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PERSUASION, COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY IN US PRESIDENTIAL VICTORY SPEECHES *A COMPARATIVE CRITICAL REVIEW OF BARACK OBAMA'S 2008 AND DONALD TRUMP'S 2024 VICTORY SPEECHES*

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ABSTRACT
This article reviews two studies on the language of persuasion in Barack Obama's 2008 and Donald Trump's 2024 presidential victory speeches. It examines how each study explains the use of language to create a sense of belonging and present the election result as a mandate to lead. The review draws on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which connects the words used in a speech, the way the speech reaches its audiences and the wider political context. The study of Obama's speech focuses on repetition, collective pronouns and recurring themes. It shows how Obama presents the victory as a shared achievement and invites citizens to take part in the work ahead. The study of Trump's speech examines pronouns, repetition, metaphors and expressions of commitment in selected passages. It shows how Trump presents his electoral victory as an opportunity for national renewal and gives his political movement a central role in that effort. The review finds that both speakers use collective language to support their claims to leadership. The two studies differ in the material they examine and the linguistic features they emphasise. These differences limit what can be concluded about each speaker's use of persuasion across the full speech.
Keywords*: critical discourse analysis, political persuasion, collective identity, political legitimacy, presidential victory speeches*

1. INTRODUCTION

A presidential victory speech gives an elected leader an opportunity to explain what the election result means and what the public can expect from the next administration. In the same speech, the winner may thank supporters, address people who voted for another candidate and describe the work ahead. Each of these tasks involves choices about language. A speaker who uses the word *we*, for example, may be referring to campaign workers, party supporters or the country as a whole. The meaning can change within the same speech. Examining those changes helps explain how a political leader takes an electoral victory and presents it as a shared achievement or a mandate to act (Charteris-Black, 2018).

This article reviews two studies of US presidential victory speeches. Alweldi (2024) examines Barack Obama's speech following the 2008 election, focusing on repetition and the main themes that organise the speech. Muneeb et al. (2025) examine Donald Trump's speech following the 2024 election, paying attention to pronouns, repetition, metaphors and expressions of commitment in selected passages. The two studies offer a basis for comparing how political leaders use language to define whom they represent and explain why their leadership deserves public support. In this article, *collective identity* means the sense of belonging to a group that a speaker creates through language. *Political legitimacy* refers to how the speaker presents the right to lead as justified by the election result and the relationship between the leader and the public.

1.1 Research Problem and Gap

Political speech studies can identify features such as repeated phrases, collective pronouns and promises about the future. The research problem is how to connect those features to broader claims about identity and legitimacy. A count of the pronoun *we* can show how often a speaker

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uses it. Identifying the people it refers to requires reading the surrounding sentences. A phrase that appears throughout a speech may connect several themes, while a phrase repeated in one passage may draw attention to a particular promise. In both cases, interpretation depends on what is being said, who is being addressed and where the expression appears.

The two studies leave a specific question open when read together. Alweldi (2024) analyses Obama's speech as a whole but concentrates on repetition and broad themes. Muneeb et al. (2025) examine more types of persuasive language in selected passages from Trump's speech. The first approach helps trace recurring language across a speech. The second allows closer attention to how several linguistic features work together within a passage. Because the studies use different methods, an apparent difference may come from the speakers' language or from the features each researcher chose to examine. This article addresses that gap by applying the same review criteria to both studies.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

1. How do the two studies explain the use of persuasive language to construct collective identity and present political leadership as legitimate?

The first objective is to compare how the studies connect linguistic choices with collective identity and political legitimacy.

2. How do differences in the material examined and the analytical methods used affect the conclusions that can be drawn from the two studies?

The second objective is to evaluate the strengths and limitations of each study's evidence and its use of Fairclough's framework.

1.3 Scope of the Review

The two published studies provide the material for this review. The discussion considers what their evidence supports about the speeches and identifies where additional evidence would be needed. It focuses on the published interpretations of the two addresses and makes no general claim about the speakers' language across other occasions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Political Persuasion in Victory Speeches

Political persuasion involves using language to encourage people to accept a particular account of events or support a course of action. In an election campaign, candidates ask people to vote for them. Once the result is known, the winner faces a different task. The victory speech gives the leader a chance to explain what the result represents, recognise the people who contributed to it and describe what the next administration intends to do. A speaker can present the same result as an endorsement of a policy, a call for national unity or a demand for political change. Each interpretation gives the audience a different reason to support the incoming government.

Charteris-Black (2018) explains how linguistic choices such as metaphor help speakers give political events a particular meaning. Describing a victory as the start of a journey invites listeners to imagine a shared destination and a series of steps towards it. A metaphor of repair suggests that something has been damaged and needs to be restored. Repetition can connect several parts of a speech through a recurring phrase. Expressions such as *will* and *must* can present future action as a commitment or an obligation. The interpretation of each device depends on the passage in which it appears.

Persuasion can also depend on the order of ideas. A speech may describe a problem before it offers a promise, giving listeners a reason to view the promise as a response to that problem. A speaker may also recall past achievements before asking people to contribute to future work. Such patterns matter because individual words rarely carry the entire argument. A close reading considers the sequence of the passage and shows how its parts work together.

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2.2 Collective Identity and Political Legitimacy

Collective identity concerns how a speaker presents people as members of a group. Pronouns such as *we*, *us* and *our* can help create this sense of belonging. The group they refer to can change as the speech develops. When a leader thanks volunteers, *we* may refer to the campaign team. When the leader speaks about challenges facing the country, the same word may refer to citizens more broadly. An analysis of collective identity therefore asks who is included at each point and what the speaker expects that group to do. Bramley (2001) shows how shifts in pronouns help politicians construct identities for themselves and others in political interviews. The same question about shifting group membership guides the reading of the victory speeches here.

Political legitimacy in this review concerns how a speaker presents the exercise of political authority as justified. A victory speech can connect the right to lead with the choice made by voters. It can also give that choice a specific interpretation. When a speaker describes the election result as a demand for renewal, the wording links the victory to a proposed direction for government. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines how that link is made and what assumptions about the electorate support it (Fairclough, 1992). The analysis concerns the reasons the speaker offers for accepting political authority. Questions about the formal basis of that authority fall outside the review. Van Leeuwen (2007) identifies shared values, practical goals and narratives as ways of justifying action through language.

Alweldi (2024) examines how repetition and collective language in Obama's speech contribute to a sense of shared achievement. Muneeb et al. (2025) interpret persuasive devices in Trump's speech in relation to populism, focusing on how the speech connects the winning movement to a promise of national renewal. These interpretations give the review a common question. What evidence shows whom each speaker brings into the collective and how membership in that group supports a claim to leadership?

2.3 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Fairclough (1992) treats discourse as text, discursive practice and social practice. These dimensions connect specific language choices to the circumstances in which a speech is produced, circulated and understood.

The first dimension, text, examines the words and structure of the speech. This review considers how the two studies analyse pronouns, repetition, metaphors and modality. Modality refers to how language expresses ideas such as certainty, possibility, commitment or obligation. A statement about what a government *will* do can express a promise, while a statement about what citizens *must* do can assign them a responsibility. The subject of the sentence matters because it tells the reader who makes the commitment or bears the responsibility.

The second dimension, discursive practice, examines how a text is produced, distributed and interpreted. A victory speech addresses the people present at the event and may reach others through broadcasts, news reports and online recordings. A study may also consider how the speech draws on earlier campaign messages, familiar slogans or other public texts. Fairclough (1992) uses the concept of intertextuality to examine such relationships. Comparing the wording of the speech with an earlier campaign message can show how a familiar expression takes on a new purpose after an election.

The third dimension, social practice, places the speech in its wider political and social context. It asks how language draws on or reinforces ideas about power, national belonging and the authority to govern. A speech may present change as the responsibility of citizens across party lines or give a particular political movement the main role in achieving it. The interpretation needs to connect that wider claim to passages and explain why their wording supports it.

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2.4 Application to the Two Studies

The review applies the same three questions to both studies. It asks what language each study identifies, what it establishes about the occasion or circulation of the speech, and how it connects those observations to claims about collective identity and political legitimacy. The three dimensions also help identify gaps in the evidence. A study can explain how a promise is expressed and connect it to a broader political idea even when it has limited information about how that promise was reported or received.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Selection of Studies

This article uses a comparative qualitative review to examine two published studies of US presidential victory speeches. The unit of analysis is each published study. The review examines how its authors selected speech material, analysed persuasive language and used their findings to make claims about collective identity and political legitimacy. Examples from the speeches are considered as evidence presented by the authors.

The two studies were purposively selected because they formed the basis of the original assignment, examined the same type of political speech and drew on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. Alweldi (2024) studied Barack Obama's 2008 victory speech, with particular attention to repetition and the main themes. Muneeb et al. (2025) studied Donald Trump's 2024 victory speech, examining a wider range of persuasive devices in selected passages. The shared genre and theoretical framework provide a basis for comparison. The differences in the material and linguistic features examined are part of what the review evaluates.

3.2 Procedure for Reviewing the Studies

The comparative review proceeds in three main steps. First, it examines each study individually. It considers the research problem, the alignment of the research questions with the objectives, the source and extent of the speech material, and the method used to analyse it. This step establishes what each study set out to investigate and what evidence it used to answer its questions.

Second, the review uses Fairclough's (1992) dimensions to assess the evidence presented in each study. At the textual level, it examines how the authors explain features such as repetition and pronoun use in the passages they discuss. At the level of discursive practice, it considers what the authors establish about the occasion, the circulation of the speech and its links to earlier political messages. At the level of social practice, it assesses how the authors connect the language to wider claims about belonging, political authority and the meaning of the election result.

Third, the review compares the studies using the same criteria. It asks whether each interpretation is supported by examples, whether the examples justify a conclusion about a particular passage or the speech as a whole, and whether an apparent difference may arise from the methods used. A pronoun count reported by one study can describe usage in its material. Comparing frequencies across the two speeches would require equivalent counts based on common rules. The review therefore uses reported counts to explain the scope of each study's evidence and compares interpretations where the studies address related features.

3.3 Scope and Limitations

The review is limited to the two selected publications. It considers statements about audience response according to the evidence each study provides. A passage can show how a speaker invites listeners to identify with a group. Determining whether listeners accepted that invitation would require direct evidence of their responses. The years of the two speeches also differ, so

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a common national setting alone gives limited grounds for explaining why the speakers chose particular forms of language.

4. CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE TWO STUDIES

4.1 Barack Obama's 2008 Victory Speech

4.1.1 Research Problem and Evidence

Alweldi (2024) asks how Barack Obama uses language in his 2008 victory speech to gain the audience's attention and encourage confidence in his leadership. The study examines two aspects of the speech. First, it identifies the main themes that give the speech its overall meaning. Second, it examines repetition at the level of individual words and phrases. These choices suit a study of persuasion because they connect recurring language to the larger message Obama presents about the election. The question about audience confidence, however, goes beyond what a speech transcript can establish on its own.

The use of the full speech gives Alweldi (2024) a basis for tracing expressions across different parts of the address. A recurring phrase may serve one purpose when the speaker looks back at the campaign and another when he speaks about the country's future. Reading the passages in sequence helps explain these changes. The study's focus on repetition also gives it a clear analytical boundary. Its findings are strongest when they explain how recurring language contributes to the message of the speech. A broader account of Obama's persuasive style would require examination of other features, including metaphor, direct address and expressions of commitment.

4.1.2 Repetition and Collective Identity

Alweldi (2024, Table 2) records 47 uses of *we*, 35 uses of *our* and 27 uses of *I*. These counts show that the speech often uses language that refers to a group. Their analytical value depends on how the words are used in particular passages. A reference to *our* during an account of the campaign can identify a narrower group than a reference to *our* during a discussion of national responsibilities. The account of inclusion would be more precise if the study identified the group referred to in each example and traced where that group changes.

The discussion of “Yes, we can” gives a clearer example of how repetition contributes to collective identity. Alweldi (2024) connects the phrase to Obama's account of changes in American public life, including women's struggle for voting rights. Repeating the phrase after references to past struggles links the possibility of future progress to actions taken by earlier generations. The phrase gives listeners a role in the story Obama tells about the country. Within that account, the election becomes one event in a longer history of people working together to bring about change. The archived transcript places the refrain alongside examples from American history, including the struggle for women’s voting rights (Obama, 2008).

The pronoun counts and the analysis of the repeated phrase serve different purposes. The counts tell the reader that plural forms recur. The discussion of individual passages explains how a familiar expression gathers meaning from the events that precede it. An account of repetition could bring those two forms of evidence together by showing where repeated expressions occur and how they connect neighbouring passages.

4.1.3 Political Legitimacy and the Limits of the Interpretation

Alweldi's (2024) examples also provide a basis for interpreting how Obama presents his authority to lead. In one passage, he gives the audience credit for the victory. In another, he calls on people to take responsibility for the work ahead. Read together, these passages connect his leadership to the contribution of voters and to their continued participation. The speech can therefore recognise the authority that comes from winning an election while placing citizens at the centre of the account of how that victory was achieved.

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Alweldi (2024) goes further by claiming that the language met the audience's emotional needs and had a strong effect on particular groups. The examples support an interpretation of how the speech appeals to hope and belonging. Verifying an effect on listeners would require evidence from those listeners. Applying Fairclough's (1992) model, the study offers its clearest evidence at the textual level. It also connects the speech to wider social themes such as political participation. Its treatment of discursive practice would be fuller if it examined how the speech was circulated, presented by the media or interpreted by different audiences.

4.2 Donald Trump's 2024 Victory Speech

4.2.1 Research Problem and Selection of Passages

Muneeb et al. (2025) examine how Donald Trump uses persuasive language to construct collective identity, express a populist political outlook and present his leadership as legitimate. Their research questions cover several linguistic features and ask how they connect to wider political meanings. The authors draw on a transcript and concentrate on passages selected for their relevance to the research aims. These include passages about national unity, future commitments and collective identity. This method allows them to examine how several persuasive devices work together in the same part of the speech.

Purposeful selection is reasonable for a qualitative study interested in how a particular expression works. It provides less evidence for a claim that a pattern runs throughout the speech. Selecting passages that contain collective pronouns makes it possible to examine how Trump constructs belonging in those passages. To judge how consistently he uses inclusive language across the address, a reader would need examples from other parts of the speech as well. Showing how passages were selected and examining examples that complicate the main interpretation would make broader claims easier to assess.

4.2.2 Persuasive Language and Political Legitimacy

Muneeb et al. (2025) discuss the phrase “a golden age” as a metaphor that presents the country's future in hopeful terms. The phrase gives the election result a meaning beyond the immediate victory. It invites listeners to see the incoming administration as the beginning of a period of national improvement. The authors also examine modal verbs such as *will*, which can express commitment to a future course of action. The metaphor offers a picture of what the future could look like, while the language of commitment presents the speaker as prepared to act. Together, these features help explain how the speech connects the election result to a claim about the leadership the country needs. In the archived transcript, Trump describes the coming period as “the golden age of America” (Trump, 2024).

The authors link the speech to populism through the way it presents national renewal and sets competing accounts of the country's condition against each other. This interpretation is strongest where the analysis identifies who is included in a collective expression, whose actions are credited and who is held responsible for the problems described. A hopeful metaphor or the use of *we* can occur in many kinds of political discourse. The case for a populist reading therefore depends on how such expressions work with the speech's wider account of the people, the political movement and the leader's authority. Mudde (2004) defines populism through a moral division between the people and an elite. Under that definition, the interpretation depends on evidence that the speech constructs both sides of that division.

4.2.3 Media Circulation and the Limits of the Interpretation

Muneeb et al. (2025) discuss how television and digital media can extend the reach of the speech. They also relate its themes to Trump's earlier campaign discourse. A claim about continuity with the campaign can be examined by comparing particular phrases or themes across texts. A claim that wider circulation increased persuasion requires evidence of how the speech was reported, shared or received. The study's discussion of circulation helps explain

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how the message could reach more people. The textual examples give firmer grounds for evaluating how the speech presents Trump's political authority.

5. COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

5.1 How the Two Speeches Create a Sense of Belonging

Both studies show that collective language helps candidates explain who shares in an election victory. Alweldi (2024) examines how Barack Obama gives voters credit for the result and invites them to take part in the work ahead. Muneeb et al. (2025) examine how Donald Trump connects the success of his political movement to a promise of national renewal. In both accounts, collective identity gives the election a meaning that extends beyond the winning candidate. The difference lies in how each speaker describes the role of the people who share in that victory.

In Alweldi's (2024) analysis, Obama's repeated phrase “Yes, we can” connects election night to earlier struggles for political participation. The examples concerning women's voting rights show how the speech brings people from different periods into a shared account of political change. The collective *we* can therefore reach beyond the people who worked on the campaign or voted for Obama. It can also refer to people whose earlier actions made wider participation possible. By giving citizens a role in that history, the speech invites them to see themselves as participants in its next stage.

In the passages discussed by Muneeb et al. (2025), Trump links the people who supported his movement to a wider vision of the country's future. The movement's success becomes part of the explanation for why national renewal is now possible. A passage can give supporters a special role in achieving victory while extending the promised benefits to the country as a whole. Reading those references in context helps distinguish the people credited with bringing about change from the people presented as benefiting from it.

These examples show why calling a pronoun inclusive requires an explanation of whom it includes. A reference to a campaign can express solidarity within that team. A reference to the country can invite a broader audience to share in a goal. A shift between the two can also let a speaker carry the enthusiasm associated with a campaign into a statement about national priorities. A study can examine that shift by following who is named immediately before the pronoun and which actions the speaker assigns to the group.

5.2 How the Two Speeches Present Leadership as Legitimate

The reviewed studies suggest that both speeches use the election result to justify a claim to leadership. Alweldi's (2024) examples show Obama sharing credit for the victory and calling on citizens to continue contributing after the election. The public appears as a source of his authority and as a participant in the work ahead. The speech presents leadership as a responsibility that follows from what voters have achieved together.

Muneeb et al. (2025) give more attention to how the winner presents his capacity to deliver change. Their discussion of Trump's promise of “a golden age” shows how the speech connects the victory to an expected period of improvement. Commitments about future action help position the leader and the incoming administration as responsible for delivering that improvement. The persuasive appeal depends in part on listeners accepting the idea that the result authorised the direction the speaker proposes.

The interpretations can be brought together by asking how each speech distributes credit and responsibility. Alweldi (2024) highlights passages that give citizens credit for past achievements and a role in future progress. Muneeb et al. (2025) highlight passages that credit a political movement and emphasise the incoming leader's commitment to national renewal. These emphases also reflect the original studies' priorities. Alweldi's focus on repeated

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collective expressions brings participation into view. Muneeb et al.'s attention to metaphor and modality makes promises about leadership more visible.

5.3 What the Different Methods Allow Us to Compare

The studies share a theoretical framework, but their methods produce different kinds of evidence. Alweldi (2024) reports how often selected words and pronouns appear in Obama's speech. Muneeb et al. (2025) focus on passages chosen for their relevance to persuasion and ideology. A count from the first study and an example from the second can both inform the comparison when each is used to answer a question it can support.

The 47 occurrences of *we* reported by Alweldi (2024, Table 2) show that the word recurs in the version of Obama's speech examined. A selected passage containing *we* in the Trump study can show how the pronoun works in that passage. A claim that one speaker uses *we* more frequently would require counts for both speeches based on the same rules and adjusted for speech length. Determining which speech uses it more often to include the wider public would also require a consistent way to identify whom it refers to in each occurrence.

The studies give different levels of attention to discursive practice. Alweldi (2024) concentrates on the speech text and its social meaning. Muneeb et al. (2025) give more attention to media circulation and links with earlier campaign discourse. Fairclough's (1992) framework helps clarify what evidence belongs to each part of the analysis. A transcript can show how a speaker frames the victory. A study of news coverage can establish which parts of the speech were selected and how they were presented. Evidence from listeners can help explain how different groups interpreted the message.

5.4 What the Comparison Shows About Victory Speeches

The studies help explain how a victory speech connects three moments. The speaker accounts for the campaign and the people who contributed to it, assigns a political meaning to the result and sets expectations for the period ahead. Each moment changes what collective language can do. A reference to a shared past can recognise people's contributions. A reference to the result can present the support of those people as grounds for political authority. A reference to the future can invite participation or set out what the incoming administration promises to deliver. Both speakers must address a public that extends beyond the coalition that helped them win. The passages reviewed show why the words that connect these two audiences deserve particular attention. Credit can stay with a specific group even when a promise is addressed to the whole country. A researcher can explain how this works by tracking who acts in each part of the speech, who is thanked for taking action and who is expected to benefit.

5.5 How the Evidence Supports Claims About Persuasion

A researcher can show that a speech offers listeners a reason to trust a leader by analysing the words used and the argument they form. Showing that listeners came to trust the leader because of the speech requires evidence about their responses. This matters because a victory speech reaches people with different views of the election. A phrase that gives supporters a sense of shared achievement may carry a different meaning for people who voted for another candidate. Alweldi's (2024) discussion of voting rights illustrates this point. The examples show how Obama repeats a familiar phrase after recalling people who faced barriers to political participation. The position of the phrase supports the interpretation that Obama connects hope for the future with change in the past. Establishing whether particular listeners felt recognised or encouraged would require evidence from those listeners. Researchers could, for example, use interviews to investigate which passages people remember and how they understood them. Such a study would need to account for listeners' prior views about the candidate and the election.

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A related issue arises in the Trump study. If a news report repeats the phrase "a golden age," it can give that part of the speech wider exposure. Its meaning may depend on what the journalist places around it. A headline may foreground the promise, while a longer report may discuss it alongside questions about policy. Applying Fairclough's (1992) model here would involve comparing the speech with actual examples of coverage to see how the same words were presented in different settings.

A future comparison could apply the same procedure to both speeches. The researcher could identify every use of *we* and *our* and record whom each occurrence appears to include. Where the surrounding passage permits more than one reading, the analysis could record that ambiguity. The next step would be to examine who receives credit for the victory, who makes promises and who is asked to act. This would allow direct comparison of how each speaker shifts between the campaign, the winning movement and the country as a whole.

6. CONCLUSION

This article compared two studies of Barack Obama's 2008 and Donald Trump's 2024 presidential victory speeches to examine how persuasive language constructs collective identity and presents political leadership as legitimate. Using Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model, the review considered how each study connected the language of the speech to the setting in which it was delivered and to its wider political meaning.

Both studies show how the speakers used collective language to give the result a meaning beyond the candidate's personal success. In Alweldi's (2024) analysis, Obama used repetition to connect the victory with earlier struggles for political participation. The examples show how he gave citizens credit for the result and invited them to take part in the work ahead. In the passages discussed by Muneeb et al. (2025), Trump linked the success of his political movement to the prospect of national renewal. His use of metaphor and expressions of commitment presented the incoming administration as responsible for delivering that change. These examples show how the speakers justified their claims to leadership by assigning different roles to citizens, supporters and the incoming government.

The comparison also found that the methods shaped what each study could conclude. Alweldi's examination of the full speech made it possible to identify recurring words and phrases across the address. Muneeb et al.'s examination of selected passages made it possible to explain how several persuasive devices worked together in context. A direct comparison of how often the speakers used particular devices or whom they included when they said *we* would require the same criteria to be applied to both speeches in full. Claims about audience responses would require evidence of how listeners understood the speeches.

The review shows why identifying a persuasive device is the first step in analysing political discourse. To explain what collective language does in a victory speech, the researcher must identify whom the speaker includes, who receives credit for the result and who is expected to act after the election. These details explain how a speech turns electoral success into a public claim about the authority and responsibilities of leadership.

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