

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump's *Us vs. Them* Rhetoric

Nathalie Zimmer, Paula Alice Kapp, Julia Keßboom, Savina Pepi, Rahel Zakarias

This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Donald Trump's campaign speech from September 29, 2024, in Pennsylvania, focusing on his *Us vs. Them* rhetoric. To accomplish this, the analysis uses Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to analyze how Trump uses language to create ideological polarization, to further divide his supporters and opponents. The results show that Trump continuously presents his followers as hardworking, patriotic people who are victims of an incompetent and corrupt system. On the other hand, he characterizes elites, immigrants, and political opponents as dangers to the stability and national identity of the United States. To further accentuate differences between both groups, his discourse deliberately uses various rhetorical devices, pronouns, emotional appeals, and fear-based narratives. The speech presents Trump as a savior, who will bring prosperity and order back to the American people, while simultaneously accusing and threatening his opponents and people who are against him. Through crisis narratives and exclusionary language, he fosters a sense of urgency and collective identity amongst his audience. This analysis emphasizes the power of political rhetoric in shaping public perception, reinforcing social division, and mobilizing support through discursive strategies that appeal to emotions, fears, and perceived grievances.