
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Linguistic Study of the Used Strategies by Candidates in The U.S. Elections

Shaymaa Fouad AliAkbar¹ and Reem Abd Sahan²

¹Assistant Lecturer, College of Education, Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq

²Assistant Translator, College of Education, Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq

Corresponding Author: Shaymaa Fouad AliAkbar, **E-mail:** Shay.fouad@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq

| ABSTRACT

This study explores how sexism is used in political discourse during the 2024 U.S. presidential election through an analysis of tweets by the candidates Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. The research is based on in Sara Mills' (2008) model of sexism in language, it investigates both overt and covert forms of sexist discourse, focusing on how language interacts with broader gendered power structures. Using a qualitative method, the study analyzes eight tweets (four from each candidate) chosen for their contrasting rhetorical strategies related to gender and authority. The results present that while neither candidate uses explicitly sexist language, their discourse engages differently with gender norms. Harris avoids overt and covert sexism but adopts assertive, expert-driven rhetoric traditionally associated with male political figures, thus, challenging conventional gender expectations. Trump's tweets rely on rhetorical strategies such as contrastive framing, presupposition, and tone to subtly emphasize stereotypes of female inadequacy masculine ideals of leadership. These patterns align with Mills' concept of covert sexism, in which discriminatory implications are embedded in language without direct expression. The analysis demonstrates that sexism in political discourse often operates not through explicit statements, but through interpretation, reception, and culturally embedded gender norms. The study highlights the need to examine not only what is said, but also how political messages are shaped by the gender of the speaker and societal expectations. finally, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how political figures both reproduce and resist gendered discourse in contemporary communication.

| KEYWORDS

U.S. Elections; political discourse; Sara Mills

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1.Introduction

This study investigates the role of sexism in political discourse during the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, focusing on the tweets analysis of the candidates (Kamala Harris) and (Donald Trump). the study is based on Mills' (2008) model of sexism in language, the study investigates both overt and covert forms of sexist discourse, emphasizing how political language interacts with broader gendered power structures.

The study employs a qualitative research methodology, which is -politically- suitable for analyzing language use and implied meaning. The study seeks to reveal how gendered assumptions manifest not only in what is said, but in how language is interpreted, received, and shaped by societal expectations.

The analysis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how political figures reproduce or resist gendered discourse norms, and how their language is interpreted through the lens of societal gender expectations. Ultimately, this research seeks to uncover the underlying discursive mechanisms that maintain or challenge gender inequality in political communication, even in the absence of explicit sexist vocabulary.

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2. Sexism

Discrimination is unfair treatment based on someone's sex, usually directed at women. It stems from societal differences between men and women and can look different depending on the culture or region, it's especially noticeable in some parts of the world, like the Middle East. Anne Pauwels, in her book *"A Woman Changing Language"*, explains how sexism is built into the way we use language. Some words and expressions either diminish women or treat them differently than men. This is known as linguistic sexism, language that favors men and subtly (or not so subtly) puts women at a disadvantage.

Sexist language doesn't just show gender bias, it reflects deep-rooted beliefs and values within a culture. These gender stereotypes have been passed down through generations. While the feminist movement has helped reduce blatant sexism, it hasn't disappeared. Today, it's more common to see hidden gender discrimination rather than obvious discrimination. Researchers like Christie (2001) note that this kind of hidden gender discrimination is especially tricky because it's easy for people to deny they meant anything harmful, even when their words carry discriminated implications.

3. Mills sexism strategies (2008)

According to Vetterling-Bruggin (1981) a statement is sexist if it denotes, causes, encourages, or results in the oppression of women. For Lakoff (1990), sexism in language simply reflects dilemma of women in society. Mills (1995) mentions that sexist language is a term used to indicate a broad variety of different elements from the use of generic pronouns, ex: he, when used to refer to males and females it is an insult term. However, the term sexism in gender discrimination is also used to classify a set of beliefs about women which can't be directly related to a certain set of linguistic features or usages.

Mills (2008) differentiates between (overt sexism) and (covert sexism). The overt is the direct one, it is a type of practice which can be recognized through the use of linguistic indicators, or via analysis of terms which are associated with the expression of discriminatory opinions about females. This type includes indicators as :

- a- Generic pronouns: the pronoun "he" to refer to both men and women, which reflects gender discrimination in language and is often called "he-man" language (Mills, 2008).
- b- Generic nouns: many generic nouns contain the word "man" and are used to refer to both sexes, showing a gender bias.
- c- The affixes: lady, -ess, and -enne (e.g., hostess, comedienne) create a gender distinction that often results in female terms being taken less seriously than their male counterparts
- d- Titles: like Mrs./Miss versus Mr. reflect a gender bias, as women's titles emphasize marital status, while men's do not.

The covert type, on the other hand, is a sort of usage that expresses gender discrimination and at the same time deny responsibility for it, just like in the use of certain terms attached to jokes, humor or irony in order to deny responsibility for an utterance. Mills (2008) shows two types of sexism (gender discrimination) and will be highlighted as following:

- a- Humor/ Jokes: Humor is often used to say things that might be too harsh or not appropriate if said seriously. By calling it "just a joke," people can avoid taking responsibility for comments that may actually be sexist or hurtful (Lakoff, 1990). Crawford (1995) notes that irony is often used in this way, e.g. using insulting terms like "cow" toward women but pretending it's all in good fun.
- b- Presupposition: Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) say that even indirect comments, often made by men, can carry sexist meanings. For instance, calling a woman "tall" might seem neutral but could imply she won't easily find a partner, reflecting outdated gender stereotypes.

4. The Data and Study Design

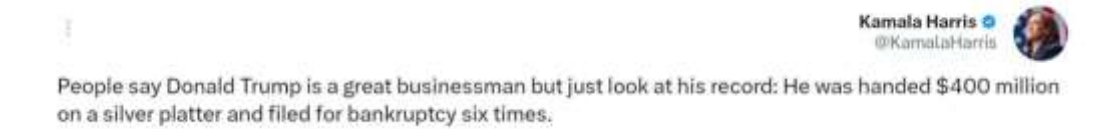
The study design involves the close examination of eight tweets from the official accounts of (Donald Trump and Kamala Harris), four from each candidate, selected from their official accounts on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). These tweets were chosen to represent contrasting rhetorical strategies around gender and authority. The research is guided by the following questions:

1. Is sexism used in political discourse during the 2024 U.S. presidential election? If yes, to what extent is it present?
2. Can sexism in political discourse be used exclusively by men against women, or can it also be employed by women against men?

Through these questions, the study draws on Mills' distinction between overt sexism -linguistically identifiable discriminatory language- and covert sexism, which operates through more subtle mechanisms such as tone, presupposition, contrastive framing, and cultural assumptions.

4. Analysis

Tweet 1



Analysis

In this political tweet, Kamala Harris criticizes Donald Trump's reputation as a successful businessman. She highlights that Trump receives a substantial inheritance "\$400 million on a silver platter" and then files for bankruptcy six times. The tweet tries to draw voters' attention to his financial failures and privilege.

According to Mills (2008), sexist language can be direct (overt) or indirect (covert). While Harris's tweet does not contain explicitly sexist language, its relevance to Mills' framework lies in how gendered power dynamics may still influence political discourse, even when not overt.

There is no use of neither overt or covert sexism. Harris does not use generic pronouns, gendered affixes, or titles that suggest direct sexism. She refers to Donald Trump by name and uses the neutral pronoun "he" when necessary. She does not employ any linguistic markers that demean women or elevate men directly through language structure. There is no humor, irony, or presupposition that targets women or embeds discriminatory ideas against a gender. The critique is fact-based and aimed at Trump's financial record, not at his gender or the gender roles surrounding him.

Politically, the tweet itself is not sexist, analyzing it through Mills (2008) invites reflection on gendered expectations in politics. Harris, as a female political figure, often faces scrutiny that male counterparts do not. Mills suggests that sexism is not only in language structure but also in the reception and interpretation of language, especially when women criticize men in power. A woman making such a direct critique of a male opponent may be received differently than if a man says the same.

To summarize, Harris's tweet critiques Trump's business reputation by citing his inheritance and bankruptcy record. According to Mills (2008), the language contains neither direct nor indirect sexism. However, within a broader gendered political context, the interpretation of her critique may reflect underlying societal biases, which Mills identifies as central to understanding how sexism operates beyond overt language use.

Tweet 2



Analysis

In this tweet, Harris criticizes Trump by repeating the word "weak" in response to three specific actions: seeking flattery from dictators, disrespecting the U.S. military, and suggesting the termination of the Constitution. The structure is rhetorical and emphatic, using repetition to portray Trump as unfit for leadership.

The tweet does not employ gendered language, generic pronouns, biased affixes, or unequal titles. The pronoun "he" refers directly to Trump and is used appropriately without generalizing to all men. Therefore, the tweet contains no signs of any use of gender discrimination according to Mills' definition.

Though the tweet is aimed at a male opponent, it engages with the political discourse surrounding "masculinity and leadership. Mills (2008) emphasizes that covert type of sexism regularly involves presupposed cultural values. In this context, the repeated

accusation of "weakness" reflects an underlying assumption that "strength is essential for leadership", a trait traditionally associated with masculinity.

By labeling Trump "weak" the tweet indirectly engages with gender norms that conflate "political strength" with "male- coded traits" such as aggression, dominance, and control. While Harris does not insult Trump based on gender, her framing of weakness as a political failure aligns with "culturally masculine ideals" of what a leader should be. According to Mills, this kind of presupposition-linking leadership with strength and implicitly with masculinity-can reinforce "gendered expectations" in political language. However, Harris herself, as a female leader, subverts these gendered expectations by adopting assertive rhetorical strategies that are often reserved for male political figures. This "reversal of expected gender roles" could also be seen as a challenge to covert sexist norms, rather than a reinforcement of them.

Harris's tweet criticizes Donald Trump by repeating the term "weak" in reference to his political actions. While the tweet contains no direct sexism, Mills (2008) allows us to examine the "indirect gender implications" behind the concept of weakness in political rhetoric. The message draws upon traditional ideas of "masculinity and strength", subtly reinforcing the association between leadership and male-coded traits. At the same time, Harris's own assertiveness as a female leader may challenge those very norms.



Tweet3

Analysis

Here, Harris describes her rival Trump as "unhinged". The term is a strong, informal adjective that questions Trump's emotional stability and mental fitness for leadership. The tweet is brief but highly evaluative, aiming to damage his credibility and public image.

According to the current model, the sentence has not got any form of sexism. Nevertheless, it may be analyzed within Mills' broader discussion of how "language in political discourse reflects gendered expectations", particularly in relation to "emotional control" and "leadership norms".

In the presupposition case, the use of "unhinged" implies emotional instability-an undesirable quality in political leadership. "Emotional instability" is historically coded as feminine, while "rationality and control" are associated with masculinity.

By accusing a male political figure of being "unhinged" the tweet inverts traditional "gendered expectations" but still relies on a framework that values "emotional control" as a masculine and leadership-defining trait. Mills (2008) points out that language may draw from "cultural assumptions" that have gendered roots. Additionally, when a female politician like Harris uses such language, it may subvert norms that expect women to be passive or emotionally restrained. Thus, the tweet also challenges "covert sexism" in political rhetoric by positioning a woman as assertive, critical, and politically aggressive.

In conclusion, Harris's tweet criticizes Trump's emotional stability. While the tweet includes no direct sexism, Mills (2008) helps uncover how the accusation engages with "gendered norms" around leadership and emotional control. The language reflects cultural assumptions that value rationality (a traditionally masculine trait) in political discourse. At the same time, Harris's assertiveness as a female speaker may also function as a challenge to those gendered expectations.

Tweet 4



Analysis

In data 4, Harris asserts that economic experts support her economic plan and claims it will strengthen the U.S. economy. In contrast, she argues that Trump's economic plan will harm the country. The statement positions her as a rational, evidence-based leader and discredits her opponent's policy.

The tweet does not imply any type of sexism. It presents a direct comparison between two economic policies based on expert evaluation. There is no use of irony, metaphor, humor, or emotionally loaded terms that might mask or imply gendered bias.

While the language itself is neutral, the broader "gendered context" of political discourse still applies. Mills (2008) emphasizes that certain "speech patterns" such as assertiveness, authority, and rational appeals are historically associated with male politicians. In this case, Harris uses these same rhetorical strategies.

By referring to "expert" and using confident, declarative sentences, she adopts a traditionally "masculine-coded" political voice. In doing so, she implicitly challenges covert sexism by asserting her authority in a domain (economics) often perceived as male-dominated. Mills (2008) would recognize this not as sexist, but as a reversal or disruption of the "gendered expectations" around leadership and competence.

Finally, Kamala Harris's tweet compares her economic policy to Donald Trump's, claiming that hers strengthens the economy while his harms it. There is a challenge to the gendered norms by employing assertive and authoritative language, subtly resisting the covert sexism that often constrains how female leaders are expected to speak.

Tweet 5



Analysis

In this tweet, Donald Trump uses capital letters and repetition to create a tone of urgency and defiance. The message is motivational and framed as a collective call to action: when "we" are knocked down, "we" rise again. The repetition of the word "FIGHT" - in increasing intensity - serves as a rhetorical strategy to energize and unify his audience, especially in the context of political struggle.

The tweet does not contain gendered type of speaking. It uses inclusive language such as "we" and avoids any overt references to gender. Although the tweet appears gender-neutral on the surface, it may reflect underlying "gendered ideologies". According to Mills (2008), indirect sexism often involves the use of culturally embedded values that privilege certain gender norms. The language of (resilience, aggression, and combat)-amplified by the word "FIGHT" draws on traditionally "masculine-coded traits" such as toughness, dominance, and confrontation.

Mills (2008) explains that political discourse often presupposes "masculinity as the default mode of leadership", where assertive or aggressive rhetoric is accepted or even celebrated. Trump adopts a "masculine leadership style" here that shows struggle and emotional intensity- qualities frequently discouraged or criticized in female politicians, who are often expected to be composed, nurturing, or conciliatory.

This asymmetry reflects what Mills calls "covert sexism": it is not the language itself that is sexist, but the "unequal expectations" applied to male and female speakers using the same style. Thus, while the tweet contains no explicit sexist language, it draws on a rhetorical tradition that privileges "masculine expressions of power", which may implicitly marginalize alternative (often feminine-coded) styles of political communication.

Trump's tweet uses aggressive and motivational rhetoric centered on the call to "FIGHT". The tweet does not contain overt sexism, but its reliance on masculine-coded values such as aggression and dominance reflects the "indirect reinforcement of gendered leadership norms". The language aligns with a political style traditionally accepted for men but often discouraged for women, revealing covert gender dynamics in public discourse.

Tweet 6



Analysis

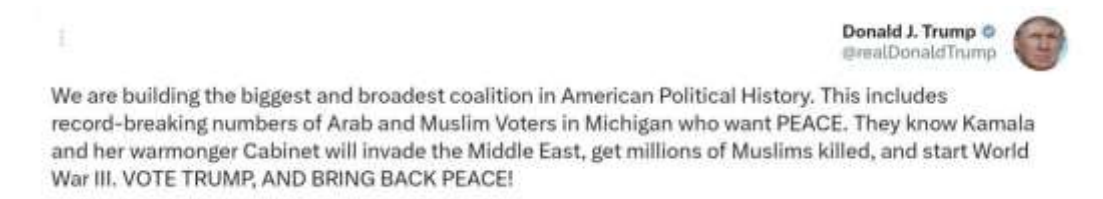
Here, Trump presents himself as the solution to a series of national and global problems. He claims that Harris is responsible for the current state of crisis as in the sentence "Kamala broke it" while he promises to restore the country's strength and prosperity. The message uses capital letters for emphasis and features a populist tone, calling on citizens to vote in order to "Make America Great Again". The hashtag #BringBackTrump reinforces the central theme of his return to leadership.

While the tweet lacks overtly sexist terms, it may contain a covert sexism in its "presuppositions and implications" as he blames the female figure. Trump attributes national decline to Harris with the statement "Kamala broke it". According to Mills (2008), covert sexism includes language that "frames women as incompetent or irresponsible", especially in leadership positions. By stating that she "broke" the nation, the tweet constructs Harris as the source of political failure, reinforcing negative stereotypes of "female inadequacy in governance"

Trump then presents himself as the corrective force who will "fix it" invoking a binary in which the female leader causes disorder, and the "male leader restores strength and stability". This rhetorical contrast taps into traditional gendered power structures, where men are viewed as authoritative problem-solvers and women as emotional or incapable (a concept discussed by Mills in covert sexism). The tweet uses bold and declarative phrases such as "inflation will END", "the border will be SAFE & SECURE" and "PEACE across the globe". Mills (2008) observes that assertive political speech styles are often gendered masculine and accepted when used by male figures. When women adopt similar styles, they are often criticized or dismissed. Thus, Trump's dominance-oriented rhetoric reinforces masculine-coded norms of leadership. Although no explicit gendered language is used, the implication that a female leader causes national breakdown while a male leader promises to restore power constitutes a clear example of covert sexism, as Mills describes.

To conclude, Trump's tweet blames Kamala Harris for national decline and frames himself as the solution. While the tweet contains no direct sexist language, it uses indirect sexism through presupposition and contrast. According to Mills (2008), the rhetorical framing of woman as the cause of disorder, man as the restorer reflects gendered power dynamics and reinforces traditional masculine ideals of leadership, aligning with covert sexist discourse.

Tweet 7



Analysis

In this tweet, Trump promotes his campaign by claiming that he is building a historically large and diverse political coalition, including Arab and Muslim voters in Michigan. He contrasts this by accusing Harris and her cabinet of being warmongers, suggesting that their leadership would lead to war in the Middle East and result in the deaths of millions of Muslims. The tweet ends with a directive: "Vote Trump, and bring back peace!"

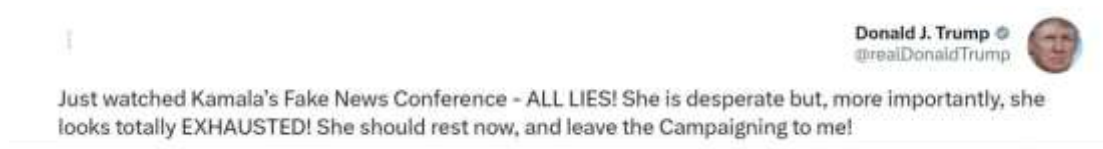
Although there is no obviously gendered language, the tweet functions within a framework of covert sexism as described by Mills (2008), particularly in the contrastive framing of leadership traits. Trump characterizes Harris and her cabinet as "warmongers" who will "invade the Middle East" cause the deaths of "millions of Muslims" and "start World War III". These claims present Harris as reckless, violent, and dangerous. While intended as a critique of policy, such extreme portrayals often reinforce stereotypes of women in power as irrational, unstable, or emotionally unfit (a central feature of covert sexism, according to Mills).

Trump presents himself as the bringer of "peace" and "order". This reflects a gendered binary, where the female leader is framed as disruptive and chaotic, while the male leader embodies control, diplomacy, and rational authority—traits traditionally coded as masculine in political discourse. As Mills (2008) argues, this contrast may not appear overtly sexist but subtly reinforces gender hierarchies through rhetorical framing.

Trump couches his attack in the voice of "Muslim voters" who allegedly "know" Harris will cause destruction. This rhetorical move allows him to project sexism onto others and avoid personal accountability—an example of covert sexism through presupposition and deniability, as outlined in Mills' model.

To summarize, Trump's tweet presents himself as a peacekeeper and accuses Kamala Harris of intending to provoke global war and mass death. He relies on covert sexism, using presupposition and contrastive framing to portray Harris as emotionally volatile and irresponsible-a stereotype often applied to women in power. The rhetorical structure reinforces masculine ideals of stable leadership, placing the male figure as a corrective to presumed female instability.

Tweet 8



Analysis

In data 8, Trump comments on a news conference held by Harris, labeling it as "Fake News" and accusing her of lying. He also describes Harris as "desperate" and "totally exhausted" suggesting she should stop campaigning and instead rest, implying he is better suited for the role.

Despite the absence of explicit sexist vocabulary, the tweet strongly aligns with the features of covert sexism as outlined by Mills (2008). By stating Harris "looks totally EXHAUSTED" and advising her to "rest" the tweet draws on stereotypes of women as physically or emotionally fragile- a classic example of social gender, as Mills discusses. This framing implies that Harris is incapable of handling the demands of leadership due to exhaustion, a criticism rarely directed at male candidates. Commenting on a woman's appearance-particularly by associating tiredness with incompetence- functions as a subtle linguistic attack on credibility, which Mills categorizes as covert sexism. This shifts attention from the content of Harris's speech to her physical state, reducing her to a visual or emotional object rather than a political actor.

By calling her press conference "Fake News" and accusing her of being "desperate" Trump uses belittling language that aligns with humor and irony-based sexism, even if not overtly humorous here. According to Mills, such tone is often used to strip women of authority while simultaneously denying any responsibility for discriminatory content. The final line "leave the Campaigning to me" establishes a clear male-female power contrast. Trump positions himself as the dominant, capable political actor and Harris as the overreaching, failing woman. This line up with covert sexist discourse, which operates by suggesting that male competence is natural and female leadership is inadequate.

In conclusion, Donald Trump's tweet criticizes Kamala Harris's news conference and attacks her credibility by focusing on her emotional state and physical appearance. While the tweet avoids overt sexist language, it clearly engages in covert sexism, as described by Mills (2008). Through presupposition, belittlement, and gendered framing, the tweet reinforces stereotypes of female fragility and male dominance, subtly undermining Harris's authority as a political leader.

5. Results

a-The tweets do not contain overt or covert sexist language. However, Mills' framework encourages examination beyond surface-level expressions, drawing attention to how political language interacts with gendered power structures.

b- Sexism often operates at the level of interpretation and context. the interpretation of such critiques may be influenced by gendered expectations in political discourse. As a female figure openly criticizing a male opponent, Harris potentially receives a different reception than a male counterpart would. Thus, while the tweet itself is non-sexist, its reception may reflect societal bias.

c-Harris's assertive rhetorical style challenges gender expectations by using a tone traditionally reserved for male politicians. This dual function- reproducing and resisting gender norms-reflects Mills' broader view of how discourse can both reflect and subvert sexism. her use of the adjective " unhinged" would interpret this as a challenge to covert sexism, showing how female politicians can disrupt traditional gendered expectations by asserting themselves within masculine-coded discursive spaces. By using assertive, evidence-based rhetoric and aligning herself with expert authority, Harris adopts a masculine-coded voice, thereby reversing gendered expectations. Mills (2008) views such rhetorical choices as a disruption of covert sexism, as they allow women to participate in political authority without conforming to gendered limitations on speech.

However, the four tweets' analysis reveals how gendered expectations shape political discourse, particularly regarding (strength, rationality, and authority). While Harris engages with traditional masculine-coded rhetoric, she simultaneously challenges and redefines gender norms in political communication. This aligns with Mills' view that sexism operates not only in what is said, but also in how language is received, interpreted, and positioned within broader societal structures.

d- The analysis of Trump's tweets reveals of covert sexism through rhetorical structures, presuppositions, and the reinforcement of gendered norms of leadership. Mills' framework allows for an examination not only of linguistic choices but also of how gendered ideologies are subtly maintained through discourse.

In tweet 5, Trump uses inclusive and gender-neutral language, Mills (2008) argues that assertive political discourse is often normalized for men, while being discouraged or criticized in women. Therefore, the message reflects covert sexism through its alignment with masculine norms of power and leadership, indirectly marginalizing more traditionally feminine-coded communicative styles. The tweet 6 presents opposition between female failure and male restoration. According to Mills, this contrast reinforces stereotypes of female incompetence and male problem-solving authority-a classic pattern of covert sexism. the seventh tweet shows female chaos vs. male rationality-is a form of covert sexism that relies on culturally embedded assumptions about gender and leadership.

Trump's description of Harris in tweet 8 draws on stereotypes of women as emotionally or physically unfit for leadership. it uses subtle belittlement and focuses on her appearance and emotional state, this strategy rarely applied to male politicians.

e- Across all his four tweets, he engages in covert sexist discourse by reinforcing masculine-coded leadership norms and positioning Kamala Harris within a framework of female inadequacy. According to Mills (2008), such language constructs and perpetuates gendered power relations, even when sexism is not overtly expressed. Trump's rhetorical strategies- including (contrastive framing, presupposition, tone, and appeals to cultural values) -reinforce a discursive environment where male authority is normalized and female leadership is implicitly questioned.

6. Conclusion

The analysis appears to be influenced by the speaker's gender, as Harris's tweets-particularly those using terms such as "weak" and "unhinged" - might be interpreted as clearly sexist if expressed by a male speaker. However, when spoken by a female politician, they are not typically regarded as sexist. This suggests that perceptions of sexism in political discourse are shaped not only by language but also by the gender of the speaker.

The analysis shows that while neither uses overtly sexist language, both engage with gendered power dynamics. Harris avoids both overt and covert sexism, but adopts assertive, expert-driven rhetoric traditionally coded as masculine. In doing so, she challenges and redefines gender norms in political speech.

Trump's tweets, by contrast, reflect covert sexism. Through contrastive framing, presupposition, and tone, he reinforces stereotypes of female inadequacy and promotes masculine ideals of leadership. His language portrays Harris as unstable and ineffective, while positioning himself as strong and rational.

Overall, the findings show that sexism in political discourse often emerges through interpretation, reception, and societal expectation, rather than explicit language. Harris subverts these gendered norms, while Trump reinforces them, revealing how deeply gender shapes political communication.

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