his supporters took the gradual rejection of expert authority—a long-standing belief in American culture—to new heights with his election.

> *"... the Trump Administration ... set out to "deconstruct the administrative state." Trump, who hung a portrait of Andrew Jackson in the Oval Office, left no doubt about where he stood on the matter of loyalty versus expertise. "Oh, we need an expert. The experts are terrible!" he said, at a campaign rally in Wisconsin, in April,2016. "They say, 'Donald Trump needs a foreign-policy adviser.' Supposing I didn't have one""* (Osnos, 2018)

As opposed to Trump's simplistic, unprepared political discourse at rallies or in tweets, the prepared speech by the President at the United Nations in 2018 shows that Trump's distrust of experts in creating policy is clear. At the United Nations, he demonstrated that the experts (or so-called experts, as he refers to them) are the opposition and not part of his administration:

> *"... America's policy of principled realism means we will not be held hostage to old dogmas, discredited ideologies, and so-called experts*

who have been proven wrong over the years, time and time again. This is true not only in matters of peace, but in matters of prosperity…." (Trump Addresses the 73rd Session of the United Nations—September 25, 2018)

Two years earlier, Trump criticized the elites/experts with his tax proposals. As with many pronouncements, the President discounted the difficult, time-consuming and elaborate process with his simple pronouncements which included little or no detail. Here again, Trump claims that he has the country's interests at heart and the experts are not to be counted on, despite his own lack of policy or governmental experience.

"… My plan will work. The experts are not really experts. They've been wrong so much over the years. My plan is the largest tax cut since Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan's plan worked. Mine is similar. My tax cut could even be a little bit larger, but I think it's going to work, and it's going to be great, and it's going to put people back to work." (Interview: Colleen Marshall of WCMH Columbus Interviews Donald Trump—October 20, 2016)

As Michael Lewis demonstrates in his newest work, The Fifth Risk (2018), Trump's political discourse is not merely rhetoric but has actual policy implications. Thousands of governmental agency appointments are left unfilled or highly unqualified individuals are placed in positions of power, above those with actual qualifications and decades of experience (the 'elite'). Not only are positions left unfilled, but lobbyists or CEOs are put in charge of agencies or departments they have built their reputations fighting to dismantle, such as the Environmental Protection Agency. Destruction from within—this is the real-world consequence of Trump's stated hatred of the 'elites' and the 'establishment.'

The political tribalism, highlighted in the work of Snyder, George Lakoff and others has only become more entrenched with the election of Trump. One senses that his speeches and tweets are indeed directed solely at his 'tribe.' The 'enemy' is not only the establishment, the globalists, immigrants or experts, but all those opposed to Trump's presidency. This is a new phenomenon in modern political discourse and violates the cultural norm of

the President seen as speaking for all Americans, regardless of their political support. Instead, Trump appears to speak only for his supporters. The ingroup is placated at the expense and antagonism of the rest of the country.

Language matters more when coming from politically powerful leaders and politicians. Unlike the 'man on the street,' leaders' political discourse has real-world and often devastating consequences (Wilson, 2015). In Trump's case whether stating explicit goals, implying that he is operating outside of the norms of established 'elite' experts, or simply lying and thereby engaging in sabotage of established norms that his followers can be a part of —the dangers are real for democratic rule and healthy political debate. Trump's political discourse is translated into action; the installation of unqualified supporters or family members into positions of power, a blurring of state and private business that benefits him or his family personally, repeated and constant attacking of a free press and even calls to violence (often dismissed as 'joking') towards opponents. These are genuine threats to democracy and the rule of law.

Even Trump's personal and business failures are not regarded as negative attributes by those with a distrust of elites. The far-sighted Arendt saw that the tyrannical leader need not to have been a 'success' in a traditional sense and that their failures might, with certain constituents, be an asset. Trump seems to encapsulate this model of leader. His failed marriages, failed businesses, bankruptcies and accusations of sexual assault did not bring him down as many had falsely predicted.

> *... for the new mass leaders whose careers reproduce the features of earlier mob leaders: failure in professional and social life, perversion and disaster in private life. The fact that their lives prior to their political careers had been failures naively held against by more respectable leaders of the old parties, was the strongest factor in their mass appeal.*
> (Arendt, 1951, pg. 428)

The world of the autocrat is not gray but rather black and white, a world where categories such as 'us and them,' 'good and evil,' 'believer' and 'infidel' have meaning, and these concepts resonate with millions who support them. The world seems to grow more and more complex over time,

and therefore a return to simplicity and clear boundaries of understanding are reassuring, comforting and require no further questions or contemplation. This is the world of Trump and his supporters, as a small sample of his daily bombastic and simplistic statements can confirm.

Ritualized Political Discourse

Along with attacks on experts and elites, Trump and his surrogates use language which impacts his supporters on a psychological level through ritualized political discourse. At post-election rallies, (numbering in the dozens as of July, 2019) he elicits emotional reactions from his fans and base supporters. Thousands of citizens engage in ritualized chants and phrases such as 'build the wall,' 'CNN sucks,' or most recently 'send her back,' referencing the congresswoman from Minnesota, Ilhan Ohmar (a U.S. citizen since 2000) who was born in Somalia.[6] During Trump's speeches, there are often interruptions for ritualized chants throughout where phrases are repeated, while Trump often stands back from the podium, smiling or gesturing to his audience.

Frequently, the discourse of Trump's speech, particularly at rallies, serves to consolidate his 'base' through ritual. Neutral or independent-minded individuals are either absent or if discovered, forcibly ejected for expressing or merely showing disagreement with what is being stated.[7] Historian Timothy Snyder explains what these ritualized chants represent:

> *In fascism the idea is not that we are individual human beings who have thoughts and reflect before we speak, the idea is that we are tribes and that politics begins from deciding who the enemy is ... and you define who the enemy is by way of a ritual ... a chant is a form of a ritual. It is no accident that those chants go to very elementary human feelings ... the notion that others are different and therefore threatening.* (https://www.facebook.com/senatorsanders/videos/2077966628921739/)

Researchers such as Amy Chua and Gary Lakoff demonstrate that tribalism—while often seen in developing countries along ethnic lines—is growing in the United States. Trump's rapid transformation of the Republican

party from traditional Republican ideals such as fiscal conservatism, foreign intervention based on anti-communist ideology and American exceptionalism into positions diametrically opposed to these ideals is remarkable. Trump's recognition of 'tribe' through his rallies, use of ritual as well as social media has enabled him to transform the political landscape rapidly, while the 'establishment' wing of the Republican party took decades to solidify its core principles during the Cold War.

Pioneering thinkers such as Eric Hoffer (1951) have long studied what makes an individual behave one way and then, as part of a larger crowd, behave quite differently, and indeed dangerously. It is a truism that the mob behaves differently than the individual. Until recently, mob behavior has been frowned upon by mainstream U.S. politicians. While arguably present in fringe elements of both the right and the left, (particularly at the height of the Vietnam War) in the current climate, Trump has made the mob mainstream. His rallies are a constant campaign rally where Trump uses rhetoric that inflames his base, while repeatedly attacking the press, other politicians, elites, immigrants and experts. Trump consistently utilizes the ritualized rhetoric of the authoritarian. One can argue that these rallies are neither policy outlays, nor components of election campaigns—they began immediately after his winning the presidency—rather, they are a form of ritual for his ingroup in the form of a celebration, a mass exhalation of Trump and his domination over the Republican party.[8]

Ritual works to cement tribal identity rather than providing any policy goals or stated objectives (Sunstein, 2002). It celebrates emotion and incitement over reason and assessment. As one of the few scholars who correctly predicted the Trump phenomenon in politics, George Lakoff is worth quoting with regards to the use of repetition and framing in Trump's language at rallies and speeches creating an ingroup, naturally opposed to 'enemies.' Lakoff describes how this process works below:

Repetition:

Words are neurally linked to the circuits that determine their meaning. The more a word is heard, the more the circuit is activated and the stronger it gets, and so the easier it is to fire again.

Framing:

> *Crooked Hillary. Framing Hillary as purposely and knowingly committing crimes for her own benefit, which is what a crook does. Repeating makes many people unconsciously think of her that way, even though she has been found to have been honest and legal by thorough studies by the right-wing Benghazi committee (which found nothing) and the FBI.* (Lakoff, 2016)

Arendt, Chua, Hoffer, Lakoff, Snyder and Sunstein all highlight the danger of the behavior of the mob through their research. This is in evidence particularly at Trump's rallies where the individual alone is one element, relatively benign in most contexts, but as part of a group, something much more dangerous. The psychological impact of groups on a normally rational and considered individual is well-established. This can be seen qualitatively at rallies held by Trump.

Trump's creation of his ingroup is somewhat more complicated than other authoritarian-leaning rulers and a surprising fact is that many of his supporters are women as well as citizens who earn meager paychecks or are on governmental assistance. These supporters nonetheless feel a bond with a man who has inherited hundreds of millions of dollars.[9] The language used and celebrated at rallies and on Twitter is in effect is a celebration of anti-intellectualism regardless of income-level or social class as traditionally defined. One could argue that a hypothetical business owner who earned $1 million in the past year could feel at home in Trump's supporters ingroup more than a highly educated school teacher earning $40,000. With Trump, wealth itself is not a helpful measure of who belongs in the ingroup and who lives outside of it.

For Trump's ingroup, notions of reason, intellectualism and cosmopolitanism are negative attributes. It is no surprise that Trump praised the uneducated.[10] To Trump and his supporters, this group has a more authentic and patriotic view of the United States and its place in the world. He achieves communion with his followers because of these factors rather than those of class and wealth. This divide between educated and non-educated and their respective worldviews are growing and have been doing so for decades

(Murray, 2013). Yet Trump places himself as a hero among the latter category while also drawing supporters from the former who may not be poor but are suspicious of the motives of the educated classes and coastal elites. Religion also plays a significant role, as Trump's support among Evangelical Christians can attest.

A further cementing of his base comes from the unpopularity among his supporters (and indeed many Americans) of 'politically-correct' speech and behavior. Trump's speech and tweets offer a balm against those who disapprove of 'politically-correct' norms. His declarations engage those who believe that 'politically-correct' philosophies embodied by especially politically active left-wing students and academics are in fact unpatriotic and are not the values shared by 'real Americans' (Chua, 2018; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018).

George Lakoff highlights this phenomenon:

> *"Donald Trump expresses out loud everything they feel—with force, aggression, anger, and no shame. All they have to do is support and vote for Trump and they don't even have to express their 'politically incorrect' views, since he does it for them and his victories make those views respectable. He is their champion. He gives them a sense of self-respect, authority, and the possibility of power."* (Lakoff, 2016)

Lakoff (2008) also has proposed the 'strict father' metaphorical model with regards to political thought and this fits in with the concept that many of Trump's opponents seem to never understand: *Trump's personal behavior carries no consequences among his supporters*. While the president breaks norms, and, allegedly, the law, his supporters show no sign of abandoning their support. Again, rational thought does not explain this but a ritualized, group-bonding with Trump as the father of the nation which is opposed to liberal values, elites, immigrants and 'politically-correct' thinking makes it possible. Trump rises above legal challenges or long-standing political norms with his followers and his Party's support, much as autocratic rulers and despots have in the past.

Analysts of Trump's rise to power look to pure nationalism, or Marxist theory but Trump's rise is its own unique phenomenon. At Trump's rallies

minorities are sometimes present, albeit in small numbers, and the initial belief that Trump voters were primarily made up of low-income brackets has also proven to be more complicated (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). However, regardless of income or even ethnicity, Trump engages his base through ritualized political discourse which appeals to emotion rather than reason.

Implications of Trump's Political Discourse

The three streams of Trump's political discourse highlighted in this article are not to be considered separate and distinct but often blend conceptionally together to form language that serves to identify the speaker with his audience. Trump, again and again, signals that he is a member of his base, by using political discourse deemed acceptable in his 'mainstream America' as opposed to in the intellectual hubs such as San Francisco, Boston, New York or Washington DC. The hatred of the other is seen in the demonization of both Muslims and Hispanic immigrants as well as elites and experts. These concepts are reiterated through the ritual chants, framing and repetition and call and response with his audience in rallies, as well as through provocative tweets.

Trump, while seen only through the lens of American politics seems extreme but fits an archetype elsewhere. Silvio Berlusconi is one such figure; in his political outlook and intermingling of personal business and governance and in method. Another is the late Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, albeit with a very different political philosophy. Chavez scorned the elites of Venezuela; was dismissed and not taken seriously by the those in political power; and appealed directly via social media to the masses of Venezuelans who had felt left out by the political and cultural elites. He went on to become a popular leader, much to the disbelief and frustration of policymakers and business leaders within Venezuela and the Bush administration. Like Trump, Berlusconi and Chavez circumvented the traditional path to political power for their own gain.

As scholars such as Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) explain, Trump, despite his outrageous behavior and speech, is also a manifestation of a much larger

and growing movement towards national populism that is not limited to the United States but increasingly playing a larger role in political discourse in Europe and elsewhere around the globe. These national populist movements reject political orthodoxy and range in a spectrum from the far right to the far left. While these movements are diametrically opposed to one another in some areas (abhorrence/acceptance of fascism) they overlap in others (distrust of political elites, free trade). Trump clearly inhabits the rightwing in this spectrum, and his political discourse matches his policies to a significant degree.

The nature of this growing tribalism is different in varying degrees depending on each region or nation's unique culture and historical background, however, there are many similarities. Chua (2018) demonstrates that a need to belong to a tribe is strong across cultures and societies. This tribal affiliation is usually ethnic in character but in Trump's case not entirely so, due to the surprising fact that numbers of ethnic minorities supported him for President.

Amy Chua explains the political tribalism that Trump has effectively tapped into:

> *"Today no group in America feels culturally dominant. Every group feels attacked, pitted against other groups not just for jobs and spoils but for the right to define the nation's identity. In these conditions, democracy devolves into zero-sum group competition—pure political tribalism."* (Chua, 2018, pg. 177)

For these groups, the ingroup bonds outweigh considered, reasoned debate when choosing political leaders. Trump has most obviously personified this phenomenon in America, but the movement is in fact larger, and growing rather than diminishing. Liberal-democratic cheerleaders such as Thomas Friedman or Francis Fukuyama once predicted in the 'end of history' during the 1990s. Contrary to their predictions however, the world is *not* inevitably being pulled towards more liberal democratic values of a non-tribal, global, free-market community. Both Trump's rhetoric and policies refute the notion of a globally united, democratic and free-market world.

Trump's appeal to ritual, a hatred of elites and immigrants, and simplistic,

black-and-white concepts in his political discourse is applauded by millions of citizens, and others abroad. Autocratic or anti-democratic leaders have swept to power in recent years. This has occurred in countries as diverse as Hungary, Turkey, Poland, the Philippines and Brazil. Powerful political parties that demonize the other and stoke nationalist and isolationist sentiments are now prominent in many more countries such as Austria, the U.K. and even the nation with the most vivid and terrifying history of embracing virulent nationalism—Germany. The leaders of these movements are often praised by Trump—a most glaring example has been his embrace and praise for President Putin of Russia while criticizing Angela Merkel of Germany, reversing a norm which was a bedrock of U.S. foreign policy, among both political parties, for over seventy years.

As outlined by Andersen (2017), Trump's capturing of the media, the Republican nomination, and finally the entire country, came about in a society particularly susceptible to the blending of conspiracy theory, entertainment, 'fake news,' and increasingly sophisticated propaganda that is tailored to our own biases and worldview through social media. The movement away from reason, factual understanding of policy and away from expertise has been growing in recent years (Nichols, 2017). Trump reinforces the growing idea that all 'truth' is relative and only one's political tribe is to be believed.

Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) claim Trump is merely a manifestation of the larger trend towards national populism and political tribalism movements that are gaining momentum across Europe and elsewhere. In their view, Trump is not an anomaly, but rather a member of a broader and growing political movement. This also brings up troubling questions of what a future political leader who uses political speech as a scalpel, as opposed to Trump's sledgehammer, might be able to achieve with regards to authoritarian goals. It is also possible, as some political observers have suggested, that Trump has fallen into a certain authoritarian role to achieve his own narrow self-interest, financial or narcissistic, devoid of any deep, personal political ideology.

Conservative Robert Kagan (2016) wrote an essay (as a warning to the electorate before the 2016 election) which stated that a figure such as Trump was indeed a break from traditional, Republican or conservative candidates

in that Trump claimed that the experts were wrong and that he alone held the answers to the difficult questions of the times. He warned his fellow conservatives that Trump was someone who exhibited fascist behavior.

"Fascist movements, too, had no coherent ideology, no clear set of prescriptions for what ailed society. 'National socialism' was a bundle of contradictions, united chiefly by what, and who, it opposed; fascism in Italy was anti-liberal, anti-democratic, anti-Marxist, anti-capitalist and anti-clerical. Successful fascism was not about policies but about the strongman, the leader (Il Duce, Der Fuhrer), in whom could be entrusted the fate of the nation. Whatever the problem, he could fix it. Whatever the threat, internal or external, he could vanquish it, and it was unnecessary for him to explain how. Today, there is Putinism, which also has nothing to do with belief or policy but is about the tough man who singlehandedly defends his people against all threats, foreign and domestic."

Whether, as Eatwell and Goodwin claim, the Trump movement is merely a form of populism and not authoritarian, or as Kagan and Snyder believe, a much more dangerous mix of kleptocracy and authoritarianism, the almost unwavering support that Trump has within the Republican party has paved his way for achieving new levels of what can be argued as authoritarian and anti-democratic behavior. Between the two schools, Kagan and Snyder's view of a more dangerous trend towards authoritarianism seems to hold sway. Trump's intermingling of business interests with governing, his direct threatening of opponents and political leaders through his Twitter account, his circumventing congress, ignoring subpoenas, asking law enforcement to carry out personal vendettas against opponents, praising dictators and threatening decades-long allies, cajoling foreign leaders to provide information that would be beneficial for his reelection campaign, clearly threatens democracy and the rule of law. Additionally, Trump hinted that that second Amendment fans 'do something' about his opponent during a national election. Trump later claimed to be merely joking.[11] Trump's multiple Russian contacts, his refusal to make his tax returns public and even removing notes from closed-door meetings with President Vladimir Putin would have been inconceivable

under a previous administration, Democratic or Republican.

This list of authoritarian behavior continues to grow over the months and years of Trump's presidency. The public either supports Trump or succumbs to a sort of numbness that sets in due to the sheer volume of unethical and potentially criminal behavior that to date has imprisoned allies and underlings, but not Trump nor any other member of his family. As he said himself, the President "could shoot somebody on fifth avenue and get away with it.[12]" None of this would have been acceptable by a candidate from either political party, let alone a President, before Trump.

Conclusion

Speech matters. What leaders say on a stage or through tweets often translates into action, either on the part of the speaker and their policies, or by their followers. The implications of their words can result in direct impacts on millions of people. A leader who distrusts experts, reasoned debate, or even democracy itself can do real and lasting damage to democracies that may take generations to repair.

The election of Donald Trump upended politics in America as expert opinion was proven wrong when Trump won both the Republican nomination and then the Presidency. The political discourse employed by Trump over the years did not suddenly change and become more reasoned or nuanced once Trump won the presidency but rather continued in its incendiary rhetoric. President Trump's power to persuade millions of his fellow American citizens, through his political discourse, has led to a more polarized society, radically conservative activist judges appointments, and to understaffed and deliberately undermined bureaucracies led by those who have made careers in opposition to the very mission of the government agencies they lead.

With Donald Trump, the warning signs are manifestly present; authoritarian speech in which the 'other' is demonized, simplistic, easy solutions that the leader alone can solve, and the use of ritual employed to solidify the base and create an ingroup in opposition to the rest of the country. Whether Trump is an aberration or a harbinger of things to come remains to

be seen but the damage done to democratic norms is likely to be long-lasting. It is recommended that researchers from a variety of fields within a broad spectrum of disciplines such linguistics and discourse analysis as well as political science, psychology and sociology are needed to document, analyze and present findings on Trump's political discourse and its implications for a wide audience. This work is not merely academic but vital in maintaining a healthy and free society, both within the U.S. and the broader international community.

Notes

1   http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/ (assessed June 6th, 2019)

2   https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-tan-orange-good-genes-bronze-lotion-white-house-a8762041.html

3   A small, random sample of Trump's political discourse (albeit not statistically conclusive) by the researcher showed his language to be at a sixth-grade level as opposed to fourth-grade level as cited above, using the same Flesch-Kincaid algorithm, however the basic premise holds that the language is simplistic linguistically when comparing with previous presidents' discourse.

4   https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/01/trump-cog-decline/548759/

5   Trump, upset at Mathis' resignation letter, tweeted negatively about the general on December 24th 2018: *"… We are substantially subsidizing the Militaries of many VERY rich countries all over the world, while at the same time these countries take total advantage of the U.S., and our TAXPAYERS, on Trade. General Mattis did not see this as a problem. I DO, and it is being fixed!"*

6   https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/17/politics/donald-trump-greenville-rally/index.html?fbclid=IwAR182qnzNBFq1CppEthjkWrQNCK2b_TbpnKcnizD4lR0tAJUQR9DmI--5WA

7   https://time.com/5390792/plaid-shirt-guy-speaks-out-trump-rally/

8   Another interesting, and disruptive aspect of the Trump phenomenon is that fact that while remains deeply unpopular with most of the country, he enjoys incredibly high poll numbers within his own party, approximately 89% as of June 16th, 2019. (https://news.gallup.com/poll/203198/presidential-approval-ratings-donald-trump.aspx)

9   The New York Times in depth reporting cast doubt on Trump's claim to be a successful largely self-made businessman by demonstrating the hundreds of millions

of dollars Trump inherited from his father, developer Fred Trump. (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/.../donald-trump-tax-schemes-fred-trump.htm)

10　https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vpdt7omPoa0

11　https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/09/trump-gun-owners-clinton-judges-second-amendment

12　https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/03/14/if-trump-shot-someone-dead-fifth-avenue-many-supporters-would-call-his-murder-trial-biased/?utm_term=.67695ab7ec7e

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