Using Content And Sentiment Analysis To Understand Populism In Donald Trump's Speeches

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About

This poster provides an analysis on a selection of speeches made by Donald Trump over the course of his political career. The aim of the analysis is to understand more about Trump's use of populist rhetoric, as well as identify whether the 6th January 'Save America' rally marked a distinct change in tone .

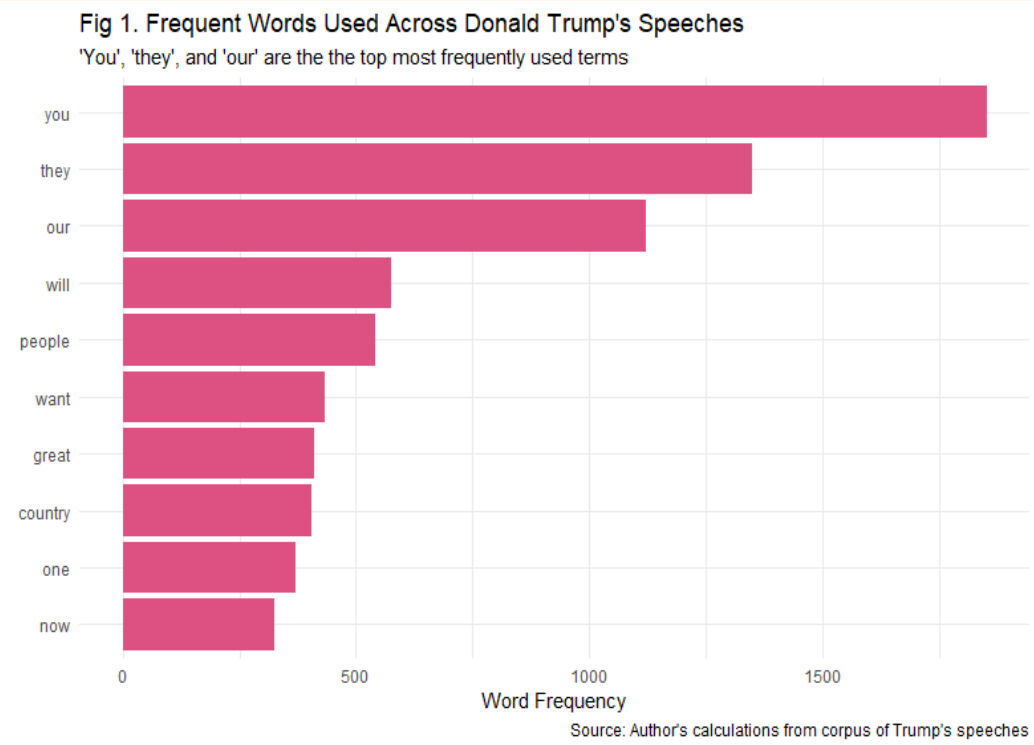
The results show that there is evidence of populism in Trump's speeches and that there is a difference between two groups of speeches, with more recent speeches that are directed to his supporters evoking more anger and sadness than at the beginning of his time in office.

The research conducted used RStudio to run a content analysis, network analysis, clustering analysis and a sentiment analysis on a corpus of selected Trump speeches.

"Populism stems from the Manichean worldview, which states that society can be fundamentally split into two homogeneous groups: the 'good people' and the 'bad elite' with the former suffering at the hands of the latter (Wirth, et al., 2016)."

"Populism is defined as a communication strategy that continuously references 'the people'" (Popping, 2018)

Content Analysis



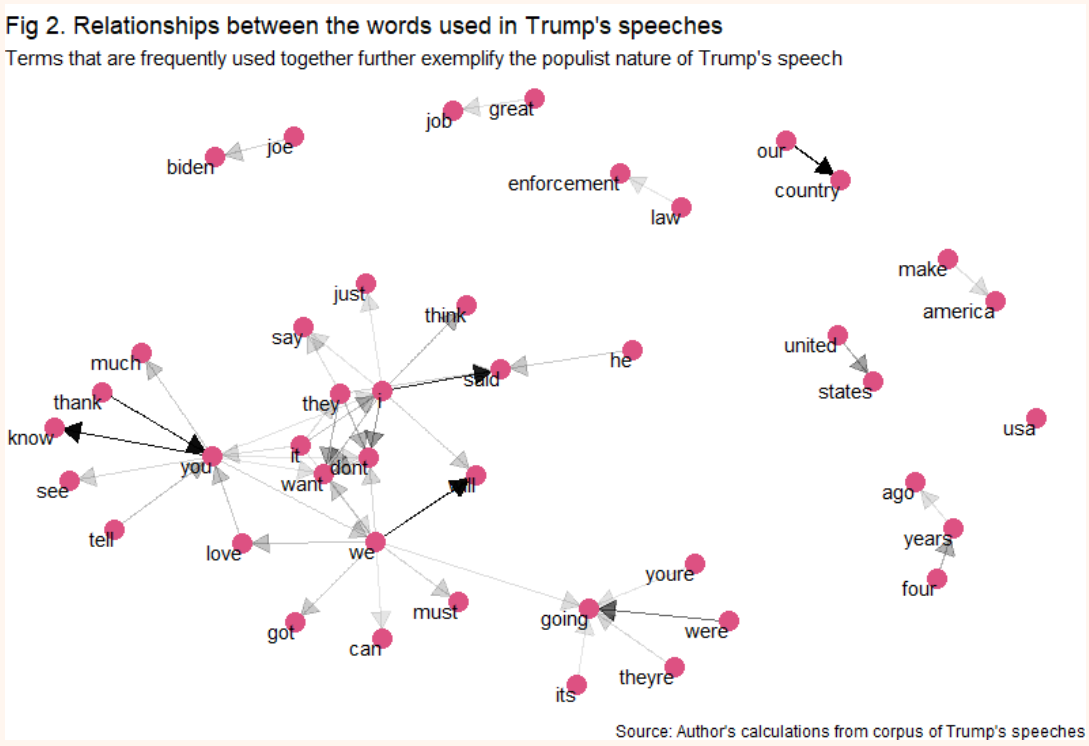
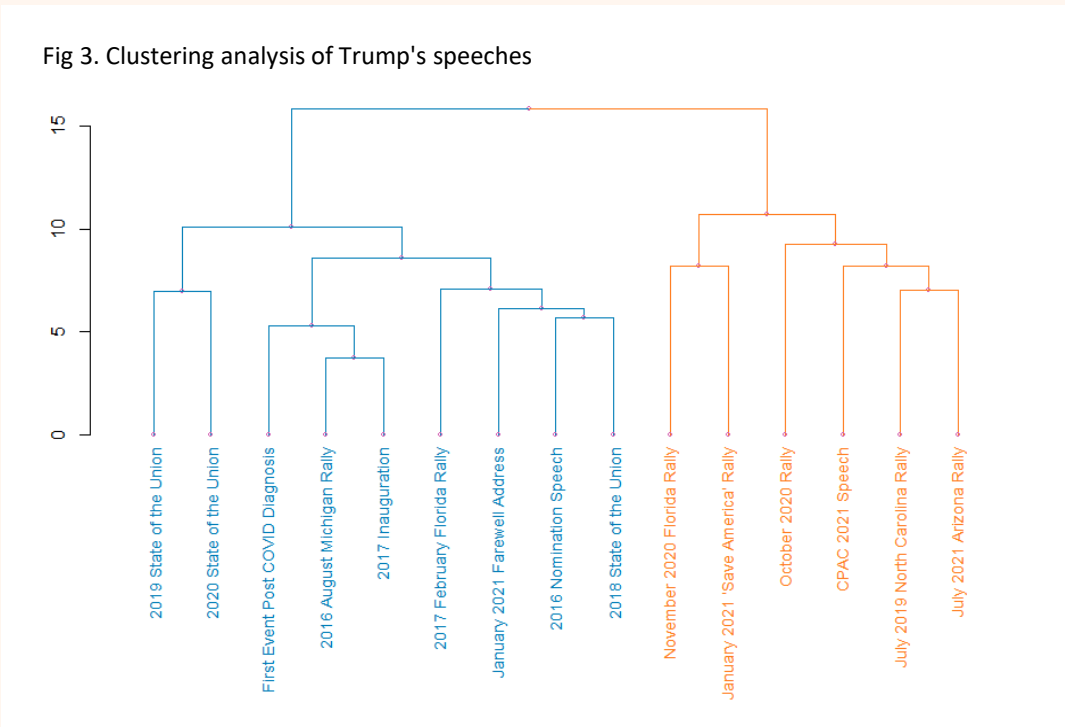


Fig 1 and Fig 2 show the results of the content analysis. Fig 1 shows how the most frequently used terms across the speeches are 'you', 'they' and 'our' which all evidence populist rhetoric. Further, Fig 2 shows how these words co-occur with other words. Darker lines indicate where words co-occur the most often with others. Connections between words such as 'you' and 'know' show how Trump imbues his audience with special knowledge, whilst 'we' and 'will' implies collective action. Both visualisations show how there is a distinction between 'us' and 'them' in the collection of speeches.

Clustering and Sentiment Analysis



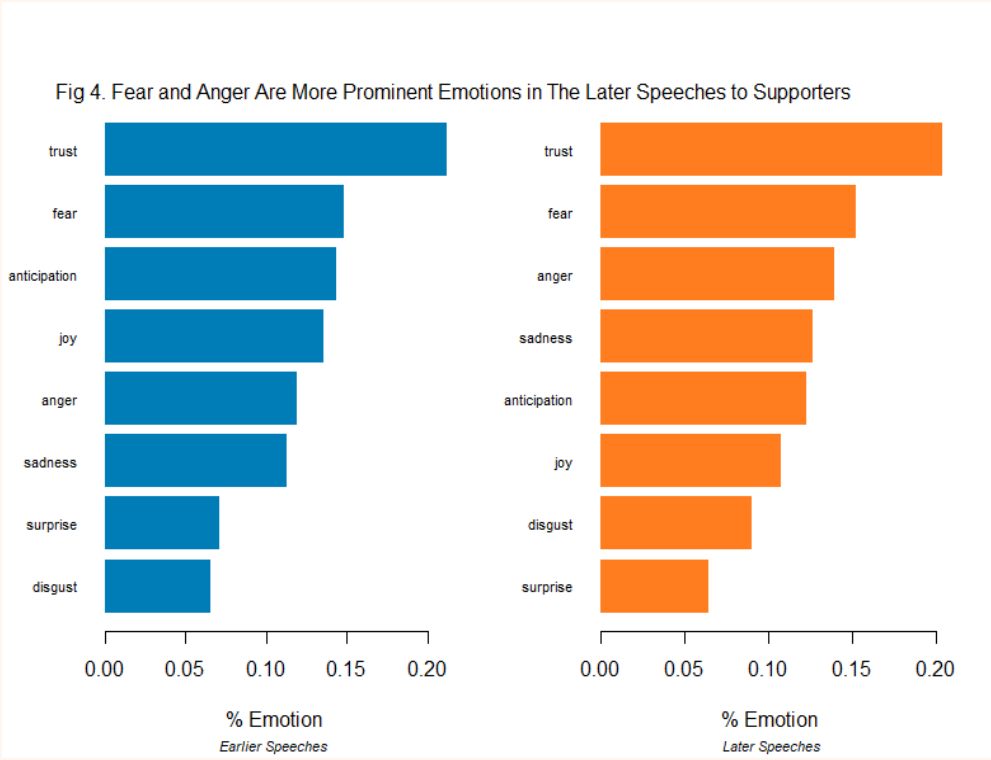


Fig 3 and Fig 4 show the results of the clustering and sentiment analyses. Fig 3 shows that there are two distinct clusters that the selection of speeches can be split into. The left hand (blue) cluster contains older campaign rallies and State of the Union addresses, as well as more recent speeches such as his 2021 Farewell Address and his first public appearance after being diagnosed with COVID. The right hand (orange) cluster contains more recent rallies including the 6th January 'Save America' rally. What can be inferred from this is that there is a distinct tone in these more recent speeches, but there seems to be a distinction between recent speeches that are directed at a more global audience rather than his direct support base. Fig 4. shows the difference in emotions between the two clusters. Whilst 'trust' and 'fear' are ultimately the most common emotion across all speeches (further evidencing populist rhetoric), the speeches in the orange cluster emote more fear and anger whereas the speeches in the blue cluster emote anticipation and joy. It can be asserted that there has been a change to a rhetoric that is more negative and based on fear, compared to the lighter and more anticipatory tone at the beginning of the presidency. This distinction, however, is not marked specifically by 6th January and instead it appears the tone of that speech was similar to other campaign speeches leading up to the 2020 Election.

References:
Popping, R., 2018. Measuring populist discourse using semantic text analysis: a comment. *Qual Quant*, Volume 52, pp. 2163-2172.
Wirth, W., Esser, F., Wettstein, M. & Engesser, S., 2016. The appeal of populist ideas, strategies and styles: A theoretical model and research design for analysing populist political communication. *Working Paper No.88.*

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