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The strategic use of metaphor in political discourse: Critical Metaphor Analysis

Tito Dimas ATMAWIJAYA  

Universitas Pamulang, Banten, Indonesia

 dosen02078@unpam.ac.id

Abstract

Political discourse is increasingly shaped by crisis events that demand immediate rhetorical responses from leaders. While metaphors have been extensively studied in political communication, understanding their strategic deployment during crisis moments remains understudied. This gap is particularly significant given the potential impact of crisis-driven metaphorical framing on public perception and policy outcomes in democratic societies. This study aims to identify how metaphorical language is strategically deployed in political crisis communication and its role in shaping public perception and policy debates. The research focuses on Donald Trump's 2024 nomination acceptance speech following an assassination attempt, offering a unique case study of crisis-response rhetoric in a high-stakes political context. The methodology combines Critical Metaphor Analysis with metaphor scenario identification, employing the Pragglejaz Group's Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) modified for political discourse. The 12,287-word speech transcript was analyzed to identify and categorize metaphorical expressions and scenarios. Inter-coder reliability was ensured through Cohen's kappa coefficient measurements and consensus meetings. The findings reveal sophisticated applications of interlinked metaphor scenarios that serve multiple rhetorical functions. Key scenarios identified include SURVIVAL AS DIVINE INTERVENTION, IMMIGRATION AS INVASION, and NATION AS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT, creating coherent narrative arcs linking personal crisis to national renewal. The analysis demonstrates how these scenarios simplify complex issues, evoke emotional responses, and construct leadership narratives. This research contributes to crisis communication theory by demonstrating how metaphor scenarios are strategically deployed to shape public perception during pivotal political moments. The findings have important implications for media literacy education and the development of ethical guidelines for metaphor use in political communication, particularly during crisis events.

Key words: *political discourse, critical metaphor analysis, crisis rhetoric, campaign narrative, Trump's rhetoric*




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Стратегическое использование метафоры в политическом дискурсе: критический анализ

Тито Димас АТМАВИДЖАЯ  

Университет Памуланг, Бантен, Индонезия

 dosen02078@unpam.ac.id

Аннотация

Политический дискурс все чаще формируется кризисными событиями, требующими от лидеров немедленной риторической реакции. Хотя метафоры широко изучались в политической коммуникации, их стратегическое использование в кризисные моменты не получило должного внимания. Этот пробел особенно значим с учетом потенциального влияния обусловленных кризисом метафорических фреймов на общественное восприятие и политические последствия в демократических обществах. Цель данного исследования – определить, как метафорический язык используется стратегически в политической кризисной коммуникации и какова его роль в формировании общественного восприятия и в политических дебатах. Материалом послужила речь Дональда Трампа на церемонии согласия на номинацию в 2024 году после покушения на его жизнь, которая представляет собой уникальный пример кризисной риторики в значимом политическом контексте. Использовался критический анализ метафор с идентификацией метафорических сценариев, а также модифицированная для политического дискурса процедура идентификации метафор группы Pragglejaz. Для выявления и категоризации метафорических выражений и сценариев был проанализирован транскрипт речи объемом 12287 слов. Надежность межэкспертной оценки обеспечивалась измерениями коэффициента каппа Коэна и дальнейшим согласованием. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют об усложненном применении взаимосвязанных метафорических сценариев, выполняющих множество риторических функций. Были выявлены ключевые сценарии: ВЫЖИВАНИЕ КАК БОЖЕСТВЕННОЕ ВМЕШАТЕЛЬСТВО, ИММИГРАЦИЯ КАК ВТОРЖЕНИЕ и НАЦИЯ КАК СТРОИТЕЛЬНЫЙ ПРОЕКТ, которые связывают повествование, соединяя личный кризис с национальным обновлением. Анализ показал, как эти сценарии упрощают сложные вопросы, вызывают эмоциональную реакцию и конструируют нарративы лидерства. Исследование вносит вклад в теорию кризисной коммуникации, демонстрируя, как метафорические сценарии стратегически используются для формирования общественного восприятия в ключевые политические моменты. Результаты способствуют повышению медийно-информационной грамотности и могут найти применение при разработке этических рекомендаций по использованию метафор в политической коммуникации, особенно во время кризисных событий.

Ключевые слова: политический дискурс, критический анализ метафор, кризисная риторика, нарратив кампании, риторика Трампа

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1. Introduction

Discourse refers to the structured use of language in communication, encompassing both spoken and written forms. It involves the organization of words, phrases, sentences, and larger units of meaning into coherent texts that convey specific messages within particular contexts. Discourse analysis examines how language is used in various contexts to construct meaning, establish identities, and negotiate relationships (Fairclough 2013, Eslami et al. 2023, Wagemans 2016, and among many others). This approach highlights the dynamic nature of language as it interacts with social, cultural, and ideological forces.

Understanding discourse is crucial because it reveals how language shapes our perception of reality. It uncovers the implicit assumptions and power relations embedded in communication, showing how language can influence thought and behavior (van Dijk 2008, Reyes 2011, Zappettini et al. 2021, and among many others). By analyzing discourse, researchers can identify the ways in which language perpetuates social norms, reinforces power structures, and reflects cultural values. This analysis extends beyond mere linguistic features to consider the broader socio-cultural and political contexts in which language is used.

Political discourse is a specialized form of discourse that occurs within the realm of politics. It includes speeches, debates, policy documents, media coverage, and other forms of communication related to governance, political ideologies, and public affairs. Political discourse is inherently strategic and persuasive, aiming to influence public opinion, mobilize support, and legitimize authority (Chilton 2004, Dillard & Pfau 2002, Konstantinova 2022, Musolff 2016). It plays a pivotal role in shaping political realities, constructing social identities, and framing issues to align with particular agendas.

In political discourse, language is a powerful tool used to construct and convey political messages. Politicians and political actors use rhetorical strategies to persuade, inform, and manipulate their audiences. These strategies often involve the use of metaphors, narratives, and other figurative language to simplify complex issues, evoke emotions, and create compelling visions of the future (Boeynaems et al. 2017, Charteris-Black 2011, Khedri et al. 2022, Kövecses 2018, and among many others). Analyzing political discourse helps to uncover the techniques used by politicians to shape public perception and influence political outcomes.

A metaphor is a figure of speech that involves understanding one concept in terms of another. It functions by highlighting similarities between two different entities, allowing complex or abstract ideas to be communicated through more familiar or concrete terms. Metaphors are not just linguistic decorations but fundamental cognitive tools that shape our understanding and perception of the world (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). They enable us to grasp abstract concepts by relating them to everyday experiences.

Metaphors play a significant role in shaping thought and language. They structure our conceptual systems and influence how we perceive and interact with reality. For example, describing time as money (e.g., “saving time,” “spending

time”) frames time in economic terms, affecting how people value and manage it. By examining metaphors, researchers can gain insights into the underlying cognitive processes and cultural frameworks that shape human thought and communication.

In political discourse, metaphors are powerful tools for framing issues, shaping public perception, and persuading audiences. They provide cognitive shortcuts that simplify complex political realities, making them more accessible and emotionally resonant (Charteris-Black 2011, Ferrari 2007, Sopory 2006, and others). By mapping familiar experiences onto political concepts, metaphors can evoke strong emotional responses and reinforce ideological positions. For instance, referring to a political campaign as a “battle” or “race” invokes competition and urgency, influencing how the public engages with the political process.

Metaphors in political discourse serve multiple functions. They help to create compelling narratives, simplify policy proposals, and mobilize support by connecting with the audience’s emotions and experiences. Metaphors can also obscure or highlight certain aspects of reality, shaping how issues are perceived and debated (Musolff 2004, Mio et al. 2005, Sun et al. 2021, and others). By analyzing the use of metaphors in political discourse, researchers can uncover the cognitive and rhetorical strategies employed by politicians to influence public opinion and achieve their political goals.

Previous research has extensively explored the role of metaphors in political discourse, demonstrating their ability to frame issues, construct political realities, and influence public opinion. Studies have shown that metaphors can shape voters’ perceptions of candidates, policies, and national identity. Researchers like Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have highlighted the pervasiveness of metaphors in everyday language and thought, while Charteris-Black (2004), Musolff (2006), and others have specifically examined their use in political rhetoric. These studies reveal how metaphors contribute to the persuasive power of political language.

Building on these foundational works, contemporary research has demonstrated that metaphors are integral to political communication, serving to simplify complex issues, evoke emotions, and shape public perception. For instance, Lakoff’s (1996) work on moral politics illustrates how metaphor’s structure political ideologies, while Musolff’s (2004) studies on the European Union reveal how metaphors influence perceptions of international relations. Contemporary scholarship has continued to expand this understanding, examining how metaphor power correlates with opinion expression in political narratives with Kalinin and Ignatenko (2024), and Mujagić (2024) investigating metaphor use in migration discourse across British and Bosnian-Herzegovinian contexts. These studies highlight the complex interplay between metaphorical language and political persuasion across diverse cultural contexts.

Studies focusing on the emotional dimensions of political discourse (Bull 2016, Bull & Waddle 2021, Carver & Pikalo 2008, Goode & Bull 2020, Karin 2019, Ponton et al. 2024, Zappettini et al. 2021, and among many others) have further

enriched our understanding of metaphor's persuasive power. They reveal how the emotionalization of media discourse through metaphorical language serves to shape public opinion and political attitudes and demonstrates how emotional resonance created through metaphorical framing can influence audience perception and engagement with political messages. Examination of political discourse in social media shows how metaphorical expressions function as powerful tools for mobilizing public opinion and constructing political narratives, particularly in digitally-mediated communication contexts (e.g., Konstantinova 2022).

Despite the extensive research on metaphors in political discourse, gaps remain in understanding how metaphors are used in response to specific events and crises. There is limited research on how political leaders employ metaphors to address and frame sudden, high-stakes situations, such as assassination attempts. Additionally, the role of metaphors in constructing narratives of resilience and destiny in political rhetoric has not been thoroughly explored. This gap presents an opportunity to examine how metaphors are strategically used in moments of crisis to influence public perception and reinforce leadership (Flusberg et al. 2018).

Further, while much research has focused on the use of metaphors in Western political contexts, there is a need for more studies examining their use in diverse cultural and political settings. Understanding how metaphors function in different contexts can provide a more comprehensive view of their role in political discourse. Addressing these gaps can enhance our understanding of the cognitive and rhetorical mechanisms that underpin political communication and contribute to more effective political analysis and strategy (Ponton 2020, Zappettini et al. 2021, and among many others).

In the context of the 2024 US elections, Donald Trump's use of metaphors in his nomination acceptance speech following an assassination attempt offers a unique case study. His speech, delivered in a high-stakes political environment, is rich with metaphorical language that frames his candidacy, the state of the nation, and his vision for the future. Analyzing this speech provides insights into how metaphors are employed to construct narratives of strength, resilience, and renewal, and how they shape public perception during critical moments in political campaigns (Wodak & Forchtner 2018).

This research aims to deepen our understanding of how metaphors function strategically in political discourse, particularly during crisis events and high-stakes political moments. The study focuses on examining how metaphorical language shapes public perception, constructs political narratives, and influences policy debates. This research addresses the gap by examining how metaphors are used in Trump's speech to respond to a crisis and frame his political narrative. It offers a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of metaphor, political discourse, and crisis communication. By analyzing Trump's speech through the lens of Critical Metaphor Analysis and metaphor scenarios, this study contributes to our understanding of the cognitive and rhetorical strategies employed in political discourse (Musolff 2016). It reveals how metaphors function as tools of persuasion

and framing, shaping public perception and influencing political outcomes. To achieve this aim, the following research questions are addressed:

1. How are metaphors strategically deployed in political discourse to frame leadership and legitimacy during crisis events?
2. What metaphorical scenarios are employed in political speeches to construct narratives of national security and societal renewal?
3. How do crisis-oriented metaphor scenarios in political discourse influence public perception and shape policy debates?

2. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical approaches of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) and the concept of metaphor scenarios, which provide robust tools for examining the use of metaphorical language in political discourse.

Critical Metaphor Analysis, as developed by Charteris-Black (2004, 2011), combines insights from cognitive linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and pragmatics to examine how metaphors shape our understanding of social and political issues. Recent work by Zibin and Solopova (2024) has expanded this understanding by examining metaphor's role across languages and cultures, demonstrating its universal yet culturally-specific nature in discourse. CMA posits that metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but cognitive devices that structure our conceptual systems and influence our perceptions and actions. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the interplay between language, thought, and ideology in political rhetoric.

One of the key principles of CMA is that metaphors are both cognitive and ideological. They reflect and shape how we think about abstract concepts, often in ways that align with particular ideological positions (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Charteris-Black 2004, and among many others). As demonstrated by Martín de la Rosa (2023) in her analysis of Brexit discourse, image schemas and metaphorical framing play crucial roles in constructing political narratives and mobilizing public opinion. This dual nature of metaphors means they can subtly reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies, making them powerful tools in political discourse. By analyzing metaphors used in political speeches, we can uncover underlying ideological biases and their impact on public perception.

Another important principle of CMA is the persuasive power of metaphors. By framing issues in certain ways, metaphors can influence public opinion and policy preferences (Charteris-Black 2005, Thibodeau & Boroditsky 2011, and others). For example, describing immigration as a “flood” evokes a sense of danger and urgency, potentially swaying public opinion towards stricter immigration policies. Research by Zibin et al. (2024) demonstrates how metaphorical framing devices in media discourse can shape public perception of complex political conflicts. This framing effect highlights the importance of metaphor choice in shaping political narratives and their reception by the audience.

The context-dependent nature of metaphor choice is also a crucial aspect of CMA. The selection and effectiveness of metaphors depend on the sociocultural context and the specific communicative goals of the speaker (Semino 2008). This means that metaphors that resonate in one context may not have the same impact in another. Understanding the context in which metaphors are used is essential for interpreting their meaning and effectiveness in political discourse.

Building on CMA, Musolff's (2006, 2016) concept of metaphor scenarios provides a more nuanced framework for analyzing complex metaphorical structures in political discourse. A metaphor scenario is a set of assumptions about prototypical aspects of a source situation, including its participants and their roles, typical events, and evaluation standards. This approach, further developed in contemporary research on cross-cultural metaphor analysis (Zibin & Solopova 2024), allows for a detailed examination of how metaphors create coherent and persuasive narratives.

One of the key aspects of metaphor scenarios is their narrative structure. Scenarios often have a mini-narrative or script-like quality, making them particularly effective for political storytelling (Musolff 2006). Martín de la Rosa's (2023) analysis of Brexit discourse demonstrates how image schemas and metaphor scenarios work together to construct compelling political narratives that evoke strong emotional responses. This narrative aspect helps to create compelling and memorable stories that can influence public perception and behavior. For instance, framing a political campaign as a "journey" can evoke notions of progress, struggle, and ultimate success.

The evaluative dimension of metaphor scenarios is also significant. Scenarios typically carry implicit or explicit evaluations of the target domain, influencing how issues are perceived (Musolff 2016). The research on emotionalization in media discourse shows how metaphorical scenarios can shape public attitudes towards specific policies or political figures. For example, describing a policy as a "lifeline" suggests it is essential and beneficial, while describing it as a "burden" implies it is costly and undesirable.

Another key aspect is the flexibility and elaboration of metaphor scenarios. Scenarios can be extended, modified, or contested in discourse, allowing for dynamic framing of issues over time (Semino et al. 2018). Recent studies have shown how this adaptability manifests across different cultural and linguistic contexts (e.g., Zibin & Solopova 2024), enabling politicians to respond to changing circumstances and audiences while maintaining the relevance and impact of their metaphors.

In analyzing Trump's nomination acceptance speech, we will use CMA to identify and interpret key metaphors, particularly those related to the assassination attempt, national security, and American renewal. This approach, informed by recent work on metaphor power in political discourse (Sun et al. 2021), will help us uncover the cognitive and ideological underpinnings of Trump's rhetoric, providing insights into how he frames these issues to support his political positions.

We will also examine how these metaphors are integrated into broader scenarios that structure Trump's narrative and argumentation. Special attention will be paid to the primary source domains Trump draws upon, such as war, journey, and construction, and their implications. Building on Zibin and colleagues' (2024) work on framing devices in political discourse, we will analyze how these source domains help create vivid and relatable images that resonate with the audience's experiences and emotions.

The framing effects of these metaphors and scenarios will be analyzed to understand how they shape public perception and support Trump's political positions. By examining how metaphorical language evokes emotional responses and creates a sense of shared identity with the audience, we can gain insights into the persuasive power of Trump's rhetoric. This analysis aligns with research on emotionalization in political and media discourse (Bull 2016, Bull & Waddle 2021, Carver & Pikalo 2008, Goode & Bull 2020, Karin 2019, Zappettini 2021, and others) and the role of metaphor in shaping public opinion.

Finally, we will consider the policy implications of metaphorical framing, exploring how it may influence public understanding of policy proposals and their perceived effectiveness. Building on both traditional frameworks of metaphor analysis and recent developments in cross-cultural metaphor research (Zibin & Solopova 2024), this study aims to reveal the cognitive and rhetorical strategies employed in political communication, particularly in response to a crisis event. This analysis will contribute to our understanding of how metaphor and narrative function in political discourse to shape public perception and policy preferences.

3. Data and methodology

The primary data source for this study is the official transcript of Donald Trump's nomination acceptance speech delivered at the Republican National Convention on July 19, 2024. This particular speech was selected for analysis because it represents a unique moment where personal crisis (assassination attempt) intersects with high-stakes political communication, offering rich potential for examining how metaphors function in crisis-response rhetoric. While Trump delivered numerous campaign speeches, this nomination acceptance speech was chosen due to its pivotal nature, comprehensive scope, and the extraordinary context in which it was delivered. The speech's timing immediately following an assassination attempt provides an unprecedented opportunity to examine how metaphorical language is deployed to frame both personal and national narratives in a moment of crisis.

The corpus consists of the full text of Trump's speech, containing approximately 12,287 words, obtained from The New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/19/us/politics/trump-rnc-speech-transcript.html>). While focusing on a single speech may limit the generalizability of findings, this limitation is balanced by the speech's exceptional nature and comprehensiveness. The decision to analyze one extensive speech in depth, rather

than multiple shorter speeches, allows for a more nuanced examination of how metaphorical patterns develop and interact within a complete rhetorical unit.

Our analysis employs a qualitative approach combining Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) and metaphor scenario identification. The methodology involves several systematic steps, beginning with multiple close readings of the transcript by two independent researchers, followed by preliminary identification of potential metaphorical expressions and development of coding protocols. It is illustrated in figure 1.

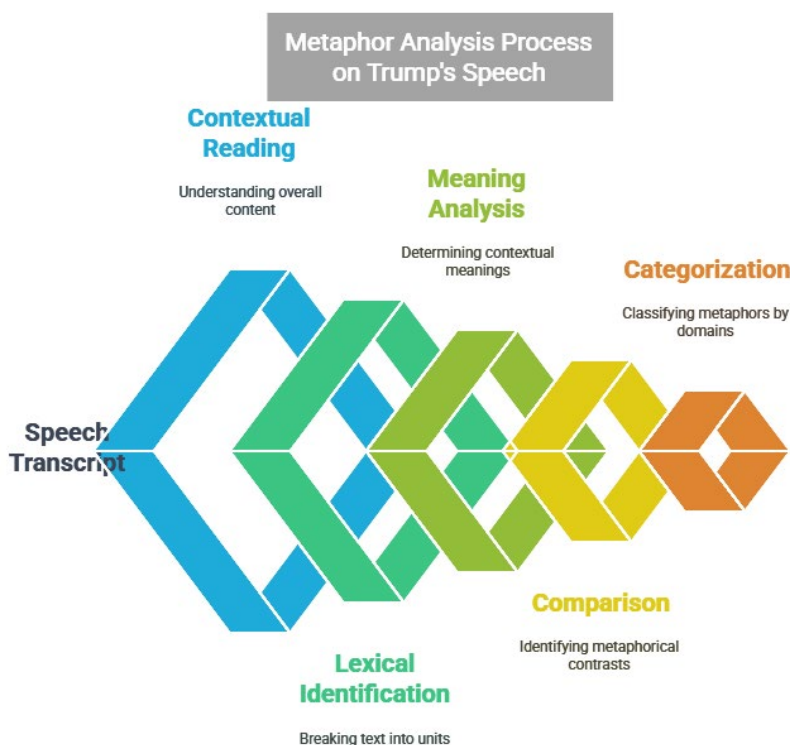


Figure 1. Metaphor Analysis Process on Trump's Speech

The Pragglejaz Group's (2007) Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) has been modified to accommodate political discourse analysis. The procedure includes complete text reading for general comprehension, lexical unit identification, contextual meaning analysis, basic meaning comparison, and metaphorical use determination. For example, in analyzing the phrase "we will build a wall," we examine its contextual meaning (creating immigration policy) against its basic meaning (physical construction) to determine its metaphorical use as part of the NATION AS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT conceptual metaphor. The details are illustrated in the table 1.

Table 1. Metaphor Analysis Process on Trump’s Speech

No	Analytical Steps	Example: “We will build a wall”
1.	Lexical unit identification	“build” (verb)
2.	Contextual meaning	Creating and implementing restrictive immigration policies and border control measures
3.	Basic meaning	To construct a physical structure by putting parts together
4.	Meaning comparison	The contextual meaning (policy creation) contrasts with the basic meaning (physical construction), but it can be understood through comparison with it
5.	Metaphorical determination	YES - The verb is used metaphorically
6.	Source domain	CONSTRUCTION
7.	Target domain	IMMIGRATION POLICY
8.	Conceptual metaphor	NATION AS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT
9.	Metaphorical function	Simplifies complex policy into concrete, familiar terms; evokes physical barrier imagery

Identified metaphors are systematically categorized based on their source domains (e.g., war, journey, construction) and target domains (e.g., politics, economy, national security). This categorization process helps organize the metaphors systematically and allows for the identification of dominant themes and patterns in Trump’s rhetorical strategies. Understanding these domains provides insights into how complex political concepts are framed and communicated to the audience.

To ensure methodological rigor and reliability in analyzing Trump’s nomination acceptance speech, we implemented a comprehensive inter-coder reliability procedure. Two researchers independently coded 20% of the speech transcript (approximately 2,457 words), focusing particularly on metaphorical expressions related to the assassination attempt, national security, and leadership themes. For metaphor identification and categorization, we calculated Cohen’s kappa (κ) to measure agreement beyond chance. The initial coding resulted in $\kappa = 0.82$ for metaphor identification and $\kappa = 0.78$ for scenario categorization, indicating strong inter-coder agreement (where $\kappa > 0.80$ represents strong agreement, 0.60–0.79 represents moderate agreement).

Discrepancies in coding Trump’s metaphorical expressions were resolved through a three-stage process. First, each coder conducted an individual review, documenting their rationale for identifying metaphors such as “we will build a wall” and “drain the swamp,” using a standardized form that captured the contextual and linguistic basis for their interpretations. Then, coders met for joint discussion sessions to compare analyses and discuss differences, particularly focusing on complex metaphorical scenarios like SURVIVAL AS DIVINE INTERVENTION AND NATION AS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT. Finally, a consensus-building phase involved working through disputed items with reference to documented examples from similar studies of crisis rhetoric in political discourse.

For cases where agreement could not be reached through the standard resolution process (approximately 5% of coded items), a third senior researcher with expertise in political discourse and metaphor analysis was consulted to make final determinations. This systematic approach to ensuring inter-coder reliability strengthens the validity of our findings while maintaining methodological transparency throughout the research process.

Following Musolf's (2006) approach, we identify recurring metaphorical themes that form coherent scenarios by analyzing how individual metaphors cluster around specific narrative structures or conceptual frames. The identified metaphors and scenarios are then examined through CMA, considering their ideological implications, potential persuasive effects, issue framing, and relationships to specific policy proposals. This critical analysis helps reveal the deeper cognitive and ideological dimensions of the speech.

The analysis is situated within multiple contextual layers: the immediate context of the assassination attempt, the broader campaign context of the 2024 presidential election, and the larger framework of contemporary American political discourse. This contextual interpretation allows us to understand the speech not just as a standalone text, but as part of a larger political and social narrative, helping explain how Trump's metaphors resonate with the current political climate and public sentiments.

Several limitations of this methodology must be acknowledged. First, while this study focuses on a single speech, this choice was deliberate and strategically motivated. The nomination acceptance speech following an assassination attempt represents a unique confluence of personal crisis and political rhetoric that is unparalleled in contemporary political discourse. We chose not to analyze other speeches by Trump during this period because they lacked the distinctive combination of high-stakes personal narrative and formal political communication that makes this particular speech valuable for studying crisis-response metaphors. Additionally, the speech's length (12,287 words) and comprehensive coverage of multiple themes provides sufficient data for in-depth analysis of metaphorical patterns. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that this focus on a single speech may limit the generalizability of findings to broader political discourse. Second, although we employ systematic procedures and inter-coder reliability measures, the interpretation of metaphors inherently involves some degree of subjective judgment. Finally, while we can analyze the rhetorical functions of metaphors, this study does not measure their actual impact on audience perceptions, suggesting an opportunity for future research combining discourse analysis with reception studies.

By applying this rigorous methodology to Trump's nomination acceptance speech, we aim to provide a detailed and nuanced analysis of metaphor use in political crisis communication. This approach enables us to examine how metaphorical language is strategically deployed to frame political issues and shape public perception, particularly in response to unprecedented events. The findings will contribute to our understanding of how metaphor and narrative function in political discourse during moments of personal and national crisis.

4. Findings

4.1. *The DIVINE and WARRIOR Mission in Politics Metaphor Scenario*

Trump uses the recent assassination attempt as a central metaphor scenario, weaving it throughout his speech to frame his candidacy and the state of the nation. This event serves as a pivotal narrative device, allowing Trump to cast himself in various symbolic roles that resonate with his audience. By integrating this incident into his broader political message, he reinforces key themes of resilience, divine favor, and protective leadership. The metaphorical portrayal of the assassination attempt not only underscores his personal narrative but also aligns with larger ideological and cultural frames that appeal to his supporters.

Trump portrays his survival as miraculous, invoking religious imagery:

- (1) I stand before you in this arena only by the **grace of almighty God**.

This statement sets the tone for a narrative steeped in divine intervention, suggesting that his survival is part of a higher plan. By framing his continued presence as a result of divine grace, Trump implicitly positions himself as a chosen leader, predestined to guide the nation through tumultuous times. This metaphor scenario of POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AS DIVINE MISSION taps into deep-seated cultural beliefs about providence and destiny, making his leadership seem both inevitable and sanctified.

The use of religious language serves multiple purposes in Trump's rhetoric. It not only appeals to the religious sensibilities of his base but also elevates the political stakes, suggesting that his leadership is not merely a matter of human choice but divine will. Consider example (2):

- (2) We live in a **world of miracles**. None of us knows God's plan...

This framing can mobilize religious and spiritual sentiments, transforming political support into a kind of faith-based loyalty.

Trump describes the assassination attempt in visceral detail, emphasizing his physical resilience:

- (3) **Bullets were continuing to fly** as very brave Secret Service agents rushed to the stage.

This vivid depiction not only highlights the danger he faced but also frames him as a figure of physical courage and endurance. The narrative constructs a POLITICIAN AS WARRIOR metaphor, positioning Trump as a leader who physically endures threats to protect the nation.

By casting his survival as an act of divine intervention, Trump also deflects attention from the political and social conditions that may have contributed to the assassination attempt. Instead of addressing potential systemic issues, as shown in example (4):

- (4) This is **God's plan** unfolding before us, not the work of mere mortals.

This approach simplifies the narrative, turning a complex socio-political event into a straightforward tale of good versus evil, with Trump as the divinely protected protagonist.

This framing of divine intervention also helps to create a sense of inevitability around Trump's political agenda, as evident in example (5):

(5) We are **chosen** to lead this great nation back to its rightful destiny.

If his leadership is seen as part of a divine plan, opposition to his policies can be framed as opposition to divine will.

Moreover, the warrior metaphor extends to his supporters, as shown in example (6):

(6) Together, we are **soldiers** in this great battle for America's soul.

This collective warrior narrative creates a sense of shared mission and solidarity among his team and supporters. The metaphor provides a rationale for strong, sometimes extreme, measures, aligning them with the narrative of protection and defense.

The POLITICIAN AS WARRIOR metaphor also serves to justify aggressive political strategies and policies, as demonstrated in example (7):

(7) We must **fight** with everything we have to protect our borders.

This framing can be used to legitimize hardline stances on issues like national security and immigration, presenting them as part of a protective strategy against external threats.

The combination of divine and warrior metaphors is particularly evident in example (8):

(8) God has **armed us** with the strength to defend our nation.

This narrative promises not just protection, but active defense against perceived threats, reinforcing loyalty and support among those who feel marginalized or threatened by current societal changes.

The warrior metaphor culminates in a call to collective action, as shown in example (9):

(9) Every American must become a **warrior** in this fight for our country's future.

Furthermore, this warrior metaphor resonates deeply with Trump's base, many of whom may feel under siege by changing social and political landscapes. By positioning himself as a warrior leader, Trump taps into feelings of vulnerability and fear among his supporters, offering them a sense of security and assurance.

Analysis of the examples above demonstrates how the combination of DIVINE MISSION and WARRIOR metaphors in Trump's speech creates a powerful narrative framework. The integration of religious language with heroic imagery enables Trump to position himself as a leader who is not only divinely chosen but also

possesses the physical strength and courage to protect the nation. This rhetorical strategy proves highly effective in creating emotional resonance with his support base.

Furthermore, the fusion of these two metaphors allows Trump to establish dual legitimacy for his leadership and policies. On one hand, the DIVINE MISSION metaphor frames any opposition to his policies as resistance to divine will. On the other hand, the WARRIOR metaphor justifies the use of extreme measures as necessary components of a ‘battle’ to protect the nation. These two dimensions work in tandem to create a highly persuasive narrative that transforms political support into both a sacred mission and a heroic struggle.

4.2. *The America Under Siege: INVASION and CRIME metaphors*

In the second major metaphorical framework of his speech, Trump employs two interrelated metaphor scenarios: IMMIGRATION AS INVASION and CRIME AS DISEASE/URBAN DECAY. These scenarios work together to create a comprehensive narrative of a nation under threat from both external and internal forces. The metaphors serve to justify aggressive policy measures while positioning Trump as both defender and healer of the nation. Through careful analysis of specific examples, we can see how these metaphorical frameworks are constructed and deployed for maximum rhetorical effect.

The IMMIGRATION AS INVASION metaphor is prominently featured in Trump’s rhetoric. This metaphorical framing portrays immigration as a direct threat to national security, as evident in example (1):

- (10) The greatest invasion in history is taking place right here in our country.

This metaphor frames immigration as an assault on the nation, casting immigrants as hostile forces intent on breaching national borders. The language of invasion invokes imagery of warfare and conflict, suggesting that the country is under siege and requires defensive action. This framing not only heightens the perceived threat but also primes the audience to support stringent immigration policies as necessary defensive measures.

By describing immigrants as invaders, Trump taps into deep-seated fears and xenophobic sentiments:

- (11) They’re **coming from prisons**. They’re **coming from jails**. They’re **coming from mental institutions** and **insane asylums**.

This narrative dehumanizes immigrants, portraying them not as individuals seeking better lives but as a monolithic threat to public safety and national security. This dehumanization makes it easier to justify harsh measures and policies aimed at restricting immigration.

Trump further reinforces the invasion narrative through militant language:

- (12) We must **defend** our borders against this **onslaught**.

The invasion metaphor extends to portraying America as a nation under attack:

- (13) Our country is being **invaded** on all fronts, and we need to **fight back**.

This framing fosters a sense of unity and purpose among his base, positioning them as part of a collective struggle to protect their homeland. It also polarizes the political landscape, portraying opponents of Trump's immigration policies as traitors who are undermining national security.

Trump connects this invasion narrative to his role as protector:

- (14) I will be your **shield** against those who seek to **destroy** our way of life.

By framing immigration as an invasion, Trump can justify extreme measures such as border walls, increased deportations, and travel bans.

When discussing urban issues, Trump employs metaphors of CRIME AS DISEASE:

- (15) The discord and division in our society must be **healed**. We must **heal** it quickly.

This metaphor frames crime as a pathological condition afflicting the nation, requiring urgent and decisive intervention.

The URBAN AREAS AS WASTELANDS metaphor is evident in:

- (16) We will **restore** and **renovate** our nation's once-great cities, making them safe, clean, and beautiful again.

Trump reinforces the disease metaphor through medical terminology:

- (17) Crime is a **cancer** eating away at our cities.
(18) We need to **diagnose** the problem and provide the **cure**.

These metaphors evoke a sense of urgency and crisis, compelling the audience to support drastic measures to restore order.

The wasteland imagery is further developed in:

- (19) Our cities have become **wastelands**, **ravaged** by crime and neglect.
(20) These once-proud neighbourhoods are now **decaying** and **rotting** from within.

By framing his approach in terms of healing and renewal, Trump offers contrasting visions of decay and restoration:

- (21) Together, we will **transform** these **dangerous** areas into thriving communities.
(22) We will bring **life** back to these **dying** cities.

Based on the examples analyzed above, Trump's rhetoric employs two primary metaphorical frameworks to discuss domestic issues: IMMIGRATION AS INVASION and CRIME AS DISEASE/URBAN DECAY. The invasion metaphors (examples 10–14) create a narrative of external threat that requires militant response, while the disease

and decay metaphors (examples 15–22) construct an image of internal deterioration requiring aggressive intervention. These metaphorical frameworks work in tandem to present Trump as both a warrior defending against external threats and a healer capable of curing internal ailments.

The strategic combination of these metaphors serves multiple rhetorical purposes: it dehumanizes immigrants through militant language, pathologizes urban issues through medical terminology, and positions Trump as both protector and restorer of the nation. This dual framing allows him to justify aggressive policies toward immigration while promising transformation and renewal of urban areas, creating a comprehensive narrative of threat and salvation that resonates strongly with his base's fears and hopes for the nation's future.

4.3. *The RENEWAL and RESTORATION Metaphors*

Trump's vision of national renewal is constructed through three primary metaphorical frameworks: NATION AS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT, HISTORY AS CYCLICAL, and NATION AS BODY. These interconnected metaphors work together to create a compelling narrative of transformation, restoration, and unity. Through careful analysis of specific examples, we can see how these metaphorical frameworks support his campaign message and policy proposals.

The NATION AS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT metaphor is central to Trump's campaign narrative, most prominently displayed in his signature slogan:

- (23) **Make America Great** Again.
- (24) We will very quickly **make** America great again.
- (25) We're going to **turn** our nation around and we're going to do it very **quickly**.

These construction metaphors position the nation as something that can be built, repaired, and improved through deliberate effort and leadership. The metaphor resonates particularly well with Trump's personal brand as a real estate developer, lending credibility to his claims of being able to "build" a better America.

The HISTORY AS CYCLICAL metaphor is evident in Trump's promises of restoration:

- (26) Americas on the **cusp** of a new **golden age**, but we will have the courage to **seize** it.
- (27) We will **return** to our greatest days of prosperity and strength.

The NATION AS BODY metaphor forms the third major framework, emphasizing unity and collective strength:

- (28) We **rise** together. Or we **fall** apart.
- (29) The **heart** of our nation must beat as one.
- (30) We must **heal** the divisions that have weakened our national **body**.

These organic metaphors frame the nation as a living entity requiring care and unity to maintain its health and vitality.

Trump extends the construction metaphor to specific policy areas:

- (31) We will **rebuild** our economy from the ground up.
- (32) Together, we'll **construct** a new foundation for American greatness.
- (33) It's time to **repair** the damage done to our nation's **infrastructure**.

The cyclical history metaphor is further reinforced through references to past glory:

- (34) We will **reclaim** our forgotten greatness.
- (35) The **spirit** of American excellence will **rise** again.

Finally, the body metaphor is applied to national challenges:

- (36) Our borders are like open **wounds** that must be **healed**.
- (37) The **lifeblood** of our economy has been **drained** away.

The analysis of these examples reveals how Trump's renewal and restoration rhetoric is carefully constructed through three interlocking metaphorical frameworks. The NATION AS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT metaphors (examples 23–25, 31–33) create a tangible, action-oriented vision of national renewal that aligns with Trump's persona as a builder and developer. These construction metaphors transform abstract political challenges into concrete tasks that can be addressed through direct action and practical expertise.

Meanwhile, the HISTORY AS CYCLICAL metaphors (examples 26–27, 34–35) tap into a powerful narrative of historical destiny and national redemption. By framing America's future as a return to past glory, these metaphors create an emotional connection with voters' nostalgia while promising inevitable success under Trump's leadership. The combination of construction and cyclical history metaphors presents national renewal as both achievable through concrete action and historically destined.

Finally, the NATION AS BODY metaphors (examples 28–30, 36–37) unite these themes by presenting the nation as a living organism requiring unity, healing, and proper leadership to flourish. This organic framing transforms political unity from an abstract concept into a vital necessity for national survival and renewal. Together, these three metaphorical frameworks create a comprehensive narrative that positions Trump as builder, restorer, and healer of the nation, capable of leading America back to greatness through practical action, historical destiny, and collective unity.

5. Discussion

The analysis of Donald Trump's nomination acceptance speech reveals a sophisticated use of metaphor scenarios to frame key issues and construct a compelling narrative. These findings offer several important insights into the role

of metaphor in political discourse, particularly in relation to Critical Discourse Analysis and contemporary metaphor studies.

Trump's framing of the assassination attempt demonstrates how political leaders can leverage crises to reinforce their image and message. By constructing a metaphor scenario of SURVIVAL AS DIVINE INTERVENTION, Trump not only portrays himself as resilient but also as chosen or destined for leadership. This aligns with previous research on the use of religious imagery in American political rhetoric (Domke & Coe 2008) and shows how personal narratives can be elevated to mythic proportions in campaign discourse. This metaphorical framing creates an emotional connection with the audience through shared trauma, positions Trump as both vulnerable (relatable) and invincible (leader-like), and sets up a broader narrative of national peril and potential redemption (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

The prominent use of invasion and siege metaphors to describe immigration aligns with previous studies on the militarization of immigration discourse (Cisneros 2008, Santa Ana 2002). These metaphors have demonstrable long-term impacts on policy formation, influencing everything from budget allocations for border security to international diplomatic relations. The IMMIGRATION AS INVASION metaphor, combined with vivid descriptions of criminals and “insane asylum” residents entering the country, serves to heighten the sense of urgency and danger, justify extreme policy measures as necessary for national security, and position Trump as a protector figure, echoing his personal narrative of surviving an attack. This demonstrates how metaphor scenarios can be used to create coherence between personal narrative, threat perception and policy proposals (Musolff 2015).

The ethical implications of such metaphorical framing are particularly concerning in an era of rapid information dissemination. Media outlets can implement several practical strategies to promote critical analysis of metaphorical language, including developing fact-checking protocols specifically for metaphorical claims, incorporating metaphor analysis segments in news coverage, training journalists to identify and contextualize potentially harmful metaphorical frameworks, and creating public education initiatives about the power of political metaphors. These strategies could help mitigate the potential harm caused by manipulative metaphorical framing, such as the dehumanization of immigrant communities or the oversimplification of complex policy issues.

This analysis contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis by demonstrating how metaphor scenarios function as tools of power and persuasion in political discourse. It extends current metaphor theory by showing how crisis events can trigger specific metaphorical framings that shape both public perception and policy outcomes. The findings particularly advance our understanding of how metaphorical language operates at the intersection of personal narrative and political messaging.

The interplay between metaphors of decay and renewal in Trump's speech reflects a common theme in populist rhetoric: the promise of returning to a mythical golden age (Taggart 2000). The NATION AS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT metaphor, encapsulated in the “Make America Great Again” slogan, has specific policy

implications across multiple domains. In economic policy, it justifies protectionist trade measures and infrastructure spending. In environmental policy, it often leads to deregulation framed as “removing obstacles to growth.” In social policy, it supports traditional value systems under the guise of “rebuilding.” This framing taps into what Higgs (2005) calls “crisis narrative” in American politics, where periods of perceived decline set the stage for transformative leadership.

The prevalence of crisis-oriented metaphors raises critical concerns about democratic deliberation. While such metaphors can mobilize public support, they may also have detrimental effects on democratic discourse. These metaphors tend to polarize public opinion by creating artificial urgency, oversimplify complex policy challenges, limit the range of acceptable policy solutions, and create obstacles to compromise and negotiation. Trump’s use of bodily metaphors to discuss national unity (e.g., “We rise together. Or we fall apart.”) is particularly interesting in this context, suggesting an attempt to reframe unity not as harmony or agreement, but as collective resistance against perceived threats. This framing of UNITY AS SHARED STRUGGLE aligns with previous research on how threat perception can increase group cohesion (Willer 2004).

To address these challenges in educational settings, we propose several concrete steps for enhancing media literacy. Educational institutions should focus on integrating metaphor analysis into language arts curricula, developing critical thinking modules focused on political rhetoric, and creating student workshops on identifying and analyzing metaphorical framing. These educational initiatives would help develop a more critically aware citizenry capable of navigating complex political discourse, particularly given how metaphors can make complex issues more accessible while potentially oversimplifying or inflaming emotions in ways that may hinder rational debate.

The media and public policy sectors also have crucial roles to play in this effort. Media organizations should establish guidelines for metaphor use in political reporting, provide context and analysis for prominent political metaphors, and create dedicated spaces for examining rhetorical strategies. On the public policy front, initiatives should focus on developing media literacy programs for adults, supporting research on metaphor impact in political communication, and creating public awareness campaigns about rhetorical manipulation. These combined efforts across different sectors would help create a more informed and discerning public better equipped to engage with political rhetoric.

The analysis extends current metaphor theory in several important ways. First, it demonstrates how crisis events can trigger specific metaphorical networks that shape both immediate responses and long-term political narratives. Second, it shows how personal and political metaphors can be strategically interwoven to create compelling narrative arcs. Third, it reveals how metaphor scenarios function differently in crisis communication compared to routine political discourse. These findings contribute to our understanding of metaphor’s role in political communication and crisis rhetoric.

The findings suggest several promising avenues for future research in metaphor studies. Researchers should conduct longitudinal studies examining how crisis-triggered metaphors evolve over time and comparative analyses of metaphor use in different cultural and political contexts. Additional research is needed on how different audiences interpret and respond to political metaphors, how digital media affects the spread and impact of political metaphors, and the relationship between metaphorical framing and policy implementation. These research directions would significantly advance our understanding of metaphor's role in political discourse.

Based on these findings, we suggest several practical applications across different sectors. In political communication, the focus should be on developing ethical guidelines for metaphor use in crisis situations, creating frameworks for responsible rhetorical strategies, and establishing standards for transparent political communication. Media organizations should implement metaphor analysis in political reporting, create tools for tracking metaphorical patterns, and develop strategies for balanced coverage of rhetorical framing. Public education initiatives should focus on designing media literacy programs, creating resources for understanding political rhetoric, and developing critical thinking tools for evaluating political communication.

In conclusion, this analysis demonstrates the central role of metaphor scenarios in shaping political narratives and framing policy debates. Trump's speech offers a case study in how personal experience, national challenges, and policy proposals can be woven together through metaphor to create a coherent and emotionally resonant campaign message. Understanding these rhetorical strategies is crucial for both scholars of political communication and engaged citizens in navigating the complex landscape of contemporary democratic discourse. While metaphors serve as powerful tools for political communication, their use carries significant ethical responsibilities and potential consequences for democratic dialogue in an increasingly complex political landscape.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how metaphorical language is strategically deployed in political crisis communication and its role in shaping public perception and policy debates. Through a detailed analysis of Trump's nomination acceptance speech following an assassination attempt, we have demonstrated the sophisticated use of metaphor scenarios in crisis-response rhetoric and their implications for political discourse.

The analysis reveals how Trump uses interlinked metaphor scenarios to create a compelling narrative arc: from personal survival of an assassination attempt, through a nation under threat, to a promised restoration of greatness. These scenarios, including SURVIVAL AS DIVINE INTERVENTION, IMMIGRATION AS INVASION, and NATION AS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT, serve multiple rhetorical functions. They simplify complex issues, evoke strong emotions, and position Trump as a divinely appointed, warrior-like leader capable of protecting and

rebuilding the nation. The strategic integration of personal and political narratives through metaphorical framing proves particularly effective in creating emotional resonance with audiences while justifying specific policy positions.

The prevalence of conflict-based metaphors (invasion, siege, war) across different policy areas suggests an overall framing of politics and governance as fundamentally adversarial. This framing has significant implications for how policies are conceptualized and debated in the public sphere. Our analysis demonstrates that such metaphorical framing affects multiple domains: economic policy through protectionist metaphors, environmental policy through obstacle-removal imagery, and social policy through reconstruction narratives. These findings highlight the need for greater attention to how metaphorical language shapes policy discussions and influences public understanding of complex political issues.

The study contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in political communication. Theoretically, it advances our knowledge of how crisis events trigger specific metaphorical networks and how these networks shape both immediate responses and long-term political narratives. Practically, it underscores the need for enhanced media literacy and ethical guidelines for metaphor use in political communication. These findings suggest that while metaphors serve as powerful tools for political communication, their use carries significant ethical responsibilities and potential consequences for democratic discourse.

This research opens several avenues for future investigation, particularly regarding the long-term effects of crisis-oriented metaphor scenarios on public policy preferences and political polarization. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for maintaining healthy democratic dialogue and informed public debate in an increasingly complex political landscape.

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Tito Dimas ATMAWIJAYA serves as the Head of the Language Center at Pamulang University and holds a faculty position. He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Linguistics at the University of Indonesia. He focuses on conducting research in the field of Linguistics and Philosophy.

e-mail: dosen02078@unpam.ac.id

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3847-2743>

Сведения об авторе:

Тито Димас АТМАВИДЖАЯ возглавляет языковой центр Университета Памуланга и в настоящее время получает докторскую степень по лингвистике в Университете Индонезии. Проводит исследования в области лингвистики и философии.

e-mail: dosen02078@unpam.ac.id

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3847-2743>