

Creating the Enemy: An Analysis of Trump's Rhetorical Dystopia During His 2024 Campaign

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Abstract

Given Donald Trump's polarizing effects on the political landscape of the United States, his rhetoric has been a continual subject of scholarly inquiry since his first term in office in 2016. While much has been done to study the enemy-creation strategies he uses in his rhetoric and their effects on public opinion, less has been done to describe the enemies themselves. This work aims to fill that gap, focusing on who he defines as enemies and how they progress in his rhetoric from May-November of 2024, when he was campaigning for the United States presidency. Along with defining and narrating Trump's enemies, this project positions these constructs within the context of conservative populist rhetoric in an attempt to understand Trump's rhetorical habits in relation to those of similar figures. It then engages in an analysis of Trump's presidential campaign rallies from May-November of 2024, events that are often used by political figures to construct and demonize, dehumanize, and delegitimize opponents and establish cultural myths. This analysis uses transcripts from six of Trump's rallies to describe his constructions of enemies and the broader conspiracy between them that he alludes to. Along with detailing the limitations of this thesis and areas for future research, this project concludes by discussing the implications of this thesis, both in future research and society more generally.