

# Trump Breaks the Internet

An Analysis of the Accuracy of the 45th President

Elee Wolf-Sonkin

State University of New York at New Paltz

*This paper is broken up into two parts. The first part describes the powers and consequences of presidential rhetoric. The president has defining, institutional, and psychological power over the people through their rhetoric. This power is extremely impactful and can be dangerous. The second part outlines possible reasons why the 45th President is especially inaccurate in his rhetoric, settling on the Personal Experience school, which suggests that Trump's business history yields accuracies in economic rhetoric, yet his lack of political experience yields inaccuracies in policy rhetoric. After an analysis of ten randomly selected tweets from Donald J. Trump's account in various categories (Unemployment, Deficit, Health Care, and Immigration), I analyzed accuracies and found that despite very low percentages of accuracies in both economic and policy rhetoric, the President was actually more accurate in policy rhetoric than he was in economic rhetoric.*

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Presidential Rhetoric is a unique and mighty tool held by the person with the greatest political power in the United States, the president. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering the available means of persuasion in the given case” (Zarefsky, 2004). Neustadt claimed that presidential power *is* the power to persuade; in other words, rhetoric is the president’s power (Neustadt, 1991). President Trump has become known for his impressively and unusually inaccurate rhetoric. As presidential rhetoric is so important, it is vital to understand how and why Trump speaks, or in this case tweets, in the way that he does. The first part of this paper will demonstrate the powers and consequences of presidential rhetoric. The second part of this paper will then attempt to understand why the president has such a high tendency to be inaccurate in his claims.

## I

Presidential speech itself has been described as “part theater and part political declaration,” (Noonan, 1990). In fact, the first time the public is introduced to their president *as* their president is in the context of a speech: the inaugural address (Patterson, 2000). This rhetoric is designed for a plethora of audiences. All from congress, heads of industries, supporters, opponents, and more are addressed (Shaw, 2017). This rhetoric may be speech, imagery, or symbolism used in order to reach the goals of the administration. Primarily, presidential rhetoric serves to define political reality (Zarefsky, 2004).

### **The Power of Definition**

Presidents possess the power to define concepts, events, and individuals to the public however they desire. They can influence how the public will view and handle a situation by underscoring some features and hiding others. The president can define national and international issues and pinpoint solutions. They can shape moral judgments on various issues, structuring the world so that they can succeed in their objectives (Zarefsky, 2004).

According to Zarefsky (2004), presidents can use the power of definition in four ways. Firstly, they can create associations from one concept to another. This allows them to further develop an initial concept. For example, President Bush linked the terror attack on 9/11 with “war” even though the attack was not state-sponsored (Zarefsky, 2004). This shaped the public’s willingness to understand and accept the administration’s decision to launch a military response onto another state. This was in contrast to how the Clinton administration had treated terror attacks, which it viewed as crimes, not war. Thus, Bush proceeded to change the characterization of terror attacks simply by employing a different rhetorical term.

Secondly, the president can define by dissociation. This means that they can fragment a concept into different pieces in order to identify their proposal with any segment that is positively perceived. For example, President Kennedy defined his arms control programs with “real peace”, as opposed to a type of military competition with the Soviet Union (Zarefsky, 2004).

Thirdly, a situation may be defined by what Zarefsky (2004) calls “condensation symbols”, or those which designate no clear referent but instead condense together a host of connotations and meanings together. This aids in ambiguous situations. For example, President

Clinton approached the difficult situation of budget deficits by giving his plan the positive connotation of “save social security first”, even though it did not quite mean that to all involved. This strategy can condense divergent emotional reactions to a stimulus (Zarefsky, 2004).

Fourthly, a president may rely on frame shifting, or using a different context from the one with which an idea is generally viewed. For example, President Bush relied on an ex post facto justification for the (failed) 2003 Iraq invasion. After clear evidence demonstrated that no weapons of mass destruction were present in Iraq (the original justification for the invasion), Bush highlighted, instead, the importance of the U.S. action of eliminating Saddam Hussein, a known tyrant (Zarefsky, 2004). Changing the frame of reference allowed the president to promote greater public acceptance of the action.

### **Institutional Powers of Presidential Rhetoric**

While the rhetorical presidency has become familiar to what Americans view as the job of the president, it is important to note the ways rhetoric has influenced the development of American political institutions (Tulis, 1987). The Presidency has clearly shown not only its strength, but its dominance via the strategic use of rhetoric.

It seems obvious that the president’s use of rhetoric overrides any official statements from other executive branch offices as the president is the constitutional head of this branch. Their rhetoric is so well regarded that it naturally replaces previously announced statements of executive offices (Shaw, 2017). Tulis (1987) describes rhetorical power as a special case of power as it simultaneously is the method of how the president defends the use of their powers *and* is a power in and of itself.

It has become typical for presidents to use rhetoric to “go over the heads” of congress to the people to support legislative proposals (Tulis, 1987). Since President Taft, presidents have been building their messages to the public around long lists of legislative goals (Tulis, 1987). Even within congress, presidential speech has a notable impact on congressional deliberation (Kasavan & Sidak, 2002). Since the president is the head of his or her political party, it is expected that the president will typically have some assurance of getting support from members of his or her party in congress.

While the role of the courts is more legal than political, presidential rhetoric has had impacts on judicial decisions, too (Shaw, 2017). For example, in response to challenges to the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy, a federal district court, relying on a single presidential speech, decided that the policy did not advance national security interests. This is particularly significant as this decision was in direct contrast to official statements made on the matter by the Departments of Justice and Defense (Shaw, 2017). Presidential rhetoric has also been used in ways adverse to the administration. President Trump’s rhetoric has been used in a multitude of court decisions regarding the “travel ban” executive order (State of Hawaii v Donald Trump, 2017). Most of the decisions using the statements as evidence that the logic given for the order was pretextual (Shaw, 2017). The rhetoric revealed the more discriminatory, more illegitimate, purpose for the order.

Dangerously, this rhetoric tends to be treated “largely ad hoc, undertheorized, and badly in need of guiding principles” by the courts (Shaw, 2017). This places an enormous amount of influence in the hands of one person. Shaw (2017) argues that this treatment grants legal effect to rhetoric for which the goal is more political storytelling than true legal positions.

While this ability is certainly threatening to American political institutions broadly, it is extremely valuable to the president. This level of power allows a sitting president to accomplish far more of their goals than they may be able to otherwise. It is in their best interest to preserve this effect as much as they can.

### **The Power of Imagined Crises**

The public is more susceptible to following the rhetoric of the president during times of crisis (Edelman, 1974). In order to maintain influence and make it easier to accomplish goals, presidents may use imagined crises to increase susceptibility of the public. Bostdorff (2017) has claimed that the main persuasive challenge for president Trump is whether, to maintain a political advantage, he can keep his supporters in a constant state of anger about assorted crises.

It is not difficult to see how a president who is able to convince the public to believe that the nation is in a constant state of crisis can use this tool to great effect in normal times, as well. Despite the helpful effects to the president, these attempts to mobilize the public via the use of rhetoric delegitimizes normal constitutional authority of the president (Tulis, 1987). Tulis (1987) argues that a president who wields rhetoric successfully, in times of crisis, can then create pseudo-crises to their benefit.

President Trump performs the creation of pseudo-crises by persistently depicting himself and his supporters as victims. He is able to label the political and media establishment as nefarious forces working against the people he represents. A president who characterizes the political environment as one of an impending crisis or their opponents as “evil” is using rhetoric to manipulate public fear (Bostdorff, 2017). Creating an enemy is a surefire way to maintain an

imagined crisis. In order to do this, there needs to be a group labeled the enemy. The fight for self defense is a pure case for the moral justification of violence (Kelman, 1976). The idea that “They’re out to get us” which President Trump uses when referring to groups such as immigrants helps him create a crisis – but it also contributes to larger problems in a nation of his followers.

### **Psychological Power over the People**

Presidential rhetoric has the potential to influence the public’s views in a multitude of ways outside of simply changing beliefs. It can reinforce an initial position, modify an attitude, change the perception of how others believe, or change the interpretation of a stimulus (Zarefksy, 2004). However, the president can only impact the public to the degree to which the public psychologically relies on its leader.

The public tends to be highly receptive to the president by predisposition to follow authority. The position of the president and the public’s reliance on him makes anything the president says important and influential (Cohen, 1995). The public tends to wait on the president's words before forming a view on policy issues, psychologically relying on them (Greenstein, 1974). Kelman (1976) has reported that wide segments of the population respond to political authorities with unquestioning obedience. Milgram’s famous obedience experiments have shown that this is built into the structure of authority situations generally, even in non-political contexts (Kelman, 1976).

Seemingly most jarring, Cohen (1995) asserts that the president does not even have to prove to the public why they are correct. The mere mention can heighten public concern even without substantive backing. As psychological reliance on presidential leadership is more

heightened in crisis situations (Edelman, 1974), it is clear why presidents tend to use pseudo-crises to maintain power (Cohen, 1995). However, history has demonstrated that the dehumanized depiction of an identifiable population by a government official can all too often lead to mass atrocities.

### **The Consequential Effects of Dehumanization**

Dehumanization, according to Bruneau (2018), is a special evaluation of others which is consistently associated with hostility or antagonistic behavior towards this group. While dehumanization is the view of a group of people as less than human, often animal like, dislike/prejudice is a different concept. Different regions of the brain are activated depending on which judgment is rendered (Bruneau, 2018). One of the dangerous aspects of this is that when one considers a subsection of some group as less than human, they tend to extend the dehumanization generally to the whole. People tend to project the misconducts of one group's extremists on that group as a whole. This grand dehumanization leads to the support of hostile policies and antagonistic behaviors toward the groups in question (Bruneau, 2018).

Kelman (1976) described how overt dehumanization weakens the restraints on humans' violent behavior by de-individuating a group. Once they are not people but simply a mass of less than human "savages", the promotion of the horrors of slavery, colonization, war, and genocide tend to follow (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). Smith (2011) argues that the depictions of minority groups as animals or inhuman did not just accompany these horrors, but facilitated them.

Leading up to the Holocaust, the Jews and Roma were referred to as "untermensch" or subhuman by Nazi officials. Just before 500,000 Tutsis were brutally killed in under 100 days

during the Rwandan genocide, they were referred to as “cockroaches” on public radio (Bruneau, 2018). Zsolt Bayer, a Hungarian politician, held speeches lamenting that not all the Jews were killed in a 1920 massacre of Jewish villages (Balogh, 2016). He publicly described the Roma as being “unfit for coexistence among human beings”. After a little girl who was a Roma was nearly killed in a car accident, Bayer encouraged the public to drive over Roma children (Balogh, 2016). His words are disturbing, and yet the U.S. president uses some of them.

President Trump repeated the words of Bayer during his campaign trail. Bayer used an analogy of the apparent threat of Muslims on Hungarians stating “If I sent you a nice big bowl of chocolates, and I inform you that I only poisoned ten, what would you do?” (Bruneau, 2018). According to Kteily and Bruneau (2017), this endorsement of dehumanizing rhetoric against Muslims promotes violent behavior.

Famously, President Trump seems to repeat “These aren’t people, these are animals” (Bruneau, 2018). He has based his claims on evidence; Trump reports seven Central American immigrants who were indicted for murder as evidence that immigrants as a group are dangerous. Calling them “animals” makes it simple to classify all immigrants as a threat (Bump, 2018a). The president and his supporters tend to dispute this claim, stating that he does not refer to all immigrants but to the subset of violent extremists who cross the border through Mexico. However, even if this is true, evidence shows that the distinction becomes fuzzy in the listener’s mind (Bruneau, 2018).

When American subjects were asked how much *all* Muslims were to blame for the acts of violent extremists, the average response is 40% (Bruneau, 2018). Conversely, when asked about how much *all* white Christians were to blame for the acts of violent white Christian extremists

(like the Klu Klux Klan), the same subjects held them only 10% responsible on the same scale (Bruneau, 2018). Violent white Christians' acts seem to be special cases while violent acts by members of minority groups extend to the characterization of the whole.

Even if President Trump is rhetorically correct in his claim that he is only discussing a small subsection of a group, it is psychologically irrelevant (Bruneau, 2018). The consequences of this mass dehumanization is clear. Those who expressed more dehumanization toward Muslim or Mexican immigrants were reportedly more likely to sign petitions to urge legislators to implement harsh policies like the travel ban or the wall (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). These are plans that the president is actively trying to implement. A psychological study revealed that an individual's likelihood to blatantly dehumanize Mexican and Muslim immigrants could uniquely predict support for Mr. Trump during the 2016 election. This remained constant even after controlling for prejudice toward these groups and political ideology (Kteily & Bruneau, 2016).

### **Rhetoric as a Weapon**

Rhetoric is a highly effective tool in the hands of the most powerful person in America. Dehumanization is shown to predict hostility worldwide. The decision to use this language invites violence against all perceived to be associated with the dehumanized (Bruneau, 2018).

As it is clearly shown to be wildly impactful, presidential rhetoric should be very carefully employed. Unfortunately, the sitting president does not seem to handle this weapon with the vigilance it requires. In fact, many argue that much of the president's rhetoric is not just careless, but inaccurate. The next section in this paper will address this issue and evaluate the president's accuracy.

## II

Since George Washington, American presidents have had a special role in how they communicate with the public. With just the power of words, they can influence the public's policy agenda, and presidents generally attempt to use their rhetoric to accomplish all kinds of goals (Cohen, 1995; Smith, 1983). Rhetoric has been called a presidential tool (Neustadt, 1991), as it is apparent that the public seems psychologically reliant on the president and what he or she says (Greenstein, 1974). For these reasons, President Trump's rhetoric should not be dismissed. He is able to insert his ideas into topics of debate in the nation and communicate broadly to his supporters in a more personal way than previous presidents (Zelizer, 2018).

President Trump is especially remarkable in his rhetoric, as he is often alarmingly inaccurate. Impressively, statistical analysis shows that Trump's words are getting more dishonest over time. The 45th president has brought on an "unprecedented avalanche of serial lying". Of all words spoken and tweeted by Trump between his inauguration and July 2017, 5.1% were a part of a false claim; that is to say, one in every 19.4 words is false. In 2018, the percentage of words part of a false claim uttered by Trump rose to 7.3% (Dale, 2018a).

Presidents have been communicating to the public in a more personal manner since FDR was able to institute his "Fireside Chats," due to the introduction of public radio. Presidents have continued this tradition up through President Obama utilizing social media platforms like Reddit, Instagram, and Twitter to reach younger audiences (Latson, 2015). While Trump has continued this presidential outreach, his notable inaccuracies make him a subject worth studying. Why

some of his statements are accurate while others are certainly not remains a question unanswered. Understanding what causes him to speak the way he does will solve this puzzle.

### **Trump Talk: Four Perspectives on its Cause**

Scholars have advanced three schools of thought to explain the phenomenon of Trump's inaccuracies and I propose a third. The first school is the *Mastermind* school, which claims that Trump's rhetoric all comes from a place of strategy and purpose. He knows that some statements are inaccurate but he is using them to gain power, so it does not matter. The second school is the *Personality* school, which suggests that Trump simply spews inaccurate statements soaked in racism and hatred because those things are core to his beliefs and that he lies so often because that is just what he has always done. The third school is more of an anti-school of thought. This school, the *Fake News* school, claims that Trump's statements are, indeed, not inaccurate, and that any media claiming that they are inaccurate are simply "Fake News". The fourth school I will call the *Personal Experience* school, which will show that while Trump is accurate in his rhetoric about business dealings, due to his history as a businessman, most else that he says, or writes, will tend to be inaccurate, due to lack of political experience and knowledge.

#### **Mastermind School**

The *Mastermind School* follows the belief that Trump speaks in the idiosyncratic way that he does, abandoning all presidential custom, for strategic reasons. Trump knows that the way to appeal to the masses is to show that he is just like the "outsiders" who support him. It matters not whether his statements are accurate, but simply whether they are effective. His supporters and opponents alike often say that he is "uninhibited" in his language. His

constituents claim that this makes his rhetoric more genuine because he is speaking his mind, even when his claims turn out to be factually inaccurate. To them, it is better to have someone in office who is wrong about the facts than someone who is “lying through their teeth” about their intentions (Stolee & Caton, 2018). Supporters seem to prefer inaccuracies than hidden calculated plans. According to a BBC interview, this is the precise reason many of his supporters voted for him, stating that because he does not hold back, you know exactly what he truly believes (Brown, Ayoola, & Matza, 2016).

Trump also works to convince his supporters that he is the only political entity that they should trust, working hard to sow doubt and distrust in major news organizations by calling them “fake news”. Lying gets Trump far in this regard. According to an Axios poll in June 2018, 92% of Republicans believe that the news media is purposely producing misleading stories (Zelizer, 2018).

Since presidents can use their rhetoric to redirect public attention, Trump uses his to distract the public from certain issues, filtering concerns onto or away from the public’s agenda (Cohen, 1995). This “Trumpian Distraction” works to convince his constituents that he is backing their interests even when he is not (Ivie, 2017). Edelman showed that the public tends to be more receptive to presidential leadership during crises or stressful situations (Edelman, 1974). So it’s no surprise that Trump remains staunch in his effort to keep his supporters in a perpetual state of anger and crisis to his benefit. He persistently depicts his supporters as victims of “the establishment”, strengthening his bond with them by depicting himself as a victim of the same forces (Bostdorff, 2017). This inaccuracy gets Trump very far. Stolee and Caton call it his “Political Sociality of Moral Outrage”. While politicians have always been known to deceive the

public, the number of Trump's lies seem to bring about an unprecedented era of "political mendacity" (Stolee & Caton, 2018).

Trump's speech does not just reflect sexism, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia for no reason; it spreads those ideologies to appeal to, resonate with, and even endorse white supremacy (Ott, 2017). He is, almost always, inaccurate in his assumptions about women, people of color, immigrants, and people of various other minority groups. It just so happens that many of his policies are better supported when white supremacy is endorsed. When Trump says, "These aren't people" (Bruneau, 2018) in reference to migrants from Central America crossing the southern border, he is dehumanizing them. Spreading the dehumanization of Central American migrants is dangerous because the degree to which people dehumanize another group is strongly correlated with the endorsement of hostile policies and the willingness to act with hostility towards them (Bruneau, 2018). This gives legitimation to the hard-line immigration policies Trump wants, such as the inhumane separation of children from their parents (Zelizer, 2018). Trump has also infused his rhetoric with militancy to sustain American militarism (Ivie, 2017), and made his opponents look paranoid by calling critical news "fake" and claiming that investigations against him are founded on conspiracy theories (Zelizer, 2018). He uses his rhetoric strategically to accomplish policies and keep himself in power.

Trump has been called an "absolutely world-class bullshit artist", fully equipped with an incomparable capacity to "lie, prevaricate, evade, mislead, stretch the truth, and dissemble" (Walt, 2017). He dominates the public media with his clownery and demonizes his opponents with no regard for truth or consistency. He uses his rhetoric to adopt the persona of a populist all

the while advancing the agenda of large corporations. He deceives his supporters with a false notion of salvation (Ivie, 2017).

Trump uses some aspects of rhetoric consistently. He depends upon hyperbole because it short circuits reason. Hyperbolic arguments are excessive and appeal to emotion instead of reason. Those arguments do not tend to be coherent, nor do they have to be, Trump takes care to dissociate his claims from political reality (Stuckey, 2017). Trump also speaks vaguely. He does this so that his supporters can read into his pronouncements so as to find a reflection of their own preferences. He tends towards blaming “the system” for the issues he and his constituents face, relying on hope and nostalgia of how it once was. This is his promise of restoration, to “Make America Great Again” for the white middle class (Stuckey 2017). Trump is accurate when it serves his purposes and inaccurate when he can use it to forward his goals. Although one may have to read into his rhetoric carefully, the *Mastermind School* makes clear that Trump speaks and writes the way that he does to achieve strategic goals.

### **Personality School**

This school insists that Trump’s rhetoric is a result of his personality; strategy does not play a role. Trump’s inaccuracies are the result of his racist beliefs; his inaccurate political statements are the result of his political incompetence. Daniel Dale says it plainly, “There’s nothing especially strategic about much of Trump’s lying; he does it because that is what he has always done” (Dale, 2018b). Trump’s rhetoric has been called a collection of gestures towards the “right-wing white populist anger” and a culmination of Republicans’ 50 year “southern strategy” to make politics primarily about race and identity (Stuckey, 2017; Drutman, 2016). Scholars show that racial resentment does more to explain support for Trump than political

ideology does, making Trump the first modern Republican to win a nomination based on racial prejudice (Drutman, 2016).

Although his supporters claimed that calling Trump a racist only began when he ran against Democrats, further research shows that this is not the case. Trump has behaved in racist ways throughout his career. In the 1980s, Trump would order managers of his casinos to clear the floor of black people when he entered the establishment; first-person accounts suggest this racist practice was consistent with Trump's personal behavior toward black employees (O'Connor & Marans, 2016). Trump's real estate company was sued by the Justice Department in 1973 for alleged racial discrimination, reportedly quoting different rental terms and conditions to Black and white applicants. Even after Trump Management privately settled the situation, the Justice Department had to charge the company once again for continuing to discriminate against Blacks (Baram, 2011).

According to O'Donnell, discrimination against Black people is nothing new for Trump, as he reportedly stated, "Laziness is a trait in Blacks. It really is, I believe that. It's not anything they can control" (O'Connor & Marans, 2016). He's also described the abilities of individuals based on race, telling O'Donnell, "Black guys counting my money! I hate it. The only kind of people I want counting my money are short guys that wear yarmulkes every day" (Baram, 2011).

This overt racist behavior did not stop once he started running for President, as he didn't speak out against them when the KKK announced that not voting for Trump is "Treason to your heritage", Trump stating he did not know enough about them to say anything. He once claimed that a federal judge could not fairly hear a case against his for-profit Trump University because "He's a Mexican... We're building a wall between here and Mexico. The answer is, he is giving

very unfair rulings” (O’Connor & Marans, 2016). Even his own party members identify that statement as a “textbook definition of a racist comment” (O’Connor & Marans, 2016). Even when two of his followers beat up a homeless Latino man, citing Trump as their inspiration, Trump did not condemn them but simply called them “passionate” (O’Connor & Marans, 2016).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “competence” as “the ability to do something successfully or efficiently”. This school holds that Trump wholly lacks political competence. Stephen Walt, an international relations professor at Harvard, argues that his dropping out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership undermined American influence in Asia, leaving the Paris accord makes Americans look like “a bunch of science-denying, head-in-the-sand ignoramuses”, and assuming China would solve the North Korea problem for America was utter nonsense. While many of his individual policies come across as incompetent, nothing shows it more than his team’s inability to spell and the confusion over which countries they are speaking about (Walt, 2017). Even though his incompetence is clear, it does not mean it is inconsequential. Any presidential mention of a policy can and will increase public awareness and concern over it. The president does not have to offer substantive details of an issue, but merely mention it to heighten public concern (Cohen, 1995). The *Personality* school shows that Trump’s racist, dishonest, and politically incompetent personality and his evident lack of effort to educate himself influences his rhetoric and whether or not his statements will be accurate.

### **Fake News School**

This school differs from the other schools as it does not try to explain why some of Trump’s statements are inaccurate but instead argues that Trump is mostly accurate. Indeed, this

school claims that the entire world of rhetoric insisting that so much of what Trump says is inaccurate is, itself, “fake news”.

Trump, himself, has stated “I wanted to make sure, unlike most politicians, that what I said was correct... When I make a statement, I like to be correct. I want the facts... Before I make a statement, I need the facts” (Kessler & Kelly, 2018d). Supporters tend to believe that the president is speaking the truth when he says this. Some members of the media insist that the mainstream news media is not reporting the actual stories that are most important to Americans, i.e. positive shifts in the economy. Therefore, mainstream news media is fake as it omits the positives and only paints a story with bias (Joyella, 2018).

This rhetoric of omission and bias makes certifying fake news as “the enemy of the people” the logical thing to do (Cohen, 2018). The media’s twisting of reality to highlight, for example, family separations at the border instead of the dangers of potentially dangerous individuals entering the country is simply put in that way to make the Trump administration look heartless. The media is using distractions to make Trump look bad, taking advantage of people being too “ignorant to see what’s going on” (Cohen, 2018).

The president has called 80% of the press as “fake news”, disparaging media publications that speak negatively of him as “lunatics”. He’s included major news media sources, such as the New York Times, NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, and more (Wagner & Sonmez, 2018). Far right extreme sources, such as Fox News and Breitbart, tend to agree with him. As it so happens, a Politifact rating on 171 statements made on air show 59% ranging from a “Mostly False” rating to an extreme “Pants on Fire” rating (PunditFact). As for Breitbart, its editor in chief has explicitly said that the media source publishes false news (Dreher, 2017). The *Fake News* school

insists that Trump's inaccuracies are wildly misrepresented by mainstream media, however as its main supporters have been discredited between interviews and Politifact analysis, the legitimacy of this school must be called into question.

### **Personal Experience School**

This school relies on the belief that Mr. Trump has a knowledge of business that yields to accurate rhetoric surrounding economic issues, but due to his lack of political experience, his rhetoric surrounding other issues is generally inaccurate. Due to his longtime career in business, Trump understands the economy and how to support big businesses. This may not be what he says he's supporting to his white middle-class constituents, but he is not incompetent in his actions. Trump has said that he understands that good business requires leverage, or "having something the other guy wants. Or better yet, needs. Or best of all, simply can't do without" (Ortiz, 2018). Trump uses this leverage that the U.S. has over its trading partners. It knows they cannot survive without the United States. Mexico, Canada, China, and most of Europe rely on American markets, so when Trump pushes them to open their markets via imposing tariffs as penalties, they will (Ortiz, 2018). Trump's supreme background in business yields accuracies in his statements regarding the economy.

However, the actual economic policies during his administrations have little to do with him. It was the Republican Congress that delivered the tax cut which Trump touts as being one of his biggest accomplishments (Kuttner, 2018). Additionally, while he has a talent for describing his own victimhood and keeping his critics off balance, his ability to speak to the public is so impaired and incoherent that it hurts his cause (Kuttner, 2018). Trump exhibits his lack of political experience in his political actions and statements.

Trump contradicts his own administration. After Attorney General Jeff Sessions argued that the Child Separation policy was specifically not meant as a deterrent to illegal crossings, Trump stated the opposite, claiming “Frankly, when you... allow the parents to stay together, then what happens is people are gonna pour into our country” (Thompson, 2018). Trump misread and misinterpreted a DOJ report and told the public that it showed that three out of four individuals convicted of terrorism-related charges are foreign-born, using this to support his travel ban and the idea that America must move away from “random chain migration”. However, the report does not support his claims. Almost worse, the vast majority of foreign-born defendants that *were* documented did not come from countries under the travel ban (Daniels, Ellingsen, & Wittes, 2018). The report itself did not discuss domestic terrorism, which wildly swayed the data that was present. If Trump’s goal truly was to prevent terror in America, demonizing foreign-born individuals is not an answer (Geltzer & Rasmussen, 2018).

Maintaining support from his party should be of core importance to Trump, however, he is alienating those that he needs. Former first lady Laura Bush called his Family Separation policy cruel and immoral. Religious groups, even conservative ones, are protesting (Colvin, 2018). Estranging his supporters is in no way helpful to him. Not taking action to respond constructively to these claims as well as not moderating his statements so as to avoid alienating fellow Republicans is clearly representative of an extreme lack of political experience and lack of curiosity to educate himself on the matter. The *Personal Experience* school shows that, outside of the economy, Trump is frankly inept at politics, and his rhetoric will reflect that.

While all three schools bring well supported and valid claims as to why Trump's rhetoric is the way it is, one school is more compelling than the others. It would be irrational to presume that an experienced businessman would not bring business know-how into his work as the president, overseeing the economy. Additionally, his lack of political experience and knowledge in many ways is more than clear. For those reasons, I find that the *Personal Experience* school most comprehensively explains why Trump is accurate sometimes and inaccurate other times. In my research, I will analyze the rhetoric of the 45th president to evaluate how well this school of thought accounts for it.

### **To Understand the Donald**

My hypothesis holds that Donald Trump will be accurate in his statements regarding the economy due to his long personal experience as a businessman; Donald Trump will be inaccurate in his statements regarding other policy-related information due to his lack of political experience and knowledge.

I will evaluate his tweets to see statement accuracy because it is the platform for which he is best known for communicating with the public. To limit my world of information, I will only evaluate statements from January 2017- October 2018. Within both pieces of my hypothesis, I must also limit my cases due to the massive amount of information that exists. Within economy-related statements, I will only evaluate his statements regarding unemployment and the deficit, as they are the two most important economic issues to Americans today (Gallup, 2018). Within my policy related statements, I will only evaluate Health Care Policy and Immigration

Policy statements as they are the two most important non-economic policy issues to Americans today (Gallup, 2018).

Within all four categories of tweets, I will eliminate any tweets for which I cannot test the accuracy. This includes candidate endorsements, self-endorsements, and general complaints or compliments that cannot be fact-checked. For my tweet samples, I will randomly select 10 tweets from the Trump Twitter Archive under certain keyword searches and enter the data into a randomizer to ensure that I am not biased in my selection. A weakness of my research data is that I will miss certain tweets that subtextually refer to the topic due to the nature of a keyword search. A strength of my research data is that I can be unbiased in my selection.

### **The Economy**

Donald Trump's public history in business is undeniable. Whether one views him as a braggadocio or a real success, Trump has an undeniable talent for business, particularly real estate (Swanson, 2016). He has had a talent for expanding his brand across various platforms such as golf clubs, real estate, hotels, shopping centers, casinos, wineries, and more. Despite a few episodes, he has come out on top. While some have claimed that his business history leaves him ill-equipped for government (Illing, 2017), others have argued that his ability to bring his business and corporate leader skills to the Presidency is what is particularly the key to his success. (Swanson, 2016).

If the latter's claim is valid, then one would assume that the president would predominantly be accurate in his statements regarding the economy. Gallup polling shows that in October 2018, the two most important economic issues to Americans today are unemployment

and the deficit (Gallup, 2018). These are issues with which a president, especially one with an economic background, should be more than familiar.

### **Unemployment**

I have organized the ten randomly selected tweets from Donald Trump's account which refer to unemployment and are statements or assertions (as opposed to encouragements or recommendations). I have also removed any and all candidate endorsements.

#### **Unemployment Broadly**

Tweets *A-E* (See Appendix) refer to the nature of unemployment levels broadly. Each boasts of having the lowest employment level in some time. Tweets *A* (July 2017), *B* (October 2017), *C* (December 2017), and *D* (May 2018) tout that unemployment is at the lowest level in years at increasing increments, *D* claiming that it is the lowest in 45 years. In May 2018, the unemployment rate was 3.4%, and he was correct in that it was lower than it had been since at least 2001, but in October 2000 it was 3.3% (FRED). While claims in *A-C* may be just on the cuff of truth, his claim in *D* is inaccurate.

In *E* (September 2018), Trump asserted that the GDP rate was higher than the unemployment rate for the first time in 100 years. However, this could not be further from the truth. Data shows that the GDP rate was higher than the unemployment rate in various years including 1941-1944, 1948, 1950-1953, 1955, 1959, 1962, 1964-1966, 1968, 1972-1973, and even as recently as 1998-1999 (Amadeo, 2018a).

## Unemployment for Minorities

In Tweets *F-H* (See Appendix), Trump discusses his contributions to low unemployment for minority groups. *F* (January 2018) highlights his unprecedented success in bringing the lowest unemployment for women. This is a broad statement, and at first glance, he does not seem to be wrong. However, context to his numbers shows that he has not necessarily done as he says. The women's unemployment rate is not as impressive as it seems. It dropped to 4.5% under President Obama in December 2016, a ten year low, continuing to drop to 4.0% in December 2017 is arguably a result in the downward trend in the women's unemployment rate that had been in existence for several years, not a Trumpian miracle (Kiely, 2018). However, in terms of his statement in *F*, he is correct about women's employment.

*G* (September 2018) claims that African-American Unemployment is the lowest in history and that while the Democrats have done nothing for African-Americans, they continue to win the Black vote. The language of his tweet makes clear that he is attributing this success to himself and the Republican party broadly. *H* (July 2018) touts how Trump is consequential in lowering the unemployment rate for Latinos 16 years and older to 4.6, an all-time low. While African-American and Latino unemployment is indeed at a record low, it is clear that those rates had been falling since before Trump took office, and the rate of their decline has not sped up since he arrived, implying that Trump does not deserve credit for this. The rates picked up during President Obama's time in office, leaving the acknowledgment to him (Kurtzleben, 2018, "FACT CHECK: Trump..."). Trump's implication that he is behind these decreases makes the tweets inaccurate.

### **New Jobs Added**

Tweet *I* (June 2017) asserts that more than 600,000 new jobs had been added since January 2017, increasing economic enthusiasm. However, official government data does not back that up. Trump had been making this 600,000 claim since early April 2017, but in that same month, only 317,000 jobs were created. That is half of what he claims (Long, 2017). Trump once proclaimed “I will be the greatest jobs producer that God ever created”, but it seems like he’s missing his mark (CNN Money, 2018).

### **Companies Returning**

In Tweet *J* (February 2018), Trump insists that “Companies are pouring back into our country, reversing the long trend of leaving” (See Appendix). This claim is, indeed, widely supported. Reshoring and foreign job announcements surged in 2017 to over 170,000 manufacturing jobs in the U.S. (Moser & Kelley, 2018). There is strong evidence supporting that work can be brought back. Trump’s claim here is totally valid.

### **Deficit**

I have organized the ten randomly selected tweets from Donald Trump’s account which refer to the deficit and are statements or assertions (as opposed to encouragements or recommendations). I have also removed any and all candidate endorsements.

### **Deficits Hurt America**

Tweets *K-L* (See Appendix) describe how deficits have harmed America. *K* (April 2017) claimed that Trade deficits “hurt the economy very badly”. However, economists are not nearly as worried about it as Trump seems to be. They claim that deficits are normal components of

trade and are not too threatening so long as they are watched (Zarroli, 2018). Some economists even conclude that “bilateral trade deficits are never problematic, or even individually meaningful” (Jacobson, 2017). That ruling makes *K* inaccurate, as well.

*L* (March 2018) claims that the U.S. had accumulated 12 trillion dollars in Trade Deficits. Oddly enough, just five days before this tweet was published, Peter Navarro, the director of White House National Trade Council, insisted that the U.S. had a half-a-trillion-dollar-a-year trade deficit (Kessler, 2018b). The U.S. trade deficit in 2017 was \$566 billion (Kessler, 2018a). It seems like an eleven and a half billion dollar jump is less than likely, and effectively proves Trump’s statement invalid.

### **Deficits With Other Countries**

Tweets *M-P* (See Appendix) refer to the deficits Trump claims the U.S. has with other countries. *N* discusses the trade deficit with Canada, *M* does this as well as bring up the deficit with Mexico. An important piece of information is that the U.S. actually has a trade surplus with Canada, not a deficit. Trump has even admitted that he simply assumed that the U.S. had a trade deficit with Canada, even if he did not know the answer (Kessler, 2018c). Even though the U.S. has a trade deficit with Mexico, *M*’s involvement of false Canada information makes both these statements false.

*O* (March 2018) provides a predicament because Trump claims that China must address its massive trade deficit with the United States. He likely *meant* their massive trade surplus, but the words of his tweet remain false (Michalowski, 2018). *P* (April 2018) brings up Trump’s idea that we have lost the trade war with China and now we are suffering from both a trade deficit of \$500 billion and an intellectual property theft of \$300 billion. Trump is both vastly overstating

the trade deficit by \$163 billion. However, his number used for intellectual property theft comes from an independent bipartisan U.S. commission, and seems to be accurate (Woodward, 2018).

This tweet falls with the other invalid ones.

### **Other Countries Taking Advantage of the U.S.**

Tweet *Q* (January 2017) holds that Mexico is taking advantage of the U.S. and that it must change. This tweet was likely a reaction to the news that the Mexican president insisted (once more) that Mexico would not pay for “The Wall”. While NAFTA has had its ups and downs for America, overall, the benefits outweigh the costs and the U.S. has not been taken advantage of (Amadeo, 2018b). Tweet *R* (May 2018) refers to the so-called massive trade deficit with Germany which Trump says is so bad for the U.S., and how Germany pays far less than they should for NATO. In terms of Germany’s contributions to NATO, Trump is right in that Germany spends 1.2% of its GDP on defense, which is below the 2% target point for NATO nations. Some experts claim that the deficit with Germany is not and should not be considered massive as Germany is one of the U.S.’s key trading partners. Even more so, “massive” implies a bad connotation, and, as mentioned above, many economists believe that bilateral trade deficits are not dangerous for the U.S.. If anything, Germany has a very open economy and has the fairest possible trade relationship with the U.S. (Jacobson, 2017). *Q* and *R* are thus deemed inaccurate, as well.

Tweet *S* (March 2018) discusses how the European Union treat the U.S. badly on trade; he also discusses how the U.S. will only drop tariffs on them once they drop their “horrific” tariffs on the U.S.. 2018 data from the World Economic Forum show that U.S. goods currently face tariffs that are roughly on par with those faced by China, Japan, Russia, and Brazil. While it

is true the EU members face lower tariffs, that is largely due to the zero tariff policy of EU membership (Petroff, 2018). It also seems as though European retaliation tariffs on the U.S. are just that, in retaliation. Most of them did not come before Trump insisted on high tariffs on steel and aluminum. Economists, including Trump's then chief economic advisor Gary Cohn who resigned over this move, argue that tariffs are not the way to handle this situation (Sampathkumar, 2018). This provides enough to deem *S* inaccurate.

*T* brings attention to how American Farmers have been suffering for years because of treatment from Mexico, Canada, and China. It is true that American farms and farmers have been suffering and dwindling for years, some blaming the high levels of regulation. However, it seems as though there are local fixes that can be very effective. State-run training programs and tax breaks for farmers have been very effective (NBC, 2014). What makes this tweet inaccurate, though, is Trump's depiction of why farmers have suffered. Blaming Mexico or Canada is simply not credible. Since NAFTA took effect in 1994, U.S. agricultural exports to Mexico have quintupled. In fact, Mexico and the U.S. have eliminated all tariffs on agricultural goods (Sieff, 2018). While farmers may indeed be suffering as a result of trade relations with China, it is actually because of Trump's actions. The back and forth tariff increases started by Trump in 2018 is very detrimental to export-reliant farmers. Some economists insist that farmers have been fairly successful in the last decade but now are worried about Trump's China tariffs (Koning Beals, 2018). Trump is inaccurate once again.

### **An Analysis of Trump's Economic accuracies**

Plainly, the data is clear. 5/10 of his tweets about unemployment are accurate. A blatant 0/10 of his tweets about the deficit are accurate. It is important that *some* economists agree, like Trump, that a deficit is not a good thing, despite modern research saying otherwise. This bias is what made his deficit tweets inaccurate more than anything else.

It is also important to note that it is not known how the President acquires his economic statistics. It is possible that his accuracy, or lack thereof, could be a product of Trump's advisors, Trump's refusal to listen to them, or a combination of the two.

However, these factors do not completely excuse the data. As it stands, Trump was only accurate in a quarter (5/20) of the selected tweets regarding the economy. This significance cannot be overlooked. Despite my hypothesis that Trump's lifelong history in business would provide him having a better understanding of the economy and thus more likely to be accurate in his statements, this does not seem to be the case.

### **Major Policy**

As described above, Trump has spent his life in business. This has been part of what got him elected. He is a man who wanted to run the country like a business. He is an outsider to politics. Unsurprisingly, this comes with its own issues. Someone who does not have a background in politics may well not understand important factors in the political world such as major policy issues.

Gallup Polling shows that the two most important non-economic policy issues to Americans in October 2018 were health care and immigration (Gallup, 2018).

## **Health Care**

I have organized the ten randomly selected tweets from Donald Trump's account which refer to health care and are statements or assertions (as opposed to encouragements or recommendations). I have also removed any and all candidate endorsements.

### **What Democrats Push**

Tweets *U-V* (See Appendix) discuss the specific health care policies that Democrats are advocating. *U* (September 2017) shows Trump accusing Bernie Sanders of pushing for a single payer healthcare plan, what Trump calls a “curse” on America. It is crystal clear that Sanders has indeed been promoting this system. As to whether it is a “curse”... that one is more debatable. It would allow all Americans to get all medically necessary appointments, procedures, prescriptions, and medical supplies. It is, however, tax-funded. Additionally, what is considered “necessary” can easily become a point of contention. Individuals also would no longer be restrained in making appointments, due to cost, which could overwhelm the system. This is a real problem in Canada which has resulted in long wait times, and which can be dangerous in itself (Bose, 2017). However, Sanders says much of this criticism is stymied because what one is not paying anymore in private healthcare costs, they are likely paying half of in public tax-supported health care costs (Schwartz, 2018). Calling it a “curse” seems hyperbolic, but it seems to be more of an opinion than an assertion, so *U* does count as accurate.

*V* asserts that Democrats want Universal Healthcare, and yet, there are protests in the UK because their system of this kind is broken. First of all, his claim about why there was a march in the UK was false. The National Health Service is the highest publicly supported program in the

UK (Soellner, 2018). The march occurred in reaction to austerity measures by the Conservative Party to privatize parts of the system. The march wasn't protesting it. As for its comparison to what Democrats want, their plans display little resemblance to the NHS, where the government owns medical facilities and employs medical professionals (Soellner, 2018). His claims in *V* are utterly untrue and clearly unresearched.

### **Obamacare Assertions**

Tweets *W-Y* (See Appendix) refer to occurrences where Trump has made assertions about Obamacare, mostly discussing how it is failing as a system. *W* (February 2017) claims that in Obamacare's failing, Humana is pulling out of participation in the system. In this claim he is correct, Humana did announce it is leaving the system in 2018 (Abelson, 2017). *X* (June 2017) insists that Obamacare premiums and deductibles increased by over 100%. This is a complaint widely held by insurance customers and critics of the bill, alike (Sarlin, 2017). This tweet is accurate.

*Y* (December 2017) asserts that with the Republicans' termination of the individual mandate portion of Obamacare, the program will "essentially" be repealed over time. While this repeal does indeed weaken the program by worsening insurance markets, it does not affect other important parts of the program (Berger, 2017). It did not affect protections for people with pre-existing conditions, tax credits for those who buy their own insurance, and the expansion of state Medicaid programs. Despite Trump's best efforts, nearly 9 million people enrolled in Obamacare for 2018 (Fang, 2017). Effectively, Obamacare has not been repealed at all. *Y*'s claims are invalid.

## **TrumpCare Structure**

In tweets *Z-BB* (See Appendix) Trump boasts about functions of his new healthcare plan, which will be referred to as “Trumpcare” in this paper. *Z* (March 2017) describes that phases 2 and 3 of TrumpCare will involve getting rid of state lines as a way to promote competition. Interestingly, there is no articulated “phase 2” of the Republican-proposed health care bill, and there was not at the time Trump tweeted this (Bump, 2017). Former Health and Human Service Secretary Tom Price had announced that the GOP bill will not accomplish this “phase” of what the president wants. In fact, congressional rules don’t even allow provisions like that to be included in a budget reconciliation bill (Horsley, 2017). This tweet is clearly politically uneducated and thus, inaccurate.

*AA* (April 2017) announces that the GOP healthcare plan will have much lower premiums and deductibles while taking care of pre-existing conditions. However, the Congressional Budget Office has predicted that the bill will increase premium costs substantially over the short term (Bump, 2017). Because the bill has been in flux, it is hard to tell if it could feasibly protect individuals with pre-existing conditions at that point in April 2017. Either way, this tweet is not correct.

*BB* (May 2018) touts that Trumpcare will give all Americans access to quality, affordable medication they need and deserve. It does seem that Trump’s goal is to increase competition between pharmaceutical companies, thus lowering drug prices for Americans (Allen, 2018). This tweet is accurate.

## Who Benefits from TrumpCare?

Tweets *CC-DD* (See Appendix) include information on who will benefit from TrumpCare. *CC* (October 2017) broadly describes how Trump's health care executive order will expand access and lower costs for the program. He claims that millions will benefit. However, the President's actions, which eliminated subsidy payments to insurers for helping reduce costs for premiums, is expected to harm the insurance markets. The Congressional Budget Office has predicted that it will raise premium costs for millions of Americans. Health insurance stocks fell following the announcement (Mallin, 2017). A skyrocket in costs does not seem to benefit millions. *CC* is deemed inaccurate.

*DD* (October 2018) claims that "College educated women want safety, security and healthcare protections... I supply all this... That's why they will be voting for me". The assertion that a group of people wants safety, security, and healthcare protections is very much in the realm of possibility. However, insisting that he has their support is unrealistic. In the past few years, support for Republicans from college-educated women has dwindled. Even Stephen Bannon, former White House advisor, has said, "The Republican college-educated woman is done". Women are broadly lining up in opposition to Republicans and Trump at unusually high levels (Bump, 2018b). Exit polling from the 2016 election showed that college-educated white women supported Clinton over Trump as a presidential candidate (CNN Politics, 2016). Data does not support Trump's claim that college-educated women will be voting for him, his tweet is inaccurate.

## **Immigration**

I have organized the ten randomly selected tweets from Donald Trump's account which refer to immigration and are statements or assertions (as opposed to encouragements or recommendations). I have also removed any and all candidate endorsements.

### **What Democrats Have Done**

Tweets *EE-GG* (See Appendix) refer to what Trump claims that Democrats have done. *EE* (January 2018) asserts that Democrats want to shut down the government over amnesty for all and border security. Firstly, Democrats have not claimed to desire amnesty for all, but amnesty for the individuals covered by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which is a radically different idea than what Trump assumes (Bovard, 2018). Trump's claim is inaccurate.

Tweet *FF* (February 2018) asserts that not one Democrat voted for "our" tax cut bill. He is absolutely correct. Not one Democratic senator or House Representative voted for the bill (Lee & Simon, 2017; Almkhatar, et al., 2017). *GG* (June 2018) insists that Democrats force the breakup of families at the border with "their horrible and cruel legislative agenda". However, there is no law, Democratic created or otherwise, which requires children to be taken from their parents when crossing the border. The Obama administration was more welcoming to individuals and families who came to the U.S. to seek asylum. The only times a parent was separated from their child was in extreme circumstance- for example, if a parent was carrying drugs- it was not a standard practice (Lind, 2018). The "zero tolerance" policy was created by Trump in April 2018 and was put into effect in May 2018 by the then attorney general, Jeff Sessions (Davis, 2018). The Democrats are not to blame here, Trump's claim is once again false.

## **Current State of Immigration**

In *HH* (June 2018), Trump compares Mexico's immigration laws to America's. He claims that Mexico has very strong immigration laws while the U.S. has ineffective ones. However, since 2011, Mexico has decriminalized illegal entry to the country as well as allowing undocumented individuals to use education and health services. Notably, it sets criminal penalties for abuse of migrants by immigration agents. Mexico took this action in order to value respect and human rights. While individuals who are caught will still face deportation, that does not make Mexican immigration laws comparatively very strong (Jacobson, 2018). Trump's claim is under-researched and incorrect.

*II* (July 2018) claims that Judges "run the system" and "Traffickers know how it works. They are just using children". This tweet is obviously in reaction to the media highlight on the children being separated from parents at the border. The administration has repeatedly stated that many of the children are not being removed from their parents but, rather, from their kidnappers. However, the number of "fraudulent" families is not as it seems. Immigration experts claim that a cultural understanding is necessary. Children's parents may already be in the U.S. or even be dead. If the child is only left with another adult, they may have become their de-facto parent. The difficulty associated with formal adoption is vast in some places (Stelloh, 2018). These families are not so much fraudulent as they are non-traditional, but that does not make them unreal. It certainly does not make them trafficking scams. "They are just using children" simply is not the norm and isn't true.

*JJ* (September 2018) presumes that current immigration laws stop the government from deporting "criminal aliens with violent felony convictions". It is not so much that previous law

blocked the government from deporting felons, but that the Supreme Court ruled that the federal definition of “crime of violence” which, under immigration law, demands mandatory deportation of noncitizens, was impermissibly vague (DeBonis, 2018). The old law did not cease deportation, it just needed to be more precise. However, in his own hyperbolic way, Trump is (vaguely) correct on this claim.

*KK* (October 2018) asserts that the U.S. has been spending billions of dollars a year on illegal immigration. This claim is fairly supported, with a caveat. Undocumented immigrants do cost billions of dollars a year. However, what they cost tends to be more than paid back by the second generation of individuals who hail from those undocumented individuals (Valverde, 2018). Indisputably, though, Trump’s claim is correct here.

### **Changes Brought By Trump Administration**

*LL* (February 2018) references polling which argues that nearly 7 in 10 Americans support immigration reform including DACA, full border security, and an end to chain migration and the visa lottery. While his numbers are valid, it is important to understand the wording of the poll. The border security question asked whether the U.S. should have “basically open borders” or “secure borders”. This does not quite allow for any middle ground. While 68% did say they opposed the visa lottery, the 79% who claim to favor merit-based immigration over family-based migration is biased. The question asks if they would rather one *or* the other without allowing for a “both” option (Kurtzleben, 2018, “What The Latest...”). While Trump is using the data deceptively, his numbers are correct.

*MM* (June 2018) asserts that the media is covering Trump’s immigration policies in a different way than they did for Obama’s same immigration policies. However, as stated earlier,

the zero-tolerance policy, which is the subject of so much media coverage, is Trump's. It was absolutely not a part of the Obama administration (Davis, 2018). Trump is incorrect.

*NN*, a tweet published on June 30th, 2018, claimed, "I never pushed the Republicans in the House to vote for the Immigration Bill, either GOODLATTE 1 or 2...". Conveniently, the Trump Twitter Archive made it very simple to test the accuracy of this tweet, as just three days earlier on June 27th, Trump tweeted:

"HOUSE REPUBLICANS SHOULD PASS THE STRONG BUT FAIR IMMIGRATION BILL, KNOWN AS GOODLATTE II, IN THEIR AFTERNOON VOTE TODAY, EVEN THOUGH THE DEMS WON'T LET IT PASS IN THE SENATE. PASSAGE WILL SHOW THAT WE WANT STRONG BORDERS & SECURITY WHILE THE DEMS WANT OPEN BORDERS = CRIME." (Tweet *OO* in Appendix)

Clearly, Trump's June 30th tweet is inaccurate.

### **An Analysis of Trump's policy accuracies**

The data is unexpected. 4/10 of Trump's tweets regarding healthcare are accurate. Surprisingly, 4/10 of Trump's tweets regarding immigration are accurate, as well.

This means that Trump was accurate in 40% (8/20) of the selected tweets regarding the two most important policy issues to Americans today. I hypothesized that Trump would have an extremely limited knowledge of policy issues due to his lack of personal experience in this regard. My shock comes from Trump knowing more than I assumed he would.

### **A (Less Than) Knowledgeable Leader**

I set out to find out why some of Trump's statements are accurate and some are not.

Trump is a notably idiosyncratic president in his use of rhetoric. He is also idiosyncratic in his background as a president.

I originally hypothesized that Trump's personal experience as a businessman would yield to a high, or at least higher, knowledge of the economy. Thus, I assumed he would be more accurate in economy-related tweets. I also hypothesized that Trump's lack of personal experience in the political world would yield to a low, or at least lower, knowledge of policy. Thus, I assumed he would be less accurate in policy-related tweets. I was wrong in both of my hypotheses, as Trump was accurate in a higher percentage (40%) of policy-related tweets than he was in economy-related tweets (25%).

It is essential to note that Trump's 40% accuracy rating, while higher than I expected, is still much lower than it should be for a sitting U.S. president. This is especially meaningful as most of Trump's inaccuracies do not come from Twitter. In fact, out of speeches, interviews, informal remarks at events, Twitter and press conferences, most of Trump's false claims occur during speeches. Twitter hosts the second least number of false claims out of the five possible venues, just more than at press conferences (Dale, 2018a). Trump is a wildly inaccurate figure in American politics. The world of research on how to explain this is fairly new, and thus there is much more work to do.

Future research may want to focus on why Trump is not accurate most of the time when it comes to statements about the economy, or why his business experience has not been of help to him as I presumed it would be. Other research may look to find which policy issues Trump is

most accurate about and why that is. Explaining the rhetoric of the 45th president can help to predict his future behavior.

Trump's rhetoric as president is especially important as it holds much more weight now than ever before. The research I did is just a first step in understanding one of the most unique political figures in American history. When considering the vast and impactful power of presidential rhetoric, it is understandable why the public reaction to his inaccuracies is as extreme as it is. With each wild statement, the Commander in Chief gives stories to major media outlets, swiftly lighting up the online world. With just a tweet, Trump can break the internet.

**Tweet Appendix, (Trump Twitter Archive)**

- A. “Stock Market at all time high, unemployment at lowest level in years (wages will start going up) and our base has never been stronger!” *July 2, 2017, 6:55 PM*
- B. “Stock Market hits an ALL-TIME high! Unemployment lowest in 16 years! Business and manufacturing enthusiasm at highest level in decades!” *October 5, 2017, 6:09 AM*
- C. “Things are going really well for our economy, a subject the Fake News spends as little time as possible discussing! Stock Market hit another RECORD HIGH, unemployment is now at a 17 year low and companies are coming back into the USA. Really good news, and much more to come!” *December 10, 2017, 8:30 AM*
- D. “JOBS, JOBS, JOBS! Unemployment claims have fallen to a 45-year low. Together, we are making the economy great again! <https://t.co/pN2TE5HDQm>” *March 29, 2018, 2:58 PM*
- E. “The GDP Rate (4.2%) is higher than the Unemployment Rate (3.9%) for the first time in over 100 years!” *September 10, 2018, 6:03 AM*
- F. “Unprecedented success for our Country, in so many ways, since the Election. Record Stock Market, Strong on Military, Crime, Borders, & ISIS, Judicial Strength & Numbers, Lowest Unemployment for Women & ALL, Massive Tax Cuts, end of Individual Mandate - and so much more. Big 2018!” *January 20, 2018, 5:31 PM*
- G. “So if African-American unemployment is now at the lowest number in history, median income the highest, and you then add all of the other things I have done, how do Democrats, who have done NOTHING for African-Americans but TALK, win the Black Vote? And it will only get better!” *September 30, 2018, 12:47 PM*
- H. ““Trump has been the most consequential president in history when it comes to minority employment. In June, for instance, the unemployment rate for Hispanics and Latinos 16 years and

older fell to 4.6%, its lowest level ever, from 4.9% in May' <https://t.co/ex9jizOyAV>" *July 12, 2018, 10:10 AM*

- I. "...way up. Regulations way down. 600,000+ new jobs added. Unemployment down to 4.3%. Business and economic enthusiasm way up- record levels!" *June 11, 2017, 7:23 AM*
- J. "The U.S. economy is looking very good, in my opinion, even better than anticipated. Companies are pouring back into our country, reversing the long term trend of leaving. The unemployment numbers are looking great, and Regulations & Taxes have been massively Cut! JOBS, JOBS, JOBS" *February 19, 2018, 9:29 AM*
- K. "The U.S. recorded its slowest economic growth in five years (2016). GDP up only 1.6%. Trade deficits hurt the economy very badly" *April 26, 2017, 5:51 AM*
- L. "From Bush 1 to present, our Country has lost more than 55,000 factories, 6,000,000 manufacturing jobs and accumulated Trade Deficits of more than 12 Trillion Dollars. Last year we had a Trade Deficit of almost 800 Billion Dollars. Bad Policies & Leadership. Must WIN again! #MAGA" *March 7, 2018, 6:40 AM*
- M. "We have large trade deficits with Mexico and Canada. NAFTA, which is under renegotiation right now, has been a bad deal for U.S.A. Massive relocation of companies & jobs. Tariffs on Steel and Aluminum will only come off if new & fair NAFTA agreement is signed. Also, Canada must.." *March 5, 2018, 6:47 AM*
- N. "We do have a Trade Deficit with Canada, as we do with almost all countries (some of them massive). P.M. Justin Trudeau of Canada, a very good guy, doesn't like saying that Canada has a Surplus vs. the U.S.(negotiating), but they do...they almost all do...and that's how I know!" *March 15, 2018, 8:29 AM*
- O. "China has been asked to develop a plan for the year of a One Billion Dollar reduction in their massive Trade Deficit with the United States. Our relationship with China has been a very good

one, and we look forward to seeing what ideas they come back with. We must act soon!" *March 7, 2018, 10:10 AM*

- P. "We are not in a trade war with China, that war was lost many years ago by the foolish, or incompetent, people who represented the U.S. Now we have a Trade Deficit of \$500 Billion a year, with Intellectual Property Theft of another \$300 Billion. We cannot let this continue!" *April 4, 2018, 6:22 AM*
- Q. "Mexico has taken advantage of the U.S. for long enough. Massive trade deficits & little help on the very weak border must change, NOW!" *January 27, 2017, 8:19 AM*
- R. "We have a MASSIVE trade deficit with Germany, plus they pay FAR LESS than they should on NATO & military. Very bad for U.S. This will change" *May 30, 2017, 5:40 AM*
- S. "The European Union, wonderful countries who treat the U.S. very badly on trade, are complaining about the tariffs on Steel & Aluminum. If they drop their horrific barriers & tariffs on U.S. products going in, we will likewise drop ours. Big Deficit. If not, we Tax Cars etc. FAIR!" *March 10, 2018, 4:29 AM*
- T. "Farmers have not been doing well for 15 years. Mexico, Canada, China and others have treated them unfairly. By the time I finish trade talks, that will change. Big trade barriers against U.S. farmers, and other businesses, will finally be broken. Massive trade deficits no longer!" *June 4, 2018, 8:47 AM*
- U. "Bernie Sanders is pushing hard for a single payer healthcare plan - a curse on the U.S. & its people..." *September 14, 2017, 2:31 PM*
- V. "The Democrats are pushing for Universal HealthCare while thousands of people are marching in the UK because their U system is going broke and not working. Dems want to greatly raise taxes for really bad and non-personal medical care. No thanks!" *February 5, 2018, 7:11 AM*

- W. “Obamacare continues to fail. Humana to pull out in 2018. Will repeal, replace & save healthcare for ALL Americans. <https://t.co/glWEQ0lNR4>” *February 14, 2017, 5:50 PM*
- X. “Democrats slam GOP healthcare proposal as Obamacare premiums & deductibles increase by over 100%. Remember keep your doctor, keep your plan?” *June 24, 2017, 7:51 AM*
- Y. “Based on the fact that the very unfair and unpopular Individual Mandate has been terminated as part of our Tax Cut Bill, which essentially Repeals (over time) ObamaCare, the Democrats & Republicans will eventually come together and develop a great new HealthCare plan!” *December 26, 2017, 6:58 AM*
- Z. “ Don't worry, getting rid of state lines, which will promote competition, will be in phase 2 & 3 of healthcare rollout. @foxandfriends” *March 7, 2017, 8:41 AM*
- AA. “...healthcare plan is on its way. Will have much lower premiums & deductibles while at the same time taking care of pre-existing conditions!” *April 30, 2017, 7:32 AM*
- BB. “The American people deserve a healthcare system that takes care of them – not one that takes advantage of them. We will work every day to ensure all Americans have access to the quality, affordable medication they need and deserve. We will not rest until the job is done!  
<https://t.co/9BzevAniNx>” *May 11, 2018, 3:56 PM*
- CC. “Very proud of my Executive Order which will allow greatly expanded access and far lower costs for HealthCare. Millions of people benefit!” *October 14, 2018, 6:27 PM*
- DD. “College educated women want safety, security and healthcare protections – very much along with financial and economic health for themselves and our Country. I supply all of this far better than any Democrat (for decades, actually). That’s why they will be voting for me!” *October 17, 2018, 2:44 PM*
- EE. “The Democrats want to shut down the Government over Amnesty for all and Border Security. The biggest loser will be our rapidly rebuilding Military, at a time we need it more than ever. We

need a merit based system of immigration, and we need it now! No more dangerous Lottery.”

*January 16, 2018, 9:07 AM*

FF. “Heading to beautiful West Virginia to be with great members of the Republican Party. Will be planning Infrastructure and discussing Immigration and DACA, not easy when we have no support from the Democrats. NOT ONE DEM VOTED FOR OUR TAX CUT BILL! Need more Republicans in ‘18.” *February 1, 2018, 6:43 AM*

GG. “The Democrats are forcing the breakup of families at the Border with their horrible and cruel legislative agenda. Any Immigration Bill MUST HAVE full funding for the Wall, end Catch & Release, Visa Lottery and Chain, and go to Merit Based Immigration. Go for it! WIN!” *June 15, 2018, 12:08 PM*

HH. “80% of Mexico’s Exports come to the United States. They totally rely on us, which is fine with me. They do have, though, very strong Immigration Laws. The U.S. has pathetically weak and ineffective Immigration Laws that the Democrats refuse to help us fix. Will speak to Mexico!” *June 22, 2018, 8:30 AM*

II. “Democrats in Congress must no longer Obstruct - vote to fix our terrible Immigration Laws now. I am watching what is going on from Europe - it would be soooo simple to fix. Judges run the system and illegals and traffickers know how it works. They are just using children!” *June 11, 2018, 11:41 AM*

JJ. “Under our horrible immigration laws, the Government is frequently blocked from deporting criminal aliens with violent felony convictions. House GOP just passed a bill to increase our ability to deport violent felons (Crazy Dems opposed). Need to get this bill to my desk fast!” *September 7, 2018, 11:35 AM*

- KK. “The United States has been spending Billions of Dollars a year on Illegal Immigration. This will not continue. Democrats must give us the votes to pass strong (but fair) laws. If not, we will be forced to play a much tougher hand.” *October 26, 2018, 8:55 AM*
- LL. “Polling shows nearly 7 in 10 Americans support an immigration reform package that includes DACA, fully secures the border, ends chain migration & cancels the visa lottery. If D’s oppose this deal, they aren’t serious about DACA-they just want open borders.  
<https://t.co/XDMcDOr9vM>” *February 6, 2018, 11:00 AM*
- MM. “Such a difference in the media coverage of the same immigration policies between the Obama Administration and ours. Actually, we have done a far better job in that our facilities are cleaner and better run than were the facilities under Obama. Fake News is working overtime!”  
*June 25, 2018, 7:36 AM*
- NN. “I never pushed the Republicans in the House to vote for the Immigration Bill, either GOODLATTE 1 or 2, because it could never have gotten enough Democrats as long as there is the 60 vote threshold. I released many prior to the vote knowing we need more Republicans to win in Nov.” *June 30, 2018, 2:17 PM*
- OO. “HOUSE REPUBLICANS SHOULD PASS THE STRONG BUT FAIR IMMIGRATION BILL, KNOWN AS GOODLATTE II, IN THEIR AFTERNOON VOTE TODAY, EVEN THOUGH THE DEMS WON’T LET IT PASS IN THE SENATE. PASSAGE WILL SHOW THAT WE WANT STRONG BORDERS & SECURITY WHILE THE DEMS WANT OPEN BORDERS = CRIME. WIN!” *June 27, 2018, 7:39 AM*

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