

# Eximia journal

[www.eximiajournal.ro](http://www.eximiajournal.ro)

Vol. 14/2025

PLUS  
COMMUNICATION **P**



International  
Communication & PR

## Hillary Clinton's Beliefs and Ideology Reflected Through Emotional Appeals in Political Discourse

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**Abstract.** This paper investigates how Hillary Clinton constructed and conveyed her political beliefs and ideological stance during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign through emotional appeals in her speeches. Drawing on the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Appraisal Theory, the study examines Clinton's discursive strategies in relation to the socio-political context of the time, emphasizing how she employed intertextuality, emotional language, and ideological alignment to mobilize support, particularly among marginalized groups. The paper contrasts her rhetorical choices with those of Donald Trump to highlight the ideological polarization that characterized the 2016 election.

**Keywords.** Hillary Clinton, Emotional Appeals, Political Discourse

### 1. Introduction

The 2016 United States presidential election marked a crucial moment in the evolution of American political rhetoric. The contest between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump not only revealed sharp ideological divisions but also highlighted divergent communicative strategies in engaging the American electorate. While Donald Trump's campaign was grounded in populist and nationalist appeals, often characterized by anti-elitist sentiment and fear-based messaging (Wodak, 2015; Lakoff, 2004), Hillary Clinton's discourse reflected a progressive Democratic vision that emphasized social inclusion, gender equality, multiculturalism, and collective empowerment.

As the first woman nominated for president by a major U.S. political party, Clinton's public discourse was further shaped by gendered expectations and historical precedents (Jamieson, 1995; Lazar, 2005). Her rhetoric navigated complex ideological terrain, seeking to assert authority, express empathy, and mobilize diverse coalitions.

This study investigates how Clinton's political ideology and beliefs as a Democratic leader were communicated through her deliberate use of emotional language in campaign speeches. It focuses on how emotional appeals were strategically employed not only to persuade but also to embody and perform ideological commitments related to justice, equality, and democratic pluralism. In doing so, the research offers insight into the broader discursive functions of emotion in contemporary U.S. political communication.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This analysis is anchored in a dual theoretical framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Appraisal Theory. Together, these approaches enable a detailed examination of how Clinton's emotional language reflects and constructs ideological meanings within the sociopolitical context of the 2016 election.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly as articulated by Fairclough (1992, 2001), emphasizes that discourse is a form of social practice that both shapes and is shaped by power relations and ideologies. CDA is especially suited for analyzing political texts because it highlights how language choices such as the framing of social issues, lexical selection, and thematic emphasis contribute to the construction of social identities, legitimation of power, and dissemination of belief systems. In the case of Clinton, CDA allows us to interrogate how her campaign discourse positioned her as a moral and inclusive leader, advocating for the rights of marginalized communities while responding to the dominant narratives of nationalism and exclusion espoused by her opponent.

### **2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis**

#### **2.1.1. Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis**

Being one of the specific theoretical perspectives and analytical approaches used in linguistic Discourse analysis, CDA is characterized not merely as a particular research method, but as a way of approaching and thinking about a problem critically. However, the significant difference between discourse analysis and CDA lies in the constructive problem-oriented, interdisciplinary and multi-methodical of the latter. So far, the discussion on the similarities and differences between discourse analysis and CDA have been conducted for a clearer understanding of this critical linguistic approach. While concerned about social relations, a discourse analysis approach is likely to use language categories as given rather than to examine how they circulate and who benefits. In contrast, CDA not only looks at the available discourse but asks how and why ideologies are circulating in the workplace discussion, what is being naturalized and who benefits (Nguyễn Hòa, 2005). CDA is characterized not merely as a particular research method, but a way of approaching and thinking about a problem critically. CDA moves between broad social formations and micro-textual analytic work... to a critical and socially motivated rather than merely descriptive analysis. Given that, a CDA approach is ideal for a study on the persuasive strategies in political speeches.

#### **2.1.2. Critical Discourse Analysis – a Theory and Research Approach**

The use of CDA as a research method is not necessarily synonymous with given methodological steps for gathering, transcribing and analyzing data. As CDA has made the study of language interdisciplinary, many different approaches to analyzing the social, critical effects of language can fall under its rubric. Some forms of CDA are deeply influenced by linguistics and analyze a text's "syntactic and lexicon, its grammar, morphology phonology". Such a focus does not mean that all linguistically influenced CDA looks alike. Such analyses can focus on a detailed look at multiple linguistic features, or highlight one or two, such as transitivity or active or passive voice. Some such approaches involve transcribing to include markers of emphasis, rising or falling pitch, pauses and other language patterns so that they are available for analysis. This approach theorizes that language patterns, when brought to bear on social and historical constructs, can reveal power relations and the working of ideology. There are a variety of critical discourse analysts with highlighted areas of analysis and viewpoints.

Fairclough (1995, 1996, 2001, 2010) considers CDA a transdisciplinary (italic in original) form of analysis featuring language as a mode of social practice. In that sense, CDA

assumes the responsibility of analyzing texts in their social contexts (Fairclough, 1995). Besides, the theoretical relationship between language and ideology is also articulated in Fairclough's theory. He emphasizes, "the merits of locating ideology in language structures or language events" (Fairclough, p.80, 1995). Inheriting and developing from the concepts of discourse and discourse analysis, Fairclough (1995) contents CDA as "a more diverse range of linguistic features and levels may be ideologically invested than is usually assumed, including aspects of linguistic form and style as well as content". He then argues that language/ ideology issues should be placed into a more general framework of theories and analysis of power.

According to Locke (2004), CDA is characterized as follows:

- analytical because we have conducted a detailed systematic examination of a particular object to arrive at one or more underlying principles.
- discourse oriented in this analysis has been concerned with language in use and with the way in which patterns of meaning are socially constructed.
- critical because a central outcome of the act of analysis is to enable consideration of the social effects of the meanings which a reader is being positioned or called upon to subscribe to in the act of reading and the discussion of these meanings.

Locke (2004) stresses that interpretation arose from an act of reading or analysis which makes meaning of a text. In the broader sphere of this definition, Fairclough argues that in respect of discourse analysis, interpretation focuses on three dimensions of discursive practice: (i) its manifestation in linguistic form ("texts" form); (ii) its instantiation of social practice (political, ideological and so on); and (iii) a third dimension which focuses on socially constructed processes of production, distribution and consumption which determine how texts are produced and circulated. As Fairclough asserts, analysis could not be separated from interpretation and analysts need to be sensitive to their interpretative tendencies and social reasons for them (1992a). Such ability to interpret discourse can be defined as literacy meaning the individual cognition to the social construction. In other words, literacy is considered the ability to read and write texts – to decode writing (as a reader) and to code language in graphic form (as a writer). In this view, textual interpretation is psychological process which occur in a reader's head. Literacy can be viewed not as a single thing but as a set of socially constructed practices. Not only do different types of texts require different ways of reading, but the same text can also be read in different ways to generate different meanings. Textual meaning becomes multiple and therefore determinate (Locke, 2004).

## 2.2. Appraisal Theory

Appraisal Theory as developed by Martin and White (2005), offers a nuanced framework within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) for analyzing how speakers and writers express attitudes, position themselves toward other voices, and modulate the force of their utterances. This theory is particularly valuable in political discourse analysis, as it illuminates how emotional, ethical, and evaluative meanings are strategically constructed and disseminated through language. Appraisal consists of three primary subsystems: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, each of which contributes to the speaker's interpersonal meaning-making.

Attitude is central to this study, as it focuses on the expression of emotional responses (*Affect*), moral evaluations of people's behavior (*Judgment*), and aesthetic or functional evaluations of things, processes, or states of affairs (*Appreciation*). These resources allow for the identification of how politicians convey empathy, solidarity, or condemnation in ways that

resonate emotionally with their audiences. For instance, when Clinton speaks in support of marginalized groups or expresses outrage over injustice, she employs affective and judgmental resources to construct a morally charged, value-driven message.

Engagement deals with dialogic positioning—that is, how speakers acknowledge, endorse, challenge, or ignore alternative viewpoints. It is crucial for understanding how Clinton framed her arguments in contrast to her opponent's and how she aligned herself with collective values or institutional stances. Her use of inclusive pronouns (“we,” “our”) and rhetorical questioning often served to align with progressive ideologies while simultaneously disaligning from opposing narratives.

Graduation, concerns the scaling of meanings—how expressions are intensified or softened. This can be achieved through force (e.g., “very,” “extremely”) or focus (e.g., sharpening or blurring the boundaries of categories). Clinton frequently employed high-value lexis and emotionally charged adjectives to heighten the urgency or moral weight of issues like healthcare, women’s rights, and immigration reform.

By integrating CDA and Appraisal Theory, this study aims to move beyond surface-level content analysis to uncover how Clinton’s emotional appeals are intricately tied to her ideological positioning. Rather than viewing emotional language as merely rhetorical embellishment, the analysis situates it as central to the negotiation of social values, group identity, and moral authority in political discourse.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, combining the analytical tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Appraisal Theory to investigate how Hillary Clinton’s political beliefs and ideological stance were articulated through emotional appeals during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. The aim is not merely to describe Clinton’s linguistic choices, but to interpret how these choices function within broader ideological, social, and historical contexts.

Given the focus on language, ideology, and emotion, this study is situated within the tradition of interpretivist inquiry, which emphasizes the understanding of meaning-making processes in social discourse. The analysis is interpretive and explanatory, seeking to uncover the implicit assumptions and ideological positioning embedded in political language.

#### **3.2. Theoretical Framework**

This research is grounded in two complementary methodologies:

- **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** Based on Norman Fairclough's work (1992, 1995), CDA explores the connections between language, power, and ideology. It offers a way to examine how discourse reflects, sustains, or challenges social and institutional power, focusing not just on what is said, but on the social and political consequences of how it is articulated.

- **Appraisal Theory:** Developed within Systemic Functional Linguistics by Martin and White (2005), this theory analyzes how speakers and writers express emotions, attitudes, and evaluations. It breaks down discourse into three systems: **Attitude** (affect, judgment, appreciation), **Engagement** (dialogic positioning), and **Graduation** (intensity or degree). This framework is particularly useful for analyzing the emotional components of political speech.

By combining these two approaches, the study connects in-depth linguistic analysis with broader ideological critique, offering a multifaceted understanding of Hillary Clinton's emotional rhetoric.

### **3.3. Data Collection**

The primary data for this study consists of a purposefully selected corpus of Hillary Clinton's campaign speeches, interviews, and public addresses delivered between July and November 2016, during the most intense phase of the presidential campaign. Key speeches were chosen based on the following criteria:

- High media visibility and broad audience reach (e.g., Democratic National Convention speech, major campaign rallies).
- Richness in emotional and ideological content, as determined by preliminary thematic analysis.
- Relevance to major policy and identity themes (e.g., gender equality, immigration, healthcare).

In total, twenty speeches delivered by Hillary Clinton in her 2016 presidential campaign were closely analyzed. Secondary data sources, including polling data from CBS News, media reports, and official Democratic Party platform documents, were used to contextualize the discourse and support the interpretation of ideological positioning.

### **3.4. Analytical Procedures**

The analysis proceeded in **four stages**:

#### **1. Textual Analysis (Micro-Level)**

Each speech was transcribed and subjected to a detailed linguistic analysis using the categories of Appraisal Theory. Special attention was paid to:

- **Affect** (expressions of emotion: hope, fear, pride, anger, etc.)
- **Judgment** (evaluations of moral character: honesty, strength, compassion)
- **Appreciation** (valuations of things, policies, or symbolic references)

Keywords and emotionally charged phrases were identified, coded, and categorized using a deductive coding frame based on Appraisal Theory.

#### **2. Intertextual and Interdiscursive Analysis**

Drawing on CDA principles, the study examined how Clinton's language echoed, recontextualized, or contested other discourses — including feminist discourse, civil rights discourse, and opposing political narratives. This stage uncovered the intertextual links and historical references Clinton employed to enhance the emotional impact of her message.

#### **3. Ideological Mapping (Meso and Macro Levels)**

The study analyzed how Clinton's emotional appeals reflected the ideological principles of the Democratic Party, such as inclusion, diversity, and social justice. Her discursive choices were mapped onto broader socio-political movements and institutional discourses.

#### **4. Comparative Analysis**

Selected excerpts from Trump's campaign speeches were analyzed using the same framework to reveal ideological and emotional contrasts. This provided insight into how opposing narratives were constructed and how emotional appeals were strategically mobilized to serve different political agendas.

### 3.5. Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

While qualitative discourse analysis is inherently interpretive, this study enhanced **validity** through **triangulation**:

- Comparing multiple speeches from different contexts.
- Cross-referencing Clinton’s discourse with party documents and voter opinion polls.
- Contrasting Clinton’s emotional appeals with those of her political opponent.

To ensure reliability, the researcher developed a consistent coding scheme informed by established frameworks in CDA and Appraisal Theory. Coding decisions were documented and justified through examples. Regarding ethical considerations, the study exclusively uses publicly available speeches and political data. No human subjects were involved, and no confidential information was used.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1. Social Context: Ideology, Identity, and Political Climate

The political discourse of Hillary Clinton during the 2016 United States presidential election cannot be fully understood without situating it within the broader socio-political, cultural, and ideological context of the time. As the first woman to secure a major party nomination for the U.S. presidency, Clinton’s campaign held historical significance not only in terms of gender representation but also in its reflection and reinforcement of the Democratic Party’s core ideological commitments—namely, social justice, inclusivity, gender and racial equality, and the protection of human rights, particularly for marginalized communities.

The 2016 campaign unfolded during a period of intense political polarization in the United States. Public discourse was shaped by widespread economic anxiety, racial tensions, immigration debates, and the emergence of populist nationalism. In this volatile atmosphere, Clinton’s rhetorical strategy centered on affirming progressive values, mobilizing identity-based solidarity, and drawing a stark contrast between an inclusive, multicultural vision of America and her opponent’s rhetoric of fear, exclusion, and nostalgic nationalism.

[H15] *“Donald Trump’s campaign adds up to an ugly, dangerous message to America. A message that you should be afraid — afraid of people whose ethnicity is different or religious faith is different, or who were born in a different country or hold different political beliefs.”*

One of the clearest articulations of this ideological divide appears in speech [H15], where Clinton directly critiques the core message of Donald Trump’s campaign. In this excerpt, she employs emotionally charged language to establish a strong moral and ideological contrast. By characterizing Trump’s message as “ugly” and “dangerous,” she not only delegitimizes his platform but also positions her own as ethically superior. Through this binary framing, Clinton presents her candidacy as the antithesis to fear—one that stands for unity, pluralism, and democratic inclusion. The use of the modal verb “should be afraid” highlights the emotional manipulation embedded in her opponent’s rhetoric, while simultaneously encouraging her audience to reject divisiveness and embrace solidarity across ethnic, religious, and political lines. This approach aims to evoke emotional responses such as moral indignation, empathy, and hope—particularly among liberal and moderate voters who value multiculturalism and social cohesion.

This ideological stance is also evident in her advocacy for women’s reproductive rights, notably in her defense of Planned Parenthood in speech [H11].

[H11] *“We need to defend Planned Parenthood against partisan attacks. If right-wing politicians actually cared as much about protecting women’s health as they say they do, they’d join me in standing up for Planned Parenthood.”*

Here, Clinton goes beyond expressing a policy preference; she makes a moral claim that invokes both judgment and emotion. By casting herself as a defender of women’s health and autonomy, she presents the opposition as not merely conservative, but hypocritical and ethically compromised. The phrase “partisan attacks” foregrounds the politically motivated nature of resistance to women’s healthcare, thereby generating feelings of frustration and urgency among feminist and progressive audiences. Moreover, her alignment with Planned Parenthood draws on the legacy of the feminist movement, linking her candidacy to broader historical efforts for gender justice and bodily autonomy.

In contrast, Donald Trump’s rhetoric, exemplified by slogans such as

[T5] *“We are going to put America First, and we are going to Make America Great Again,”*

is rooted in a different set of ideological assumptions and emotional appeals. His discourse is marked by populism, nationalism, and protectionism, tapping into sentiments of fear, resentment, and nostalgia. “America First” evokes economic and cultural isolationism, while “Make America Great Again” suggests a perceived loss of national identity and strength that must be restored—often interpreted as a return to a past that was less inclusive and equitable.

While Clinton’s discourse emphasizes progressive change, diversity, and forward-looking unity, Trump’s vision focuses on preserving traditional hierarchies, reinforcing borders, and reasserting American dominance. These contrasting rhetorical approaches reflect not only different political strategies but also fundamentally divergent ideological worldviews, each operating within its own emotional register.

Clinton’s messaging, deeply embedded in the institutional commitments of the Democratic Party, demonstrates an intersectional understanding of identity and policy. Her consistent support for minority rights, gender equity, immigration reform, and LGBTQ protections is framed not as a collection of isolated concerns but as interconnected struggles within the broader pursuit of democratic inclusion. This ideological coherence bolsters her credibility as a leader committed to systemic change, while her emotional appeals resonate with voters who prioritize equality and human dignity.

Significantly, Clinton’s discourse draws from longstanding American liberal traditions from Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal to Barack Obama’s politics of hope. Her references to civil rights history and feminist milestones serve as intertextual devices that anchor her candidacy within a broader narrative of social progress. By invoking such historical continuities, Clinton legitimizes her political positions while emotionally aligning herself with the ideals and sacrifices of past movements. This strategy fosters a sense of collective memory and shared moral purpose, strengthening her appeal to liberal and progressive constituencies.

[H13] *“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”*

[H19] *“Tonight, we’ve reached a milestone in our nation’s march toward a more perfect union: the first time that a major party has nominated a woman for president.”*

Clinton’s citation of [H13] “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself” evokes the legacy of Roosevelt’s leadership during crisis and subtly aligns her platform with the values of resilience and public responsibility. Similarly, in [H19], she frames her nomination as a national milestone in the ongoing struggle for gender equality. This reference to feminist history transcends personal accomplishment, functioning as a rhetorical device to galvanize support by

invoking the aspirations of earlier generations. Together, these intertextual strategies infuse her campaign with a sense of moral continuity and historical gravity, reinforcing her identity as a progressive leader.

In sum, Clinton's campaign unfolded in a highly polarized and emotionally charged political environment, marked by competing visions of American identity and values. Her discourse, rooted in the ideological foundations of the Democratic Party and informed by traditions of American liberalism, presented a deliberate counter-narrative to Trump's populist nationalism. Through emotionally resonant appeals and a consistent commitment to inclusive values, Clinton not only communicated her policy agenda but also constructed a political identity that aimed to inspire, unify, and mobilize around the ideals of democracy, equity, and social progress.

#### **4.2. The Impact of Political Ideology on Clinton's Use of Emotional Language**

Hillary Clinton's use of emotional language throughout the 2016 presidential campaign was deeply intertwined with her political ideology and the broader value system of the Democratic Party. Emotion in her rhetoric was not merely decorative or persuasive in a superficial sense, but rather functioned as a deliberate, ideologically grounded strategy. Through emotional appeals, Clinton constructed a moral framework rooted in progressive ideals—equity, social justice, collective responsibility, and democratic inclusion. These ideological commitments shaped both the content and tone of her discourse, embedding her emotional language with ethical significance and political intent.

At the situational level, Clinton's rhetoric often spotlighted systemic injustices, social inequality, and policy failures with the intent of stirring moral outrage and prompting collective action. When addressing issues such as racial profiling, gun violence, or threats to reproductive healthcare, her language was carefully calibrated to evoke empathy, indignation, and solidarity—emotions that align with the Democratic emphasis on protecting the marginalized and pushing for structural reform. This reflects what Martin and White (2005) describe as “invoked judgement” in appraisal theory, whereby emotion is used to shape moral evaluations implicitly, without overt moralizing.

[H2] *“Too many young African American men are still being stopped and searched for no reason, and too many are ending up dead. We must acknowledge these hard truths and come together to change the system.”*

[H6] *“It is unconscionable that we cannot pass common-sense gun laws when our children are being gunned down in schools and on the streets. Enough is enough.”*

[H9] *“When politicians attack Planned Parenthood, they're not just attacking an organization — they're attacking the millions of women who rely on it for basic health care.”*

[H10.1] *“Thoughts and prayers are not enough. We need action to stop the epidemic of gun violence tearing our communities apart.”*

[H10.3] *“We have to stand up for the rights of immigrants, of people of color, of LGBTQ Americans, and of every person who has ever been told they don't belong. That is the promise of our democracy.”*

Clinton's emotional engagement with issues of social justice reveals a consistent ideological thread grounded in empathy, reform, and inclusion. In [H2], the stark phrase “ending up dead” evokes both grief and indignation, casting systemic racism as a national moral failure. In [H6], the use of “unconscionable” intensifies the sense of urgency around gun reform and signals a collective moral responsibility. Similarly, [H9] shifts the focus from abstract policy to human impact, portraying attacks on Planned Parenthood as direct assaults on the

wellbeing of millions of women. The rejection of “thoughts and prayers” in [H10.1] underscores a broader critique of political inaction, while [H10.3] appeals to shared democratic values by naming marginalized communities and invoking a vision of inclusive citizenship. Through these emotionally resonant moments, Clinton built a narrative aimed at uniting audiences around a shared sense of ethical purpose and political urgency.

At the institutional level, Clinton’s emotional discourse channeled optimism and policy-based hope. Her proposals on healthcare, taxation, education, and gun control were presented not only as pragmatic solutions, but as emotionally significant responses to the lived realities of American citizens. These appeals positioned government as a force for empowerment and social repair, and grounded policy advocacy in affective terms that resonated with everyday concerns.

[H4] *“I believe that health care is a basic human right, not a privilege—and I will do everything I can to make sure that everyone has access to it.”*

[H5] *“Wall Street, corporations, and the super-rich are going to start paying their fair share of taxes.”*

[H8] *“We will make college debt-free for the middle class and tuition-free for families making less than \$125,000 a year.”*

[H9.5] *“If the FBI is watching you for a suspected terrorist link, you shouldn’t be able to just go buy a gun with no questions asked.”*

[H9.7] *“We need to break down all the barriers holding you back and keeping us apart.”*

Clinton’s campaign messages wove emotion into policy discourse to present government as an engine of fairness and opportunity. In [H4], declaring healthcare a “basic human right” invites both empathy and a sense of moral urgency. [H5] channels economic frustration, emphasizing fairness in taxation and echoing public resentment toward entrenched wealth. Her promise in [H8] to make college more accessible taps into the financial anxieties of middle-class families while projecting a hopeful, forward-looking agenda. In [H9.5], references to terrorism and loopholes heighten emotional tension and signal moral clarity on gun control. [H9.7] then softens the tone with a unifying call to dismantle divisions, reinforcing the campaign’s commitment to inclusiveness and solidarity.

Clinton’s emotional strategy effectively blended situational critique with institutional reassurance, reinforcing her progressive ideological stance. Her rhetoric sought to mobilize liberal and moderate voters around values like compassion, community, and ethical governance. Her campaign slogan—“We are stronger together”—captured this ethos, emphasizing unity over division and the pursuit of shared goals over partisan conflict. While Trump’s campaign often depicted politics as a zero-sum battle, Clinton framed it as a collective journey toward justice and inclusion. Her repeated use of “we” and “our” underscored this message, fostering a sense of shared identity and mutual responsibility.

Moreover, Clinton grounded her emotional appeals in historical memory, drawing connections to movements such as women’s rights, civil rights, and LGBTQ activism. By aligning present-day struggles with the emotional and moral legacies of past social change, she invited voters to see themselves as participants in a larger story of progress. This strategy not only added depth and legitimacy to her platform but also reinforced emotional identification with causes that transcend generational boundaries.

Polls, such as one from CBS News, show that Clinton’s emotional appeals resonated particularly well with women, minorities, and college-educated voters, who viewed her as experienced and socially committed. However, her inability to engage working-class white

voters, who felt disconnected from the Democratic Party, revealed a key shortcoming of her emotional approach. While grounded in progressive values, Clinton’s emotional messaging lacked the immediate, populist intensity that fueled Trump’s appeal. Despite her strengths, Clinton’s loss in 2016 was influenced by a combination of campaign strategies, media dynamics, voter perceptions, and a highly polarized political climate.

### CANDIDATE QUALITIES

Among registered voters

SHARES YOUR VALUES	TRUMP	CLINTON
Yes	31%	37%
No	66%	60%
HONEST AND TRUSTWORTHY	TRUMP	CLINTON
Yes	31%	32%
No	64%	64%
STRONG QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP	TRUMP	CLINTON
Yes	55%	64%
No	44%	44%
RIGHT TEMPERAMENT FOR PRESIDENT	TRUMP	CLINTON
Yes	27%	48%
No	70%	49%

CBS News/New York Times

Figure 6.20. Voters’ views on Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump according to CBS News’s poll

Moreover, Clinton’s emotional appeals were framed by a blend of moral aspiration and detailed policy discussions, which may have weakened their emotional impact, especially on undecided or disillusioned voters. While her rhetoric combined logical appeals with emotional elements, it leaned more heavily on reason and evidence than on unfiltered emotion. In contrast, Trump’s rhetoric, despite its regressive tone, tapped into raw emotion, resonating deeply with certain voter groups. This contrast reflects a broader challenge within liberal political communication: balancing ethical, ideological consistency with the need to fully engage with the emotional dynamics of politics.

#### 4.3. Intertextuality and Historical Resonance in Clinton’s Emotional Appeals

One of Clinton’s most effective rhetorical strategies was her deliberate use of intertextuality—drawing upon the words and legacies of past leaders, feminist icons, and civil rights movements to lend historical depth and moral weight to her discourse. This approach allowed her to frame her campaign as part of a larger narrative of American progress, positioning herself within a tradition of social justice and democratic ideals. By evoking figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt and referencing the suffragist movement, Clinton infused her rhetoric with emotional resonance and a sense of historical continuity.

She often recalled pivotal moments in feminist and civil rights history to underscore her commitment to equality: “*Women’s rights are human rights, and human rights are women’s rights.*” This line, first delivered in her 1995 Beijing speech, was strategically reintroduced during the 2016 campaign, serving as both a symbolic touchstone and a reaffirmation of her

longstanding advocacy. The emotional power of this repetition lies in its capacity to evoke pride, perseverance, and a shared sense of unfinished struggle.

Clinton's use of inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "our," along with collective references, reinforced the idea of a common cause rooted in collective memory and moral purpose.

[H8.8] *"I'm here today because generations of women and men, who came before us, fought and sacrificed and made this moment possible. From Seneca Falls to Selma to Stonewall, they bent the arc of the moral universe toward justice."*

[H10.9] *"We need to prove once again that America stands up to every challenge, no matter how tough the odds, and we've always done it together—just like Eleanor Roosevelt reminded us: 'You must do the thing you think you cannot do.'"*

[H3] *"We have to make sure the hard-won rights of the past two centuries are not rolled back—because as Shirley Chisholm said, 'If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair'"*

[H6] *"I wish my mother could be here tonight. She was born before women could vote. But she believed in America, and she believed in me. That's why tonight's victory is for every little girl who dreams of breaking barriers."*

[H9] *"We are standing under the glass ceiling right now. But don't worry—we're not smashing it alone. We're doing it with the lessons of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and every woman who refused to be silenced."*

Across these examples, Clinton's intertextual references reveal a strategic effort to align her campaign with iconic movements for justice and equality. In [H8.8], she invokes the landmarks of Seneca Falls, Selma, and Stonewall to anchor her platform within a triad of historical struggles—gender, race, and LGBTQ+ rights—while echoing Dr. King's language to lend moral gravitas. In [H10.9], the invocation of Eleanor Roosevelt as a figure of quiet strength links Clinton's leadership to a legacy of resilience and civic courage. The citation of Shirley Chisholm in [H3] affirms her support for bold, inclusive representation, underscoring a politics of presence and disruption. [H6] weaves the narrative of suffrage into her personal story, deepening emotional engagement through generational connection. Finally, [H9] places her campaign within a lineage of resistance embodied by Tubman and Truth, invoking a spirit of defiance and collective empowerment.

Together, these intertextual moves serve not only to legitimize Clinton's political vision but also to invoke a shared emotional and historical memory. By framing her candidacy as part of an enduring fight for justice, she invites voters to see themselves as participants in a larger moral journey, one defined by progress, perseverance, and solidarity.

#### **4.4. Historical Intertextuality and Emotional Legitimacy**

One of Hillary Clinton's most effective rhetorical strategies during the 2016 campaign was her deliberate use of intertextuality - the incorporation of historical references, iconic figures, and collective memory to strengthen the emotional and ideological force of her message. By invoking the legacies of feminist pioneers, civil rights leaders, and foundational moments in American history, Clinton positioned herself not merely as a presidential candidate but as the inheritor of a broader moral and democratic tradition. This approach allowed her to situate her campaign within a continuum of national struggle and progress, lending emotional weight and historical legitimacy to her political platform.

In particular, Clinton frequently referenced Eleanor Roosevelt, framing her as a model of principled leadership and empathetic governance. In her remarks at the Women for Hillary event, Clinton stated:

[H18] *“I have always admired Eleanor Roosevelt. She said we should do the thing we think we cannot do. That’s the spirit we need today.”*

This reference served a dual rhetorical purpose. On one hand, it aligned Clinton with a revered female figure in American political memory, reinforcing her ethos as a woman leader with a deep sense of public service. On the other hand, it appealed to the audience’s emotional attachment to democratic ideals and moral courage, subtly linking Roosevelt’s legacy to the present political moment.

Perhaps the most resonant intertextual gesture in Clinton’s campaign was her revival of a defining phrase from her 1995 speech in Beijing:

[H20] *“If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights, once and for all.”*

Originally delivered at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, this declaration became a cornerstone of Clinton’s feminist identity. Its repetition in 2016 was more than a nostalgic callback—it functioned as an emotional bridge connecting past advocacy to present ambition. The phrase invited listeners to experience continuity between decades of feminist struggle and Clinton’s current candidacy, evoking pride, solidarity, and moral affirmation. It was a powerful reminder that her campaign was part of a larger fight for human dignity and gender justice, not merely a personal or political ambition.

Clinton also consistently invoked the civil rights movement to frame her campaign as a continuation of the struggle for racial equality. In a speech to the National Baptist Convention, she remarked:

[H18] *“We’ve come a long way since the march on Selma, but we still have work to do.”*

This allusion to Selma did more than situate her campaign in historical context—it invoked an emotional call to action. By aligning her platform with the sacrifices of past civil rights leaders, Clinton prompted audiences to feel both pride in historical progress and urgency in confronting ongoing injustice. The phrase “we still have work to do” echoed a common refrain in moral-political rhetoric: that democracy is unfinished and requires constant vigilance.

These historical references were reinforced by Clinton’s use of inclusive pronouns “we,” “our,” and “us” which cast her message in collective terms. Rather than framing political progress as the result of individual heroism, she emphasized shared responsibility and intergenerational effort. Slogans like “We are stronger together,” and lines such as “Let us finish the work our ancestors began” underscored her campaign’s orientation toward unity and civic duty. These linguistic choices acted as emotional cues, inviting audiences to see themselves as participants in a shared moral narrative.

Through such intertextual strategies, Clinton extended the emotional scope of her rhetoric beyond the immediate stakes of the 2016 election. She drew on enduring cultural scripts about justice, progress, and inclusion to construct a campaign narrative that resonated with deeply held values and collective memory. In doing so, she offered her audience not just policy proposals, but a sense of historical purpose and belonging. Her discourse became a symbolic space where voters could imagine themselves continuing the work of those who came before - marching, organizing, and resisting in the name of freedom and equality.

#### 4.5. Emotional Resonance and Limitations of Clinton's Strategy

While Hillary Clinton's emotional appeals were grounded in a consistent ideological framework and supported by historical intertextuality, her overall emotional resonance across the electorate was uneven. Despite deploying a wide range of rhetorical and affective strategies including appeals to hope, inclusion, and justice, her ability to connect with certain voter demographics on an emotional level remained limited, particularly in contrast to the populist rhetoric of her opponent, Donald Trump.

One of the most significant challenges Clinton faced was her limited appeal to the white working-class male demographic, many of whom felt economically marginalized and culturally alienated in the context of globalization and shifting social norms. Clinton's discourse, though emotionally charged in support of progressive values, often failed to acknowledge or tap into the emotional grievances of this group, such as economic insecurity, cultural displacement, and resentment toward perceived political elites. In contrast, Trump's emotionally direct slogans — such as *"Make America Great Again"* — evoked nostalgia, pride, and a sense of belonging for these voters, effectively leveraging affective populism to create a strong emotional bond.

[H9.10] *"America is already great, but we are great because we are good — and we will keep getting greater together."*

[H8.1] *"We're going to say no to tax cuts for the rich, no to bad trade deals, and no to employers who exploit workers or cut wages."*

[H8.8] *"We are stronger together — and we will rise by lifting each other up, not by tearing each other down."*

In [H9.10], [H8.1], and [H8.8], Clinton's rhetoric reveals a pattern of moral appeal and collective idealism that struggled to engage white working-class men on an emotional level. In [H9.10], the claim that "America is already great" overlooked the discontent of those who felt excluded from economic growth and cultural recognition. This optimistic framing clashed with a sense of decline many voters associated with lost manufacturing jobs and community erosion. In [H8.1], her criticism of tax breaks for the wealthy and unfair trade deals speaks to real issues but does so in the language of policy rather than personal experience. The lack of emotional urgency meant that her message did not offer the kind of identification or catharsis that this group was seeking. Similarly, [H8.8] calls for unity and mutual support, but the broad appeal lacks concrete acknowledgment of their specific grievances. The absence of emotionally charged, identity-affirming language left many feeling unseen, especially in contrast to Trump's direct appeals to pride, resentment, and belonging.

Moreover, Clinton's emotional register was often embedded in intellectualized, policy-oriented language, which, while resonant with educated, urban, and liberal voters, risked alienating audiences who craved simplicity, passion, and emotional immediacy. For example, her speeches frequently emphasized complex policy details regarding healthcare reform, tax policy, and education funding — topics that require cognitive engagement but do not always elicit immediate emotional response. While this approach aligns with traditional expectations of political competence, it was often perceived as overly rehearsed or inauthentic, particularly in a media environment increasingly shaped by performative charisma and affective immediacy.

Media portrayals of Clinton as overly "prepared" or "scripted" intensified the perception of her emotional expression as calculated rather than spontaneous. Even in moments of genuine emotion, such as her tear-filled concession speech, her affect was often seen as insincere. The political atmosphere of 2016, marked by distrust of the establishment and a preference for unfiltered emotion, posed challenges for Clinton. Her emotional rhetoric, while

carefully crafted and ethically framed, contrasted with the unrestrained, theatrical style preferred by many voters. Additionally, Clinton's gender created further challenges in how her emotional appeals were received. Female politicians often face expectations to balance strength and empathy, which sometimes led to her emotional expressions being misinterpreted. For example, anger or ambition might be seen as overly assertive or unappealing, whereas similar emotions in male candidates were often praised. This created a gendered double standard, diminishing the impact of her emotional strategy, particularly among undecided voters. Despite this, her emotional appeals resonated with core supporters, including women, racial minorities, LGBTQ groups, and college-educated voters. Her slogan, "Stronger Together," embodied a vision of political unity based on empathy and cooperation, yet lacked the intensity and aggression that mobilized Trump's supporters. This contrast underscores the challenge in modern politics: balancing emotional appeal with reason, inclusivity with populist sentiment.

### 5. Conclusion

Hillary Clinton's emotional appeals in the 2016 presidential campaign reflected her commitment to social justice, equality, and inclusive governance. Her speeches used powerful emotional language, appealing to solidarity, hope, and moral outrage, to promote a progressive vision for America rooted in empathy and historical continuity. By referencing key historical moments and shared values, Clinton aimed to connect with marginalized groups and reinforce the democratic ideals of the nation.

However, her emotional approach faced challenges in its impact. Compared to Donald Trump's populist rhetoric, which struck a chord with disillusioned voters, particularly white working-class men, Clinton's emotional messaging lacked the raw immediacy that resonated more deeply with this demographic. Additionally, societal expectations regarding gender and the highly charged media environment often led to perceptions of inauthenticity in her emotional appeals.

Ultimately, Clinton's defeat in 2016 highlights the difficulty of using emotional rhetoric effectively in modern politics. In a time when spectacle, identity, and polarization heavily influence public discourse, emotional messages must not only align with values but also genuinely connect with a diverse electorate that is increasingly divided on emotional and ideological lines.

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