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## A Comparison of Obama's 2007 and Hillary Clinton's 2015 Bids for Presidency Speeches

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### ABSTRACT

The article sought to study Barack Obama's 2007 bid for the presidency in his Announcement Speech and Hillary Rodham Clinton's 2015 bid for the presidency in her Campaign Launch Speech. It focused on how both candidates used the central ideas and their development into the main ideas of the speeches to declare their bids for President of the U.S.A. The research raised some questions regarding whether the two speeches had similarities, as both politicians were running in the presidential race on the Democratic Party's path. The research method employed qualitative content analysis to study the core meaning of the speeches based on new analytical narratives viewed in terms of specific rhetorical strategies. Subsequently, the study interpreted the underlying thought behind the speeches by focusing on the central ideas and their elaboration into the main ideas. The article showed that Obama and Clinton shared some similarities as they attempted to earn the support of Americans of all backgrounds. They defended the cause of the middle-class economy. Obama focused more on a coalition of Americans of diverse background and change, whereas Clinton focused more on furthering the middle-class economy.

Keywords: Obama's and Clinton's bids for Presidency, Obama's and Clinton's presidential campaign speeches, Obama's and Clinton's presidential race, Democratic presidential candidates, Democratic platform, American presidential race.

### INTRODUCTION

It is very common for politicians who intend to run for presidential races to take their time in officially announcing their candidacies. In American politics, such candidates usually allow themselves sufficient time before they vigorously embark on the campaign trail throughout the country. Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton (henceforth referred to as Obama and Clinton, respectively) were rivals in their attempts to win the Democratic Party's official nomination for the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Finally Obama won the race and got the Democratic Party's nomination and ultimately won the race to the White House after defeating his Republican rival, John McCain. As Obama's second term of presidential office was drawing to a close, Clinton ran for the 2016 presidential election as would-be first female president of the U.S.A. Indeed, Hillary herself has been in public view on the national level for more than two consecutive decades: first as first lady when Bill Clinton was the U.S. president for two terms of office. Then, she served two terms in elected public office as a senator from New York. After she was defeated by Obama in the 2008 primary race, to her

party's and comrades' astonishment, she accepted Obama's offer to serve as Secretary of State in his administration. With a long record of experience, she stood unmatched within her own party.

### Scope of the Research

The scope of this research is a rhetoric and discourse study involving inquiry into both Obama's and Clinton's carefully scripted texts using rhetorical craft to communicate their persuasive political thoughts and goals in their bids for the U.S. presidency. The research is focused on the core meaning of both figures' invention of the central ideas and their further elaboration on some of the main ideas to communicate their arguments in their bids for the U.S. presidency. This research used the term "style of political communication" to refer to a distinct way of using language to create a certain effect to achieve political goals (cf. Verdonk, 2002, p. 5,6).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This research identified the central ideas in accordance with the idea of "invention"—the first of five

canons of rhetoric (cf. Beebe & Beebe, 2009, p. 447; cf. Hesford & Brueggemann, 2007, pp. 36-40; cf. De Beaugrande & Dressler, 1990, p.14; cf. Leith & Myerson, 1989, p. 15)—and then developed it to become a complete text in terms of a set of main ideas. To identify the rhetorical canon of “invention”, this paper used the rhetorical construct of “the central idea of a speech”, which is the underlying thoughts of a speech expressed in “a one-sentence summary of the speech content” (cf. Beebe & Beebe, 2009, p. 31), to decipher the core meaning of both Obama's and Clinton's bids for the U.S. presidency. For that purpose, analytical narratives were used to deconstruct the scripts of the speeches to determine the thoughts underlying each speech. The same processes also helped identify the “main ideas” of the speeches as further development of the central ideas into key points of the speech in the text-making process (cf. Beebe & Beebe, 2009, pp. 30-32). This paper aims to examine how these constructs were used to organize meaning resources in order to communicate both political figures' lines of thought and political goals in their respective speech (cf. Verdonk, 2002; cf. Thornborrow, 2002; cf. Becker, 1977).

This work involved closely scrutinizing the organization of these meaning resources using certain rhetorical techniques (cf. Leanne, 2010). Such techniques include introducing an effective ice-breaker to an audience with the aim of establishing common ground for breaking down barriers (pp. 15, 16, 63), sending a message that could earn a wider audience for a speaker to achieve transcendence (pp. 42,43), conveying vision through personalization by means of down-to-earth everyday examples of ordinary life (p. 17), sending and personalizing messages that can be easily grasped by common people (pp. 74-76), sending a message related to the audience's shared experience and familiarity by evoking relations to events or iconic characters in history (pp. 48, 49, 82, 83), using resonating words or phrases from political lexicon by borrowing words from iconic figures in history (pp. 22, 56, 59), and ending a speech by signaling a strong sense of determination and involvement on the part of the audience by using a crescendo tone and leaving a strong impression (pp. 18-19).

#### **DATA AND SOURCES OF THE DATA**

The sources of the data for this article were Obama's 2007 bid for the U.S. presidency, known as his Announcement Speech (Obama, 2007a). The prepared text was delivered against the backdrop of the Old State Capitol Building in Springfield, Illinois (2007b). Meanwhile, for Clinton's 2015 bid for the

U.S. presidency, this research used her first campaign launch speech in running for the 2016 presidential race (Clinton, 2015b). The prepared text was delivered on June 13, 2015, in Roosevelt Island, New York, two months after her official announcement to run for the 2016 U.S. presidency (Clinton, 2015a; cf. Lisa, 2015). The data were Obama's and Clinton's central ideas and main ideas in their bids for the presidency.

#### **RESEARCH METHODS**

The research conducted a qualitative content analysis of Obama's and Clinton's speeches as mentioned above to uncover their respective central ideas constituting sets of their main ideas in communicating their respective political thoughts and goals (cf. Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 16-30; cf. Schreier, 2013, pp. 1-8, 30). Krippendorff (2004, pp. 16,17) labels such an approach as interpretive because it requires a close reading of both speeches and rearticulating them into new analytical narratives. The method consists of the following steps: performing a close reading and rearticulating the content of both speeches, determining the research questions to focus on the inquiry related to the rhetorical craft to communicate the texts' persuasive political thoughts and goals in terms of how each expressed their bids for the U.S. presidency, attempting to interpret both texts, answering the research questions, and drawing conclusions and verifying the findings (cf. Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 29, 30).

In the data analysis, data reduction techniques were used, as the research goal was to focus on both Obama's and Clinton's rhetorical craft in communicating their political thought and goals in terms of the central ideas and key ideas in their bids for the U.S. presidency. The central idea of the respective speech was derived by deconstructing the organization of the meaning resources of the related speech scripts in terms of rhetorical techniques (cf. Leanne, 2010), rearticulated it into a new analytical narrative. Then, a one-sentence summary of the speech content was drawn (cf. Beebe & Beebe, 2009, p. 31) from the new analytical narrative (cf. Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 16, 17). Furthermore, the main ideas of the speech were derived by identifying the key points of the successive paragraphs of each speech script (cf. Beebe & Beebe, 2009, pp. 30-32) with the help of the new analytical narratives. In the research processes, the researcher used interpretation to arrive at the core meaning of the styles of the political communication as expressed in the central and main ideas of both speeches (cf. Schreier, 2013, pp. 4, 30). To explore the range of opinions or views on the topic of this paper, clarify

perspectives, and verify the depth of meanings of the speeches, the researcher had a natural discussion with some people having expertise on American politics and rhetoric (cf. “Research”, n.d.; cf also Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990, pp. 12-15, 141).

## ANALYSIS RESULTS

### Central Idea: Obama’s Announcement Speech

Obama announced that he was running for the presidential race on February 10, 2007, in Springfield, Illinois. His Announcement Speech was delivered against the backdrop of the Old State Capitol Building, which symbolically linked him to the historically iconic figure related to the site—Abraham Lincoln—the father of American unity who rose to national leadership as president. To establish common ground and linkages with his audience, Obama encouraged his audience’s participation in his “journey for a reason”, communicating the message of power and unity as one people to build a more perfect union. Thus, against this backdrop, Obama’s Announcement Speech sent the message to the American audience that his “improbable quest” for the presidency was part of the long journey for a more unified America begun by his predecessor.

As part of that journey of how he came to join the presidential race, Obama spoke about the American values of hard work for a better and greater cause shared by most Americans. He personalized the values by using a grass-root narrative of his initial career as a community organizer to play “a small part in building a better America” in Chicago’s poorest neighborhoods. He mentioned that Springfield had given him the best education. He went to law school, worked as a civil right lawyer, lectured on constitutional law, and then became a senator from the region. Subsequently, he was motivated to enter into politics because he had learned that some things could not be solved on the local level but could only be addressed on a higher political level. Springfield had taught him more about the decency of the American people, through which they could build a more hopeful America. Against the backdrop of the Old State Capital Building associated with the iconic figure of Abraham Lincoln, Obama announced that he was running for president. He was determined to deliver on his goal of changing the ways of Washington.

Obama reminded his audience that the American government was apt to change to be more responsive

to the needs of the people. People who loved their country could change it. Each generation had their own calls. He reminded his audience that they were called to change the ways of Washington—including the failed policies and broken politics of the ruling party. Through the American legacy, they, together as one people, were capable of meeting any challenges that would arise.

Obama’s message was soaring high as he referenced history and took advantage of his familiarity with his audience. No less important was how Obama also strongly emphasized the strength of America using intertextuality between the white tradition by citing Abraham Lincoln—“a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer”—and the black tradition by citing Martin King Luther Jr. as he powerfully insisted on “a King’s call to let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream”.

Obama’s message became transcendent as he emphasized the people’s commonalities—facing and solving their common challenges and problems—the failed policies and broken politics—together as one people. The message of a coalition of people of diverse backgrounds to meet their common problems and challenges was foregrounded in his audience’s awareness. He underscored that the campaign was not only his but also about things that they—he and the people—could do together to bring about change.

Using the historically iconic figure Abraham Lincoln and borrowing his resonating words, Obama underscored his plea for American unity and their mission together to transform the nation. Obama ended his speech by using the crescendo rhetorical technique and leaving a strong impression on the part of his audience to take action in joining his “improbable cause” to continue the unfinished job of perfecting the union in pursuit of a better America.

Based on the core content of the analytical narrative above, the central idea of Obama’s Announcement Speech can therefore be summarized as follows: “Only a broader coalition of Americans of the most diverse backgrounds can work to bring about change and unified force to overcome widespread problems in America”.

### Main Ideas: Obama’s Announcement Speech

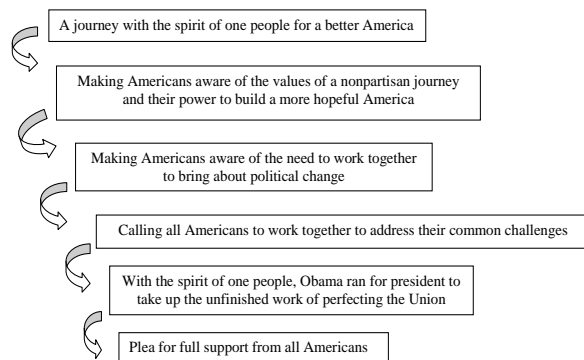
The following is a table of the speech organization containing the main ideas of Obama’s Announcement Speech:

**Table 1.** Organization of the Main Ideas in Obama's Presidential Announcement Speech

Organization of the Main Ideas in the Speech	
1	<b>OPENING</b> Appreciation for the audience joining him on a journey with the spirit of one people for a better America
2	<b>BODY</b> Nonpartisan journey and the decency of the American people to build a more hopeful America Reminding Americans of the need to work together to bring about political change Calling all Americans to work together to address their common challenges With the spirit of one people, Obama ran for president to take up the unfinished work of perfecting the Union.
3	<b>CLOSING</b> Plea for full support from all Americans

### Foregrounded Message of Obama's Style of Political Communication

Through careful and critical reading and comparison of the main ideas of the speech, the foregrounded message of Obama's political communication in the speech can be inferred as follows:

**Table 2.** Foregrounded Message of Obama's Style of Political Communication in the Announcement Speech

### Central Idea: Clinton's First Campaign Launch Speech

Clinton's first campaign launch speech was delivered on June 13, 2015, in a political rally two months after the official announcement of her bid for the presidency by means of social media (Clinton, 2015a). The choice of the site on the park in Roosevelt Island, New York, could have been intended to evoke the spirit of Franklin D. Roosevelt, of whose legacy Clinton aimed to follow. She took a position of standing tall as she mentioned the headquarters of the United Nations, a place visible from the site where she had represented the U.S.A., evoking her prior role and experience on the international forum that could be of advantage to her

later as future commander in chief. Meanwhile, her use of the phrase "no ceiling" to refer to the open air park aimed to evoke the image of the "glass ceiling" metaphor, referring to the highest position that women can see but not attain. This reference reminded her audience that she could be the next—but first—female president of the U.S.A.

Clinton mentioned Roosevelt's enduring vision of America in which prosperity had to be built and shared by all. Later in the speech, she listed the four fights to follow in Roosevelt's steps that had become the focus of her campaign: strengthening the economy, strengthening families, increasing opportunities, and renewing the promise of the American democracy. She honored Roosevelt's legacy that was continued by two Democratic presidents, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, clearly indicating that she was also determined to keep this legacy alive. Her reference to those iconic figures showed her firm foundation to step into this role. Rhetorically, she was speaking with the goal of establishing common ground with her audience when referencing history and familiarity. This effort aimed to link her bid to her predecessors' legacies in emphasizing the middle-class economy. She also showed that she appeared to be a strong politician coming from a deep-rooted tradition as she borrowed resonating words from Roosevelt's political lexicon, such as equal opportunity, job security, no special privilege for the few, civil liberties, and standard of living. She reminded the audience of America's basic bargain with her Democratic predecessors. Clinton personalized the values of hard work and dreams of a better future in America's basic bargain by using tricolons and telling about her hard-working grandfather in the small business of printing drapery fabric that could finally reward him with middle-class life. The same success was true on the national level as Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama reached success in their respective administration, as both held tightly to the enduring basic bargain of America.

She talked about how to meet new challenges and keep moving forward with the economy and the democracy. She reminded her audience that the challenges they were facing originated from the false belief in another fundamental vision of the economy from the other party. She promised that it was time to realize that everyone's hard work would pay off. She promised to create prosperity for every American. It was for these reasons that she was declaring her run for the U.S. presidency, not just for a few but for all Americans. She was running for president and showed she was at odds with Republican top-down economic policies. She underscored the so-called inclusive economy, referring to the vision of America that her values and lifetime had taught her. Clinton

personalized the type of hope, perseverance and endurance shared by every American to meet everyday challenges. She mentioned that everyday Americans needed a chance and a champion, and she wanted to be that champion. She personalized her determination using a narrative of her own years of experience and work to show that she was more than ready to be a champion for all Americans. She pleaded for the support of all Americans to fight for the legacy of the four freedoms. She sought to build the American middle-class economy for everyday Americans. She wanted to strengthen American families to strengthen the nation. She aimed to harness American ingenuities to help America stay ahead in terms of peace, security, and prosperity. She wanted to reform the American government and revitalize the American democracy to better serve everyday Americans.

Clinton pleaded for the spirit of togetherness to work as one people to build the nation and to win the four fights: building an economy where hard work would pay off, strengthening families, defending the country and increasing opportunities, and renewing the promise of democracy.

She reminded her audience that the fight would not be easy. They would face challenges as the other side would still be promoting another fundamentally different vision of America. The job would be difficult, but she was quite determined to persevere. She personalized the importance of the value of perseverance in a narrative of her mother, who had taught and reminded her to keep fighting amidst various difficulties.

Clinton ended her first campaign launch speech on a crescendo, reminding the audience that the story of American progress could have been made only by hard struggles. She left a strong impression on the part of her audience to join her in the job of building the nation for their common good—a nation where nobody would be left out or left behind.

Based on the core content of the analytical narrative of Clinton’s speech above, the central idea of her first campaign launch speech can therefore be stated as follows: “America had to meet every challenge together as one people to strengthen the rewarding American middle-class economy, strengthen families, defend the country and increase opportunities, and renew the promise of democracy”.

**Main Ideas: Clinton’s First Campaign Launch Speech**

The following is a table of the speech organization containing the main ideas of Clinton’s First Campaign Launch Speech:

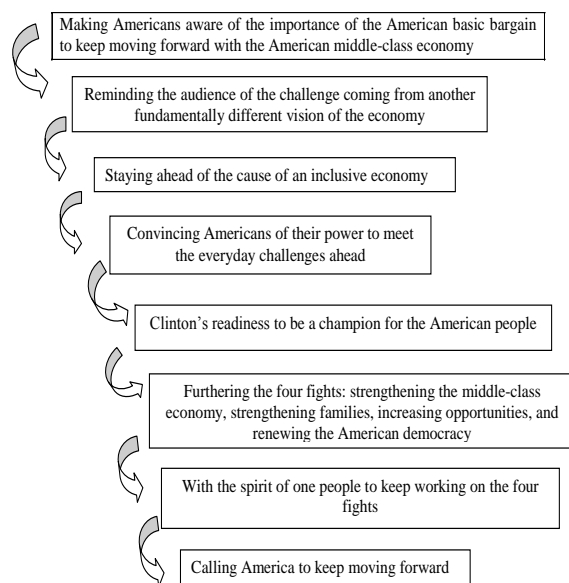
**Table 3.** The Main Ideas of Clinton’s First Campaign Launch Speech

<b>OPENING</b>	
1	Salutation and standing tall with the enduring vision of America
<b>BODY</b>	
2	The enduring values of the American bargain
3	Keeping ahead in the economy and the democracy
4	Creating prosperity for every American
5	Fighting against unemployment and economic inequality
6	At odds with Republican top-down economic policies
7	Promoting an inclusive economy
8	The potential of every American to face every challenge
9	Clinton’s readiness to be a champion for the American people
10	Strengthening the American middle-class economy
11	Strengthening American families
12	Maintaining America’s forward pace in leadership and increasing opportunities
13	Renewing the American democracy
14	With the spirit of one people to keep working on the four fights
15	Fighting against another fundamentally different vision of America
<b>CLOSING</b>	
16	Calling America to keep moving forward

**Foregrounded Message of Clinton’s Style of Political Communication**

Through careful and critical reading and comparison of the existing main ideas of the speech, the foregrounded message of Clinton’s style of political communication in the speech can be inferred as follows:

**Table 4.** Foregrounded Message of Clinton’s Style of Political Communication in Her First Campaign Launch Speech





### **A Comparison of Obama's and Clinton's Central Ideas**

Obama's central idea focused more on the theme of raising a coalition of Americans of diverse backgrounds to work together to bring about political change to counter the failed national leadership of the preceding Republican president and solve America's common problems as part of the job of perfecting the Union.

Clinton's central idea focused more on strengthening the American middle-class economy of the preceding administration, motivated by the awareness to keep America's basic bargain and the readiness with support of all Americans as one people to meet new challenges to keep working on the four fights: strengthening the economy, strengthening families, increasing opportunities, and advancing the American democracy.

### **A Comparison of Obama's and Clinton's Main Ideas**

Both Obama and Clinton shared the same ideology of the Democratic Party. For this reason, both continually reminded their prospective voters of the challenges coming from another fundamentally different vision of America. They both fought for the cause of the American middle-class economy. However, their political situations were very different. When Obama launched his bid for the presidency, his predecessor was a Republican president, George Bush. Obama aimed to demand change from his predecessor's failed leadership. It stood to reason that he would heavily criticize Bush's failed policies. By contrast, when Clinton was launching her bid for the 2016 presidency, her predecessor was Obama—from the same party—under whose first administration she had served as Secretary of State. Instead of criticizing him, she praised him along with another Democratic president, Bill Clinton, her husband, for honoring America's basic bargain in making them both successful. She sought to continue Obama's success. Therefore, for Obama, his bid meant to bring about fundamental change from Republican to Democratic politics. For Clinton, her bid meant to preserve and continue the implementation of the Democratic vision of economy and politics\*. The focus of her campaign

underscored the goal of advancing in the four fights: strengthening the economy, strengthening families, defending the country and increasing opportunities, and advancing the American democracy. Clinton would be in a worse position—to be labeled as a status quo presidential candidate—if she were not able to add more to Obama's accomplishments.

Obama linked himself as part of the procession in history to bring together Americans of diverse backgrounds to accept the unfinished job of perfecting the Union. By personalizing a romantic narrative of himself from very humble beginnings, he wanted to earn the support of all Americans to play a small role in contributing to a better America—a nonpartisan narrative shared by the majority of Americans. Undoubtedly, he was able to earn the support of a coalition of Americans of all backgrounds. Meanwhile, Clinton appeared to be standing tall as a politician with a long record of international experience and reputation. Like Obama, who used an iconic figure (Abraham Lincoln) and cited his words/phrases from his resonating political lexicon, Clinton also used an iconic figure (former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt) and borrowed his resonating words/phrases to keep her political goal alive. Obama used Lincoln to evoke and underscore the spirit of unity of all Americans to work together for their common good, whereas Clinton used Roosevelt to carry on the four freedoms. Clinton seemed to follow her Democratic predecessor as she enlisted the support of minorities such as LGBT voters, immigrants, and the majority of middle-class voters of various backgrounds. She sounded a more populous message as she promised to be a champion for all Americans and stated that she was running to make the so-called "inclusive economy" work for everyday Americans in which no one would be excluded. Prosperity was meant for all Americans. Obama's bid was also concerned with foreign policy, such as putting an end to the unending wars outside the country, whereas Clinton's bid was focused more on the strengthening of America's domestic middle-class economy that had been reclaimed by her Democratic predecessor. America's role in international affairs was sufficiently left to her track record on the international front, which she mentioned in citing her role in representing America on the international forum from the start and, of course, implicitly referring to the common knowledge of her track record as a former Secretary of State. Foreign policy was only slightly mentioned but not further elaborated, as she also sought to further the cause of defending the country to meet new global challenges requiring all elements of America's power.

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\* The argument is more convincing if Clinton's 2015 bid for the U.S. president is analyzed against the backdrop of Obama's bid for a second presidential term in his three speeches: the Osawatimie Economic Speech (2011), the State of the Union Address (2012a), and the Virginia Beach Campaign Speech (2012b). In these speeches, Obama underscored his goal of reclaiming the American middle-class economy

## CONCLUSION

Following the analysis and discussion of Obama's and Clinton's bids for the presidency, several conclusions can be drawn:

- a) Both Obama and Clinton sought to maintain America's middle-class economy motivated by the desire to honor America's basic bargain.
- b) Obama criticized the failed politics and policies of the preceding Republican president and sought to change them with the support of a coalition of Americans of diverse backgrounds.
- c) Clinton sought to continue the vision of creating a prosperous middle-class economy by emphasizing what she called an inclusive economy in which no one would be excluded and in which hard work would pay off for every American.

Finally, to better explore the whole context of Clinton's 2015 bid for the U.S. presidency, it would be worth studying her bid in light of Obama's bid for his second term as president, in which he underscored his goal to reclaim the American middle-class economy, particular in the following speeches: the Osawatomie Economic Speech (Obama, 2011), the State of the Union Address (Obama, 2012a), and the Virginia Beach Campaign Speech (Obama, 2012b).

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