

# HATE SPEECH AS A CONFLICT COMMUNICATION TOOL: THE CASE OF DONALD TRUMP

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## Abstract

Hate speech is a crucial tool in Trump's conflict communication, which helped him win the 2024 presidential election. This study aims to investigate hate speech in Trump's political discourse, focusing on the role and functions of hate speech as a conflict communication tool. The research demonstrates that hate rhetoric in Trump's political discourse aimed at positioning himself as the best choice and, simultaneously, forming an extremely negative image of his political opponents. The expression of Trump's hate speech encompasses negative stereotypical and non-typical nominations within the threat domain which are targeted at three main addressees: the presidential candidate Kamala Harris, then President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party.

## Keywords

conflict communication, hate speech, nominations, political discourse, political rhetoric

## 1 Introduction

Since the start of the presidential campaign in 2024, the USA has been in the political and geopolitical spotlight. The diversity of this campaign demonstrated polarization within the American society and the global powers, ranging from Europe, Middle East to Latin America and Asia (Novus/Gallup, 2024). The Republican candidate Donald Trump was supported by the working-class electorate because the US economic recovery and tax cuts were the key issues he promised to work on. Although Trump was not an attractive president for the majority of American society, then President Joe Biden's age and health-related issues and the financial support to Ukraine positioned him as an incapable and even non-beneficial candidate. However, the situation did not change after replacing Biden with Vice President Kamala Harris. The majority of European countries, such as Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Spain, France, Britain and Italy (YouGov, 2024) were in favour of the Democratic candidate due to the geopolitical situation in the world and the threat of Trump's election to the presidential position leading to US withdrawal from NATO and Ukraine funding cut.

Trump has high personal and political ambitions; therefore, he has been striving to be re-elected as the US president. Consequently, he carried out a harsh conflict communication aimed at his political competitors – firstly, at Biden, later at Harris. Hate speech is a crucial tool in Trump's conflict communication

and the electoral results show that it was powerful and successful. Thus, hate speech in Trump's political discourse is the object of this research. Moreover, this article aims to analyse the role and functions of hate speech as a conflict communication tool. The transcript of Trump's debate with Harris (ABC News, 2024), 10 September 2024, serves as the research material because it explicitly demonstrates hate in Trump's political rhetoric aimed at positioning himself as the best choice and, simultaneously, forming an extremely negative image of his political competitors – Harris, Biden and the Democratic Party.

Hate speech has become a popular research topic within the scope of different fields, such as politics, social media, migration, interpersonal relations, and so forth. The most recent studies of hate speech in political discourse focus on the research into hate speech aimed at UK MPs (Agarwal et al., 2021); the expression of hate speech targeted at Muslims and immigrants in Trump's political discourse (Rabab'ah et al., 2024), the significance of understanding emotions in hate speech within the frame of political discourse (Alcántara-Plá, 2024), the language models enabling detection of hate speech (Oliveira et al., 2024), the expression of hate speech in political discourse in various countries, for example, Poland (Dawidczyk & Jurczak, 2023), Germany (Weissenbacher & Kruschwitz, 2024), Pakistan (Akbar & Safdar, 2024), Catalonia (Berdón Prieto et al., 2023), and India (Jafri et al., 2024).

Conflict communication in political discourse is a powerful tool for politicians and political leaders to implicitly or explicitly achieve the intended aims. Although there are numerous studies on conflict and communication as individual concepts, research into conflict communication is rather scarce. The significance of conflict communication within the scope of political discourse has been extensively analysed by Linkevičiūtė (2011, 2013, 2019, 2021), and a discourse analytical perspective on conflict talk has been discussed within the framework of argument (Leung, 2002). However, the role of hate speech as a conflict communication tool has not been analysed yet, which marks the novelty and significance of this research.

This paper addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What types and forms of hate speech are prevalent in Trump's political rhetoric?
- (2) Who are the targets of Trump's hate speech; what is the role of hate speech in Trump's political discourse?

The theoretical and methodological framework of this research is grounded in the concepts of political discourse, conflict communication, the concept of hate speech, and linguistic markers of hate speech in conflict communication, which are discussed in the next section.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Conflict communication in political discourse

Conflict communication is inseparable from political discourse since it is the most powerful tool enabling politicians to achieve their intended aims, ranging from winning elections to lobbying beneficial personal or political goals. Furthermore, conflict communication plays a significant role in image formation; thus, it is often exploited to position competitors as negative, politically uneducated, non-beneficial and incompetent political figures.

Conflict communication is frequently built upon binary oppositions, drawing a clear distinction between *ingroup* and *outgroup*, terms introduced and defined by van Dijk (1995). The image of *ingroup* is always positive and, according to van Dijk (1995), is based on detailed description, emphasis, argumentative support, impression management, assertion, etc. Contrary to it, the *outgroup* is negatively positioned applying the following strategies: de-emphasis, denial, understatement, marginalization, etc. and based on the narrative, having no argumentative support. Therefore, politicians always associate themselves with the *ingroup* and treat their opponents as the representatives of the *outgroup*. Such distinction, based on the superiority of *ingroup*, leads to the emergence of conflict communication.

Littlejohn (1999) defines conflict in political discourse as involving at least two parties, having mutually unobtainable goals, different values and approaches. According to the scholar, conflict finishes when both parties are satisfied with the final result, expressed either in the form of winning or losing. Jorgensen and Phillips (2008) point out that conflict communication in political discourse contributes to eliminating alternative ways of the world perception and implies the idea that there exists a single possible approach.

The negative image formation in conflict communication is not only based on binary oppositions, focusing on positive *ingroup* and negative *outgroup* connotations. Conflict communication, aimed at political opponents, is also based on placing the blame (Sillars, 1982). This strategy is explicitly exploited when the political leader, who aims at being elected or re-elected, blames the opponent for detrimental political decisions, violating moral and ideological values, being corrupt or incompetent. Consequently, the political leader implicitly or explicitly positions himself/herself as a contrast to the competitor and thus implies the idea that he/she is the only right candidate for the position. The form of its expression – implicit or explicit, largely depends on the politician's personality, moral values, intended aims, political party and ideology. The research material demonstrates explicit and overt expression of hate speech in Trump's political discourse.

## 2.2 Hate speech

The popularity of the term *hate speech* has led to the coinage of numerous definitions and areas of application. First, hate speech, as a term, was introduced in the 1980s by law scholars in the USA and used to refer to communication against historically oppressed groups in terms of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2004; Matsuda, 1989; Sponholz, 2023; Stone, 1994). The United Nations define hate speech as “any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor” (United Nations, n.d.).

Hate speech in political discourse is mainly formed on a personal or group basis, putting a negative emphasis on the person's or group's personal, political or ideological identity. The role of hate speech in politics is not only to form an intended negative image of the opponent; according to Piazza (2020), it also fuels domestic terrorism, as in Trump's cases in 2016 and 2021. The main platform for expressing hate speech is social media due to anonymity in the form of fake accounts, nicknames, and so forth. However, hate speech might also be expressed offline, in oral communication which is highly exploited by politicians and political leaders to achieve their intended aims. Brown (2008, 2017) states that the main aim of hate speech is to evoke hostility between *us* and *them*. This strategy might be used by politicians to position themselves as the representatives of the *ingroup* and to counterpose this image with their political opponents' as belonging to the *outgroup*. Rabab'ha et al. (2024) point out that politicians make use of hate speech and different rhetorical strategies on an emotional level in order to influence the preferences and attitudes of their target audience. Trump is not an exception; he has been widely exploiting hate speech in his presidential campaigns since 2016. His political rhetoric, demonstrating hate, is aimed at political competitors and is formed upon shaping inferiority (Sponholz, 2018), “referring to the particular expressions of hatred against particular (groups of) people in particular contexts” (Howard, 2019, p. 95), incitement to hatred, contempt and discrimination, expressions of insult, ridicule, slander (Sponholz, 2023).

The expression of hate speech heavily relies on stereotypes and prejudices. Some scholars (Balsiūnaitė, 2016) identify and analyse them individually, others (Ermida, 2023) blend prejudices with stereotypes within the scope of hate speech and claim that prejudice is a stereotypical opinion about a specific group of people and is aimed at causing a harmful effect. The role and effect of Trump's hate speech aimed at his political opponents will be discussed further.

### 3 Methodology

The transcript of a full presidential debate between President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris (10 September 2024) serves as the research material. The material has been manually collected from the official media website of ABC News (US). The research focuses on the identification of stereotypical and non-typical nominations prevalent in Trump's hate speech aimed at his political opponent Harris. Moreover, the expression of Trump's hate speech targeted at then President Biden and the Democrats is also discussed in this study. Thus, the research data comprises only negative instances of language use without references to neutral or positive language targeted at his political opponents. Further, the role and functions of the identified nominations demonstrating hate in Trump's political rhetoric have been analysed. Furthermore, the research is based on the categorisation of particular political figures: first, hateful nominations formed by Trump and targeted at his present competitor Harris have been identified and analysed; second, the nominations aimed at the Trump's former political opponent Biden have been identified and discussed. Finally, the study analyses nominations, expressing hateful rhetoric directed at the competing political party – the Democrats.

In this research, the definition of hate speech is formed on the assumption that its underlying role encompasses shaping human inferiority and may intentionally activate contradictions between groups of people (Sponholz, 2018, 2023). Stereotypical nominations in political discourse are shaped upon the most prevalent political stereotypes and stereotyping political candidates on the basis of social group of the voters (Portmann, 2022), while non-typical nominations are original, non-recurring, targeted at a single, specific person, situation or context, for example nominations related to President Joe Biden's health issues. The analysis of nominations in conflict communication is immensely significant because they are used to manipulate the target audience (Bolinger, 1973). The research comprises the identification and analysis of linguistic and rhetorical markers of hate speech as tools of Trump's conflict communication. The study focuses on the following linguistic markers: derogatory terms, stereotypes, negative connotations and insulting language. Rhetorical markers, the key elements of rhetorical analysis, discussed in this research include sarcasm, moral outrage, inciting hatred towards political opponents and forming their negative image. The critical discourse analysis and political discourse research methods applied in this study enable the identification and analysis of a description system, crucial for shaping nominations. The system includes activity descriptions, norm and value descriptions, and position descriptions (van Dijk, 1995). Furthermore, the identification of the prevalent nominations as integral parts of particular

semantic fields and their analysis has been conducted within the scope of cognitive linguistics. Thus, the research demonstrates a combination of political discourse, political rhetoric and cognitive linguistics.

However, the research might have limitations, such as interpretative subjectivity, limited scope, since the analysis focuses on the transcript of one debate, because only one Trump-Harris presidential debate was organised. Furthermore, the study discusses context-dependent language, serving the role of forming a negative image of the political opponent and manipulating the target audience.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Hate speech as a conflict communication tool in Donald Trump's political discourse

It can be assumed that Trump has had personal and political ambitions to be re-elected to the presidency since the last presidential election that he lost. Therefore, he exploits different tools and means that might enable him to win this battle for power. Hate speech is the prevailing tool in Trump's political rhetoric, targeted at his political opponents – Harris, Biden and the Democratic Party.

#### 4.1.1 Kamala Harris's case

Trump aims at forming a negative image of Kamala Harris; thus, shaping a stereotypical *liar* nomination derived from the *threat* domain:

- (1) *First of all, I have no sales tax. That's an incorrect statement. She knows that.*
- (2) *She's gone to my philosophy. But if she ever got elected, she'd change it. And it will be the end of our country.*
- (3) *Well, there she goes again. It's a lie. I'm not signing a ban. And there's no reason to sign a ban. [...] What she says is an absolute lie.*
- (4) *Excuse me, I have to respond. Another lie. It's another lie. I have been a leader on IVF which is fertilization.*

The *threat* domain embodies a negative Trump's attitude to his political competitor, forms a negative image of Harris and the party she represents, and demonstrates a harsh form of hate speech, exploited as a tool in his conflict communication. In (1), Trump expresses an implied *liar* nomination. He does not explicitly address Harris as a liar, but he implies this idea by claiming that *that's an incorrect statement* and emphasizing his opponent's unscrupulousness

by the statement *she knows that*. Example (2) also implicitly positions Harris as a *liar* and even a cunning politician because she currently pretends to be sticking to Trump's vision and philosophy on producing chips in the USA, *but if she ever got elected, she'd change it*. The *liar* nomination is even intensified by the detrimental consequences of her actions which will lead to the collapse and downfall of the USA. A recurring exploitation of the noun *lie* in (3-4) explicitly and openly assigns Harris a *liar* nomination. An extremely negative image of Trump's political opponent is built upon such sensitive topics as abortion and IVF, since 80% of Americans support the access to IVF (A Civiqs/DailyKos poll, 2024), and 77% treat abortion as a serious issue (The Economist/YouGov poll, 2024). Trump claims that Harris lies about his decisions and plans regarding abortion ban and IVF; thus, forming a counterposition between him and his opponent, and forming a binary opposition where he implicitly grants himself a positive image and contrasts it with a negative image of Harris because a liar cannot be a positive and attractive leader who will work for the welfare of the country. This leads to another nomination – *the destroyer of the USA* in Trump's conflict communication aimed at Harris:

- (5) *She's destroying this country. And if she becomes president, this country doesn't have a chance of success. Not only success. We'll end up being Venezuela on steroids.*
- (6) *She is destroying our country. She has a plan to defund the police. She has a plan to confiscate everybody's gun. She has a plan to not allow fracking in Pennsylvania or anywhere else. That's what her plan is until just recently.*

Positioning Harris as *the destroyer of the USA* might have a serious impact on the US electorate – Trump promises to make America great again and contrasts his plans with the accusation and powerful blame that *she is destroying our country*. According to Trump, his political opponent performs destructive actions in different areas, including economics and security. The majority of the electorate, especially the Republican supporters, are dissatisfied with financial aid to Ukraine (49% according to Pew Research Centre, 2024), fiscal deficit, etc. Moreover, gun confiscation means violating the rights of US citizens and therefore might result in losing part of Harris's supporters.

Trump further makes use of hate speech in forming a negative image of his political competitor and implicitly depicts Harris as being *the wrong candidate*:

- (7) *And just to finish off, she doesn't have a plan. She copied Biden's plan. And it's like four sentences, like run-Spot-run. Four sentences that are just oh, we'll try and lower taxes. She doesn't have a plan. Take a look at her plan. She doesn't have a plan.*

Trump repeatedly emphasizes the phrase *she doesn't have a plan* implying the idea that Harris is not ready to become the president, she does not have any political vision. In (7), hate speech is also built upon sarcasm that Harris's plan consists of four sentences that might be summarized in three words – *run-Spot-run*.

Example (8) demonstrates a non-typical, explicit, direct and extremely negative nomination – *a Marxist*:

- (8) *She's a Marxist. Everybody knows she's a Marxist. Her father's a Marxist professor in economics. And he taught her well.*

The majority of US citizens put a sign of equality between Marxism and Communism, 53% of Americans view Marxist nomination and 67% treat Communist nomination as an insult (The Report on U.S. Attitudes Toward Socialism, Communism, and Collectivism, 2020); therefore, a Marxist nomination is highly disadvantageous for Harris. Trump emphasizes the validity of this nomination by giving references to Harris's background and aims at attracting a bigger part of electorate, especially the wealthy and prosperous target audience. Furthermore, Harris, then Vice President, the representative of the Democratic Party – the party in power, which financially and morally supports Ukraine in Russia's war against it; thus, Trump builds his hate speech on the allusion to Russia, he calls his political opponent *the czar* – the title historically related to Russia and currently, within the context of Russia-Ukraine war, evoking negative connotations. Moreover, Trump intensifies it and makes it even more negative shaping *the border czar* nomination which is extremely insulting for the person who fights against Russia's illegal actions in Ukraine. However, this expression of hate speech has one more aim – Trump wants to evoke negative feelings of the target audience and to accuse Harris of crimes committed by immigrants:

- (9) *I ask, what about all the people that are pouring into our country and killing people? That she allowed to pour in. She was the border czar. Remember that. She was the border czar. She doesn't want to be called the border czar because she's embarrassed by the border.*

The Russian topic is further exploited in Trump's conflict communication targeted at Harris. He assigns her *Putin's favourite* nomination:

- (10) *Putin endorsed her last week. Said I hope she wins. And I think he meant it.*

This nomination should evoke doubts and cognitive dissonance in the heads of the electorate because Harris positions herself as a fighter against the Russian

invasion of Ukraine, but Putin himself supports her and looks forward to her victory in the elections. Moreover, *Putin's favourite* nomination does not only express insult and a pejorative attitude to Harris, it also implicitly states that Harris is a hypocrite, evoking direct associations with the already analysed *liar* nomination. Furthermore, Trump directly accuses Harris of initiating the war in Ukraine and implicitly grants her a *warmonger* nomination:

- (11) [...] *they sent her to negotiate peace before this war started. They sent her in to negotiate with Zelenskyy and Putin. And she did and the war started three days later.*
- (12) *They sent her in to negotiate. As soon as they left Putin did the invasion.*

Although Harris publicly demonstrates her political and personal position against war in Ukraine, the *warmonger* nomination enables Trump to raise doubts in the consciousness of the electorate regarding the integrity and sincerity of Harris. Moreover, in (11-12), Trump repeatedly implies Harris's poor negotiating skills, which are crucial for any leader and further implicitly contrasts and counterposes them with his excellent negotiation skills as he boasts to negotiate with Putin and end the war within 24 hours.

Trump prefers expressing hatred based on binary oppositions – depicting himself as the only beneficial leader while at the same time contrasting his positive actions and intentions with a negative representation of his opponents. Thus, he grants Harris a *corrupt politician* nomination built on the contrast:

- (13) *She said people start leaving. People don't go to her rallies. There's no reason to go. And the people that do go, she's busing them in and paying them to be there. [...] People don't leave my rallies. We have the biggest rallies, the most incredible rallies in the history of politics.*

In (13), Trump counterposes his and Harris's rallies. He focuses on the negative depiction of his opponent which might be even treated as an insult because he concludes that *there's no reason to go* to her rallies and simultaneously positions himself as a strong and attractive candidate, because *people don't leave my rallies*. Furthermore, Trump claims that Harris is a *corrupt politician* because she provides free transport and pays the electorate to come to her rallies. This might lead to the intended conclusion that Harris lacks support from the electorate and is a weaker, less successful candidate than Trump.

The *threat* domain encompasses a variety of threats to the US society and the country itself; thus, Trump nominates Harris as a *danger*:

- (14) *She went out — she went out in Minnesota and wanted to let criminals that killed people, that burned down Minneapolis, she went out and raised money to get them out of jail. She did things that nobody would ever think of.*
- (15) *This is the one that weaponized. Not me. She weaponized. I probably took a bullet to the head because of the things that they say about me. They talk about democracy. I'm a threat to democracy. They're the threat to democracy.*

In (14-15), Trump again expresses hatred, which is based on one of his favourite tools – accusation. He accuses Harris of raising money to release prisoners, weaponizing society, making the USA an insecure country and even of attempting to assassinate him in Pennsylvania, 13 July 2024. In both examples, hate speech is explicitly expressed and directly targeted at Harris. *Danger* nomination, formed in the criminal context, in (14), aims to evoke negative feelings of the electorate and might result in losing its support. The statement *she weaponized* sounds contradictory because earlier in the same debate Trump claimed that *she has a plan to confiscate everybody's gun*, which leads to the conclusion that Trump interprets the same facts differently depending on the intended aim. Example (15) also demonstrates the employment of a sarcastic binary opposition *democracy – the threat to democracy*, where Trump positions himself as a threat based on the political narrative of the Democratic party and instantly contradicts that with the conclusion – they're *the threat to democracy*, where they stand for the Democrats. Furthermore, he emphasizes the detrimental importance of the Democratic discourse because it was the reason for the assassination.

In the area of foreign relations, Trump's hate speech demonstrates *the hater* nomination:

- (16) *She hates Israel. At the same time in her own way she hates the Arab population because the whole place is going to get blown up, Arabs, Jewish people, Israel.*

Here Trump harshly accuses Harris of lacking empathy for nations at war and at the same time forms an intended, negative image of his political opponent as being a cold, merciless and ruthless person. In (16), Trump puts emphasis not only on political, but also on personal features in the expression of hate speech. Trump's discourse demonstrates a wide variety of explicit negative nominations targeted at Harris, such as a *bad, ineffective politician* and an *outsider*:

- (17) *[...] she's been so bad, it's so ridiculous.*
- (18) *So, she just started by saying she's going to do this, she's going to do that, she's going to do all these wonderful things. Why hasn't she done it? She's been there for 3 1/2 years.*

- (19) *Because you believe in things that the American people don't believe in.*

Trump aims at portraying Harris as a bad choice for the USA because she has not introduced promised changes and reforms during her term of service, and she is not familiar with her electorate because she is not aware of the electorate's position and beliefs. The *outsider* nomination is extremely sensitive and relevant for the electorate as it depicts Harris as the representative of the *outgroup*, as a stranger who does not care about society, and might, therefore, result in ruining her reputation and losing votes.

Finally, Trump demonstrates his hatred towards Harris by expressing a pejorative and derogatory attitude towards her. In his opinion, Harris is such an *insignificant person*, politician and opponent that he does not even care about her:

- (20) *I don't care what she is.*

- (21) *Number one, she said she'll go back to congress. She'll never get the vote. It's impossible for her to get the vote. [...] She's not going to get the vote. She can't get the vote. She won't even come close to it. So it's just talk.*

In (21), Trump repeatedly emphasizes the insignificance of Harris as a politician because *she'll never get the vote, she won't even come close to it* and exploits his hate narrative to raise doubts in the consciousness of the electorate if she is worth to be voted for. This example implies the idea that Harris is such an *insignificant person* that Trump does not even treat her as a competitor.

#### 4.1.2 Joe Biden's case

Another person within the scope of Trump's hate speech is President Joe Biden, although he withdrew his candidacy and was replaced by Harris. Nevertheless, Trump puts a sign of equality between Harris and Biden, and nominates her as *Biden*:

- (22) *She is Biden. She's trying to get away from Biden. I don't know the gentleman, she says. She is Biden.*

In (22), Trump aims to form an unbenevolent and derogatory image of Harris by implying the idea that his political opponent is a betrayer who pretended to work in a team with then President Biden, but when she replaced him in the presidential campaign, she turned her back on Biden and even renounced knowing him. Moreover, Trump exploits this sign of equality, which he puts between Harris and Biden, to warn the electorate that Harris is not a new and modern candidate, she is just a replica of Biden. Thus, *Biden* nomination is targeted at

80 % of the electorate (Times/ Siena Poll, 2024), who think that Biden is too old for the presidential position and 57% (Echelon Insights, 2024) of Americans who do not favour his economy policies, and serves as a tool of discouraging the US society from voting for Harris.

Trump grants Biden a *boss* nomination, expressing negative connotations within the scope of an election campaign:

- (23) [...] *and then her I think probably her boss, if you call him a boss, he spends all his time on the beach [...].*

The depersonalized expression *her boss* refers to Biden and thus expresses Trump's disrespectful approach to the current president. Moreover, the pejorative *boss* nomination implies the idea that Biden functions not as the head of the state but acts as the boss of a corporation or business where he unilaterally makes decisions. However, Trump expresses his doubts about Biden's capabilities to be the *boss* raising a rhetorical question *if you call him a boss*. Negative connotations are further built upon the accusation that Biden is an ineffective and inefficient political leader because *he spends all his time on the beach*. Example (23) further puts an emphasis on Trump's pejorative attitude towards Harris in the form of an expression *her boss*, which depicts Trump's political opponent as a highly dependent employee obeying her boss's orders.

However, Trump contradicts himself, targeting his hate speech at Biden. Although at the beginning of the debates he grants Biden the *boss* nomination, later he forms a negative image of his predecessor as of a *weak man*:

- (24) *We had no problems when Trump was president. But when this weak pathetic man that you saw at a debate just a few months ago [...].*

Here, Trump puts an emphasis on Biden's physical condition, which arouses pity due to his helplessness and disability. Although Biden has already withdrawn his candidacy, Trump shows no mercy for him and expresses his pejorative attitude toward Biden. Furthermore, Trump contrasts the image of a *weak Biden* with his own success and power because, from his perspective, there were no problems *when Trump was president*. Trump aims at humiliating Biden and portraying him not merely as a *weak* political leader, but as an insignificant president who is not valued and respected in the political arena. Thus, Trump grants Biden a *disrespected person* nomination:

- (25) *I know Zelensky very well and I know Putin very well. I have a good relationship. And they respect your president. Okay? They respect me. They don't respect Biden. How would you respect him? Why? For what reason?*

Initially, in (25), Trump personally dissociates from Biden because he presents the attitude of two political leaders Zelensky and Putin towards the then president of the USA. However, further rhetorical questions *How would you respect him? Why? For what reason?* demonstrate his own approach to Biden and imply the idea that Trump does not respect Biden. Moreover, these rhetorical questions are aimed at raising doubts in the effectiveness and benefit of Biden's presidency and, as Trump identifies Harris as Biden, these questions are also aimed at raising doubts in her candidacy and appropriateness for the presidential position. However, Trump already positions himself as the president, therefore supposing that he is the only right choice because *they respect your president. Okay? They respect me.* This example demonstrates Trump's favourite method of conflict communication – counterposition between him and his opponent, where he is positioned as a positive member of the opposition while forming an extremely negative and unfavourable image of the opponent. Trump emphasizes the importance and validity of a *disrespected person* nomination by claiming that the Democrats themselves do not respect their leader, and expresses intense hatred by comparing Biden to a dog:

(26) *They threw him out of a campaign like a dog. We don't even know, is he our president?*

Although Trump constantly expresses his hatred, contempt and humiliation targeted at Biden's physical and mental state, in (26), he positions himself as Biden's advocate because he directly indicates that the Democrats got rid of their candidate when they perceived how poor his chances were of winning the presidential election. However, Trump again raises a rhetorical question *is he our president?* which enables him to return to a very significant issue – the legitimacy of Biden and doubts about his election in 2020.

As has already been mentioned, Trump aims at forming an extremely negative image of his predecessor, and thus he directly accuses Biden of being *the worst president* in the history of the USA:

(27) *In my opinion, I think he's the worst president in the history of our country.*

(28) *The worst president, the worst vice president in the history of our country.*

Biden is nominated as *the worst president* within the scope of foreign relations. Example (27) depicts the already discussed ineffective communication with the presidents of Ukraine and Russia; in (28), the nomination is formed on the basis of overextensive military support in Afghanistan and the accusation that Biden,

together with Harris, accepted millions of immigrants in the USA and that would lead to the destruction of the country. The latter example demonstrates dual hate, simultaneously targeted at the president and the vice president. This proves the validity of the conclusion that Trump puts a sign of equality between Biden and Harris, and therefore the expression of hate, targeted at one of these persons, encompasses and presupposes hate, simultaneously aimed at both of them.

Finally, Biden's negative image is complemented by a *corrupt politician* nomination:

- (29) *We have nothing because they refuse — you know, Biden doesn't go after people because supposedly China paid him millions of dollars. He's afraid to do it. Between him and his son. They get all this money from Ukraine. They get all this money from all of these different countries. And then you wonder why is he so loyal to this one, that one Ukraine, China? Why is he? Why did he get 3 1/2 million dollars from the mayor of Moscow's wife? Why did he get — why did she pay him 3 1/2 million dollars?*

Here, recurrently, Trump employs one of his favourite conflict communication techniques – accusation and forms a nomination evoking negative connotations in the subconsciousness of the target audience – the electorate. Trump accuses Biden, together with his son, of corrupt actions – taking bribes from very diverse countries, having their own dangerous and detrimental goals, and thus demonstrating his loyalty to them. The nomination of a *corrupt politician* is intensified by introducing the fact that Biden took money from Russia, *from the mayor of Moscow's wife*. Here Trump aims to depict Biden as a hypocrite because he officially demonstrates his support for Ukraine, but at the same time, he accepts bribes from the Russians. Four rhetorical questions are again employed to raise doubts about Biden's politics and moral values. Furthermore, the statement *we have nothing because they refuse* is targeted at all Democrats and expresses Trump's intended aim to convey the idea that neither Democrats nor their candidate are worth voting for.

#### **4.1.3 The case of the Democratic Party**

The Democratic Party is the third group present in Trump's hatred radar in his conflict communication. In the majority of cases, Trump shows his contempt for this party by addressing its members as *them*, but not the Democrats or the representatives of the Democratic Party. By using this pronoun, Trump dissociates from the Democrats and depicts them as members of the *outgroup*, as the outcasts of the society. *The destroyers of the USA* is the prevalent nomination within the *threat* domain:

- (30) *They've destroyed the economy and all you have to do it look at a poll. The polls say 80 and 85 and even 90% that the Trump economy was great that their economy was terrible.*
- (31) *Our country is being lost. We're a failing nation. And it happened three and a half years ago.*
- (32) *Because they're destroying the fabric of our country by what they've done. There's never been anything done like this at all. They've destroyed the fabric of our country.*
- (33) *But if she won the election, the day after that election, they'll go back to destroying our country and oil will be dead, fossil fuel will be dead.*
- (34) *[...] they have destroyed our energy business.*
- (35) *This is the most divisive presidency in the history of our country. There's never been anything like it. They're destroying our country.*

In (30-35), Trump repeatedly blames the Democrats for destroying the country, its economy, resources and the unity of the society. Moreover, this constant blame and accusations carry an extremely heavy emotional load with an intention to portray the US Democratic Party and its governance as the most detrimental, unbenevolent and even harmful party in US history. Trump's conflict communication discourse, constructed upon constant repetition, is highly persuasive because if one keeps repeating the same idea many times, it frequently becomes widely accepted and trusted, however strange it might seem. There are so many disappointed and dissatisfied American citizens in the present state of affairs and the candidate Trump finds and announces the culprit – the Democrats. Furthermore, Trump acts as a prophet because he predicts the threatening future of the country if the Democrats win – *but if she won the election, the day after that election, they'll go back to destroying our country and oil will be dead, fossil fuel will be dead*. However, Trump explicitly opposes himself against the Democrats and their candidate and positions himself as the only right person who can save the country because *the polls say 80 and 85 and even 90% that the Trump economy was great that their economy was terrible*. Trump puts a negative emphasis on the period when the Democratic President Biden was the head of state and government of the USA, and implicitly counterpositions it with his own presidency by outlining that *there's never been anything like it*.

Ironically, Trump's hate speech aimed at his political opponents includes *haters* nomination. First, Kamala Harris is assigned this nomination, and later it is also targeted at *them* – the Democrats. Trump's political opponents are portrayed as *haters* within the context of immigration:

- (36) *Well, bad immigration is the worst thing that can happen to our economy. They have and she has destroyed our country with policy that's insane. Almost policy that you'd say they have to hate our country.*

Example (36) incorporates two of Trump's hate target groups – Harris and the Democrats, and repeatedly blames both groups for destroying the country with *insane* immigration policy. Here, Trump uses hate speech to demonstrate his intended portrayal of the political opponents as being not only negative, non-beneficial, but even dangerous for US society because their actions show how they hate their country and its citizens. Moreover, Trump's attitude to Democrats' immigration policy implies the idea that his actions will be totally different – benevolent for the country if he is elected. The intended negative image of the Democratic Party and its actions is further emphasized by granting them a *danger* nomination:

- (37) *They talk about democracy. I'm a threat to democracy. They're the threat to democracy – With the fake Russia Russia Russia investigation that went nowhere.*

The above statements and the nomination itself are built upon an explicit counterposition between Trump and the Democratic Party. Although, according to Trump, his political opponents constantly talk about democracy and accuse him of being *a threat to democracy*, he positions them as being *the threat to democracy*. This nomination is related to Trump's doubts about the Democrats' integrity, which is expressed by *the fake Russia investigation* and the assumption that such *fake investigations* might evoke tension between Russia and the USA and might be regarded as posing not only *a threat to democracy*, but a *danger* to the security of the country.

Finally, the Democrats are nominated as *weak and incompetent politicians* within the area of national security:

- (38) *It wouldn't have happened with me. The leaders of other countries think that they're weak and incompetent. And they are. They're grossly incompetent.*

In (38), Trump forms a negative image of the Democrats and verbally fights against them using not merely his own approach to them but further complements the validity of this negative nomination by introducing the attitude of other political leaders. National security is a sensitive and extremely significant area for any country; thus, incompetence and failures here are inexcusable. Moreover, the nomination of *weak and incompetent politicians* is intensified by the implied idea of US reputational harm due to the fact that *the leaders of other countries*

*think that they're weak and incompetent* and thus damage the image of the USA as the leading power. Consequently, Trump offers the solution – to vote for him in the presidential election because *it wouldn't have happened with me*.

Overall, hate speech, in the form of negative, stereotypical and non-typical nominations targeted at his political opponents and competitors, is the prevalent tool in Donald Trump's conflict communication discourse, which is aimed at his primary goal – to be re-elected as the president of the United States of America.

## 5 Conclusions

Hate speech is a highly prevalent tool exploited in Donald Trump's conflict communication aimed at his political opponents. The expression of Trump's hate speech encompasses negative stereotypical and non-typical nominations within the *threat* domain, which are targeted at three main addressees: the presidential candidate Kamala Harris, President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party. The study shows that Trump's hateful rhetoric is intended to shape the inferiority of his opponents, forming their negative image and activating contradictions between the electorate of opposing parties and candidates for the US presidency.

The research into Trump's hate speech as a tool of conflict communication identified such linguistic markers as derogatory terms, stereotypes, negative connotations and insulting language targeted at Harris, Biden and the Democrats.

The majority of linguistic markers in Trump's conflict communication are aimed at Harris in the form of the following stereotypical nominations: *a liar, the destroyer of the USA, the wrong candidate, a corrupt politician, a danger, the hater, bad, ineffective politician, an outsider, an insignificant person*. However, the research found some nominations, non-typical of political discourse, such as *a Marxist, the border czar, Putin's favourite, a warmonger* and even *Biden*. The expression of hate speech targeted at then President Biden demonstrates a few stereotypical nominations: *the worst president, a corrupt politician* and non-typical nominations: *the boss, a weak man, a disrespected person*. The nominations, targeted at Biden, are not abundant due to the withdrawal of his candidacy from the presidential election. The name of the opposition party – the Democrats is replaced by an implicit address *they* in Trump's conflict communication discourse. *They* are stereotypically depicted as *the destroyers of the USA, haters, a danger, weak and incompetent politicians*. The recurring application of hate speech expressing nominations such as *the destroyer/s of the USA, a danger, a corrupt politician, hater/s* presupposes the fact that Trump treats all three groups equally and perceives all these political opponents as equal competitors.

The results of rhetorical analysis demonstrate that Trump takes advantage of sarcasm in shaping the negative image of his political opponents and aims at inciting hatred, built upon negative nominations, towards them. Trump's hate speech, in the majority of cases, is expressed dually and based on counterposition and contrast, which enable him to position himself as a strong, beneficial and trustworthy presidential candidate and simultaneously to create the intended negative image of his political opponents – Harris, Biden and the Democrats. Harsh, implicitly and explicitly expressed hate speech in Trump's conflict communication plays one more role – it should not only assure his supporters that their choice is the best, but it should also raise doubts in the subconsciousness of Harris's or the undecided electorate and entice these voters. Moreover, the research into the prevalent linguistic and rhetorical markers shows that hate speech in Trump's conflict communication discourse demonstrates manipulation of the target audience's political views, beliefs and influences their political behaviour in elections. Thus, hate speech is exploited as a tool enabling Trump to be re-elected as the 47th president of the USA. The election results demonstrate that this tool is highly effective.

The research addresses the use and significance of hate speech as a conflict communication tool in Trump's political discourse during the 2024 presidential campaign. However, the research material, comprising only the available debate transcript, might be acknowledged as a limited scope study limitation. Future research should encompass a broader scope of Trump's political discourse.

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