DonaldsTrump's rhetoric: an analysis of his frames

and an explanation why these frames are so convincing and attractive to his supporters

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How does Donald Trump frame his message? What are his followers hearing? Here are Donald Trump's seven frames - and an explanation why these frames are so powerful.

1. They're smart - and we're stupid

Whatever Trump talks about, he always has the same message: others are 'much smarter' than America. The Chinese are 'much smarter'. The Mexican government is 'much smarter, much sharper' than the American government. The nuclear agreement with Iran? One of the 'dumbest deals' in history, the Russians will benefit from the deal - because they're 'smart'.

Americas opponents are smarter - but they're also dishonest. China manipulates its currency. Russia is making millions on the Iran-deal, America is getting nothing out of it. The Mexican government is deliberately sending 'bad people' across the border.

Why is this message so attractive to so many people? First of all, the 'much smarter' frame makes any subject on Trump's agenda a matter of competition: it's us against them. This is why Trump's speeches are so energizing: they are not about policy, but about a fight with a combative Trump. A Trump who in the end is a good guy – the guy who's fighting for you.

Secondly, Trump is nourishing a need that we all have in this confusing, complicated world: we want to know the root cause of our problems. Trump reduces all of this complexity to one cause: they are smarter than us. You might think this is a shallow analysis or complete nonsense, but knowing the root causes gives us the idea that we understand the complexity of our world - that we are more or less in control.

2. We need the best people - and I know them

Trump's solution always involves getting 'the best people', 'great people', 'brilliant people', 'tough people' working for America. The battle with ISIS? Trump will use 'our brilliant people from Silicon Valley' to take on the enemy on the internet. The competition with China, Japan and Mexico? Trump will deploy America's best businessmen to make international deals - and of course not the 'bunch of political hacks' that the country now has to deal with.

Here we come to one of Trump's key frames. When asked what he will do, he often responds with a who-answer: whom he's going to use to solve a problem. His international economic policy? He's going to get the best negotiators to make new agreements with China and Japan. He knows them personally, too. 'I know the smartest guys on Wall Street. I know our best negotiators. I know the overrated guys, the underrated guys, the guys that nobody ever heard of that are killers, that are great. We gotta use those people.'

Why is this 'best people-frame' so attractive to Trump's followers? It implies that Trump doesn't have to talk about complex policies with all their nuances. His focus on 'who' implies that his answers to questions about his policies are always very generic. The natural inclination of his opponents? To attack him with very specific questions. What is the result? Trump has the simple, powerful, straightforward message - his opponents the complex message.

The 'best people-frame' is also attractive because it taps into the undercurrent that there's something terribly wrong with the American leadership – 'our leaders are stupid'. Anyone who detests Obama's liberal values and policies very much like to believe that they have everything to do with weak leadership - and Trump serves you promptly.

3. I love them – and they love me

Trump's proposals are often controversial and impractical. What's more, they insult people. Mexico will have to pay for the wall. It won't, of course, and this proposal insults Mexicans. Preventing Muslims from entering the country would be insulting for Muslims, especially the ones fighting ISIS.

His reaction to his many critics? One: he again responds to 'what' questions with 'who'-answers. His reaction to the criticism about his entry ban is that so many people have called him to say, 'Donald, you've done us a tremendous service.' Many of his Muslim friends called him and said, 'You know, Donald, you're

right.' He's always had loads of friends among people he has insulted. He loves Mexicans, Hispanics love him, and many Mexicans work for him. He loves China, the Chinese love him, and the biggest bank in China occupies one of his buildings.

Two: he explains why he makes these proposals, what his intentions are. Why a wall? Because Trump is deeply concerned about crime among immigrants. Why a ban? Because of the danger of terrorism - the first thing we'll have to do is to 'figure out what is going on'.

So what happens when he uses these 'who' and 'why' frames? Anyone with an analytical mindset who listens to Trump hears immoral and impractical proposals. But anyone with major concerns about immigration and terrorism hears something else. There may be something wrong with Trump's proposals but his intentions are good. His proposals express an enormous drive to put an end to illegal immigration and terrorism. What's more, Trump is ultimately a good guy when it comes to his personal relationships with Mexicans and Muslims. In this way, his extreme proposals are made to appear reasonable. Once again, he's making it convenient for you.

4. Insulted? I'm going to be your best President ever

Trump doesn't only propose new policy that would insult certain people (Frame 3). He also personally insults them: women, the handicapped, veterans. Who doesn't know the kinds of things he's said about women? He insults Vietnam veteran John McCain. Mexicans are criminals and rapists.

How does he get away with these insults? By emphasizing how good his policies will be: for women, for veterans, for Mexicans. 'I would be the best for women, the best for women's health issues'. And: 'We're going to take care of our vets. Our vets are treated horribly. They're our greatest people'. Is he insulting Mexicans? 'I'll take jobs back from China, the Hispanics are going to get those jobs, and they're going to love Trump.' Just imagine that you're one of Trump's followers. There's something of the cowboy about 'The Donald': shoot first and ask questions later. He doesn't' think before he opens his mouth, so he says a lot of things that

are wrong. But he does the right things; he's the right person for women, for veterans, for Hispanics. Trump: Politicians? 'All talk, no action' - 'I am a creator.'

5. I don't have time for political correctness

Suppose you get handed a difficult question limited apparently to two possible answers: yes or no. An example: Trump is asked about the many things he has said about women: would what he has said about them be appropriate coming from the President of the United States? It is a lose-lose-frame. Both a 'yes' and a 'no' are wrong answers. How could he reframe the question? By what we call 'meta-framing': don't enter into the frame, but say something about the frame. Do not address the question itself but saying something about it.

So what does Trump say in response? 'I think the big problem this country has is being politically correct. I frankly don't have time for political correctness. And to be honest with you, this country doesn't have time either.' You don't answer the questions, but you say something about it. The question is wrong, sprouts from elitist political correctness and this has got us into all kinds of trouble.

Trump uses this strategy a lot. Is someone criticizing what he's said about Muslims? About Mexicans? These criticisms are based on a supposed need for being 'politically correct'. 'So many "politically correct" fools in our country. We have to all get back to work and stop wasting time and energy on nonsense!' he tweets.

For conservative America, this strategy connects with a strong feeling they have: straight talk is censored by the liberals that forbids us from saying certain things that have to be said. Others are trying to tell us what is correct and what isn't. The Donald, however, is straightforward.

6. I always win. I win. I beat people

Ted Cruz had Trump cornered in a debate. Trump's reaction: Cruz is "a nasty guy", the "single biggest liar". Jeb Bush had Trump over a barrel in a debate. Trump's reaction: Bush is saying this 'because he has failed in this campaign. It's been a total disaster. Nobody

cares.' Rubio felt warm in a hot room and was perspiring. Trump likes to remind us of this. "He was soaking wet, I'm telling you. He was wet. I say, 'What the hell is going on over here?' I thought he just came out of a swimming pool. He was soaking. I looked, I said, 'Wow'. I said, 'Are you OK?'" And the moral of this story? "Can you imagine Putin sitting there and waiting for the meeting and this guy walks in and he's like a wreck. No, you got to have Trump walk into that meeting."

It may be an unwritten rule that you stick to the issues in a debate, but this doesn't seem to apply to Trump. With him, it's anything goes. If you're not winning by means of logic, you attack someone personally (Cruz) or you argue that your opponent isn't doing well in the polls so whatever he says is nonsense (Bush). Or if someone's perspiring in a hot stuffy room, you point it out to everyone (Rubio).

What's behind it all? Trump has to win, no matter what. "I always win. Knock on wood. I win. It's what I do. I beat people. I win," he told a journalist. If "always winning" is so important, you'll do anything and everything to get there. Trump is a deal maker: he'll do anything it takes and use every trick in the book to get what he wants. He may misbehave, but hey, he's doing it for us.
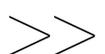
7. It's the economy, stupid

Other countries are smarter than America, and Trump is going to put an end to this: he's going to bring jobs back to America. This message is repeated over and over. How can Trump reduce the deficit while not touching Social Security? "I'm going to save Social Security, I'm going to bring back jobs."

What's he going to do for the African American community? "The African-Americans love me because they know I'm going to bring back jobs." Should we increase the minimum wage? That question isn't very relevant according to Trump, because "I'm going to bring jobs back to America."

It may be simple but at least it's consistent, and the endless repetition of a simple consistent message is a powerful campaign weapon.

Trump has two opinions when it comes to foreign policy. Trump is going to strengthen the American military and he doesn't want to get involved in any foreign military operations. What Trump has to say about other countries is always sprinkled with remarks about the economy. The war in Iraq cost America trillions. It's an investment that earned America nothing at all. It helped Iran, though. Iran is profiting from the situation, sniffing around in Iraq and chasing after the oil riches. Should we intervene in Syria? Trump is "interested in oil", not in yet another "quagmire". Let the Russians take care of the Syrian quagmire – "We can't go everywhere." Trump often frames foreign policy as an economic issue and this is potentially very powerful. The economy is often more important in American political campaigns - 'its the economy, stupid'. And viewing foreign policy from an economic standpoint releases you from the moral obligation of getting involved in all those quagmires in the rest of the world. Many Americans are fed up with them already. Trump obviously still wants to "bomb the shit out of ISIS", "bomb the hell out of ISIS" - but you never hear any specific plans for this.

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The Trump Paradox

Trump's frames are convenient for many of his followers. He wants to win and take control of our complicated unsafe world in which no one seems to be in charge. He will bring back jobs to America. He has that powerful drive to solve problems and in the end he is a good guy. A great guy. A smart guy. This is what many of his followers hear, and they'd rather simply accept all of his insults and incorrectness. Up until now, at least.

But there is more. After Trump proposed closing the borders to Muslims, his fellow-Republican Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, had this to say:

"This is not conservatism. What was proposed yesterday is not what this party stands for and more importantly it's not what this country stands for. Not only are there many Muslims serving in our armed forces, dying for this country, there are Muslims serving right here in the House working every day to uphold and defend the constitution. Some of our best and biggest allies in this struggle and fight against radical Islamic terror are Muslims, the vast vast vast majority of whom are peaceful, who believe in pluralism and freedom, democracy and individual rights."

What could be clearer than this? It shows that there's a lot of opposition – also among the Republicans – that is definitely going to make things difficult for Trump. Trump's insensitive aggressive rhetoric also makes him vulnerable – and this conjures up opposition, too. Paradoxically, however, Trump's followers see anyone who opposes him as members of the establishment: the louder these opponents raise their voices against Trump, the more they serve Trump's purposes. More than that, another paradox might be activated: the louder their voices, the more moderate Republicans might take the risk and vote for Trump - the system has more than enough checks and balances.