

Understanding Trump: Power back to the People?

Paolo Donadio

University of Naples Federico II
pdonadio@unina.it

Abstract

Trump's election in the US (November 2016) is another episode of the 'populist' wave that is competing with left-wing and right-wing mainstream politics. This paper adopts a critical discourse perspective to find out why US

voters decided to trust a rich and controversial businessperson who has often declared his contempt for politics and politicians. We try to outline, in terms of debate framing, some language features of Trump's communication that proved to be effective in the electoral contest and may serve to explain his final election. Qualitative analysis, based on pronoun distribution, tenses, and naming, is integrated with a preliminary quantitative analysis of campaign communication through a corpus of Trump's speeches (82 speeches, delivered from June 2016 to the acceptance speech delivered on November 9, 2016). This corpus is compared to the speeches delivered by Trump's political contender to the White House, Hillary Clinton (36 speeches, delivered from July 28 to November 9, 2016). As a result, we can see that Trump's informal style follows a clear strategy, which is the intention to trigger an emotional response from his audience in opposition to the political rationality of his rival.

Keywords

Trump, people, populism, campaign, discourse, power