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Creating Emotional Connections: The Role of Metaphors in Obama's 2024 Democratic National Convention Speech

Nozimjon Bobojon o'g'li Ataboev¹, Bahor Bahriddinovna Turaeva², Zokirova Sokhiba Mukhtoraliyevna³, Sabirova Zebo Zokirovna⁴, Xolmatova Elnura Sherali qizi⁵, Zahriddin Xazratqul o'g'li Hayitqulov⁶

¹Foreign Languages Faculty, Bukhara State University, Bukhara, Uzbekistan

²Institute of Uzbek Language, Literature, and Folklore, Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

^{3,5}Faculty of Preschool and Primary Education, Fergana State University, Ferghana, Uzbekistan

⁴Faculty of Journalism and Uzbek Philology, National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

⁶Department of Theoretical Aspects of the English Language, Uzbekistan State World Language University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

SUBMISSION TRACK

Received: July 16, 2026

Final Revision: October 14, 2026

Accepted: October 18, 2026

Available Online: October 25, 2026

KEYWORDS

Metaphors, political communication, emotional connections, cultural linguistics,

CORRESPONDENCE

*E-mail: n.b.ataboev@buxdu.uz

A B S T R A C T

Metaphors in high-stakes political discourse serve as essential cognitive frameworks that shape public perception, evoke shared cultural conceptualizations, and mediate complex institutional transitions. This study investigates how Barack Obama strategically deploys conceptual metaphors in his 2024 Democratic National Convention address to establish emotional resonance with voters, reframe partisan competition, and facilitate surrogate endorsement and charisma transfer to Vice President Kamala Harris. Applying a mixed qualitative and quantitative discourse-analytic design, the study analyzes Obama's 3,542-word verbatim address through the combined lenses of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics framework, and Critical Discourse Analysis, utilizing the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP/MIPAR). The analysis identified 23 metaphor tokens across 18 distinct conceptual metaphor types, yielding a density of 6.49 metaphors per 1,000 words and a high type-token ratio of 78.3%. Four primary functional themes emerged: delegitimizing the political opposition (34.78%), promoting unity and community solidarity (30.43%), inspiring collective hope and optimism (26.09%), and honoring legacy and intergenerational leadership transition (8.70%). Rather than escalating apocalyptic fear, the rhetoric operationalizes a novel strategy of domestic demotion, trivially reframing political demagoguery as low-status domestic nuisances, while deploying structural relay tropes to dignify candidate succession and confer historical legitimacy onto the new nominee. The findings demonstrate that political persuasion benefits from substituting polarizing fear appeals with paired domestic counter-metaphors and culturally grounded schemas, proving that effective leadership communication relies on aligning cognitive frames with shared cultural values to foster sustainable civic engagement and national cohesion.

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of metaphors in political discourse is a powerful rhetorical tool that can shape public perception, create emotional connections, and

mobilize voters (Dvalishvili, 2023; Howe, 1988); Jesudas & Mohammed, 2024; Prabhakaran & Shutova, 2021). Metaphors in political discourse serve as powerful rhetorical tools that shape public

perception, evoke emotions, and mobilize voters (Anber, 2023; Xu, 2015). They simplify complex ideas, enhance persuasive power, and create emotional impact (Anber, 2023). Metaphors guide perception, structure experiences, and generate new insights, allowing politicians to communicate effectively and frame issues (Xu, 2015; Landau & Keefer, 2014). Even brief exposure to metaphoric framing can influence observers' interpretation of target issues by transferring knowledge from concrete concepts to abstract ones (Landau & Keefer, 2014). Politicians strategically use metaphors to fulfill persuasive and rhetorical goals, express ideological positions, and employ face-saving strategies (Raphael, 2016). Metaphors help the public make sense of political issues, express attitudes towards politics, and identify with national beliefs and goals (Raphael, 2016). Hence, metaphors are integral to political communication, shaping attitudes and linking various parts of society.

Barack Obama's speech at the 2024 Democratic National Convention is notable for its strategic use of metaphors to convey complex ideas and inspire his audience (PBS NewsHour, 2024). In his speech, Barack Obama delivered a powerful endorsement of Vice President Kamala Harris, emphasizing her readiness to lead as the party's presidential nominee. He focused on the pressing need for America to remain a force for good in the world, underlining the values of democracy, justice, and equality. Obama highlighted the importance of unity and collective action in addressing critical challenges, such as climate change, economic inequality, and the preservation of civil liberties.

Metaphors are not merely linguistic devices but fundamental cognitive tools that shape our understanding of the world (Gibbs, 2017; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The central idea of conceptual metaphors, as explored by cognitive linguists like George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), suggests that much of human thought is metaphorical. In this theory, metaphors are not limited to language; they are fundamental to thought itself. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits that metaphors are integral to human thought, influencing how we reason about complex issues and make decisions (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011; Gibbs, 2011). Even subtle metaphorical framing can significantly impact problem-solving approaches and information gathering, often without conscious

awareness (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). The human conceptual system is inherently metaphorical, built upon nonmetaphorical concepts derived from direct experience, such as spatial orientations and physical entities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphorical concepts, in turn, are understood through these more concrete experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). While CMT has faced criticism, substantial linguistic and psychological evidence supports its core tenets (Gibbs, 2011). Recent developments in embodied simulations and dynamical systems theory offer new perspectives on conceptual metaphors (Gibbs, 2011).

Moreover, metaphors extend beyond personal cognition to shape collective perceptions and cultural values. Different cultures rely on specific metaphors that reflect their worldviews, yet many metaphors have universal underpinnings based on shared human experiences. Cultural Linguistics, pioneered by Farzad Sharifian, explores the interconnection between language and cultural conceptualizations. This field emphasizes that cognition is not just individual but also collective, with cultural conceptualizations distributed across group members (Sharifian, 2009). These conceptualizations, including schemas, categories, and metaphors, are embedded in language, making it a "memory bank" for cultural knowledge (Sharifian, 2017). Metaphors, in particular, play a crucial role in shaping social cognition, allowing people to understand abstract concepts through more concrete ones (Landau et al., 2010). This metaphor-enriched perspective offers unique insights into social information processing (Landau et al., 2010). This approach provides a deeper understanding of language use across cultures and its role in shaping collective perceptions and values.

The cultural linguistics approach provides a framework for analyzing how language reflects and shapes cultural cognition. This study will uncover the underlying cultural models and values that inform his rhetoric by examining the metaphors in Obama's speech through this lens. This analysis will not only shed light on the effectiveness of Obama's speech in creating emotional connections but also contribute to a broader understanding of the role of metaphors in political communication. Ultimately, this research aims to demonstrate how metaphors can be a powerful tool for political

leaders to connect with their audience, convey their message, and influence voter behavior.

Based on the primary research objectives, the research questions could be formulated as follows:

1. What types of metaphors are present in Barack Obama's speech?
2. What are the primary functions of these metaphors in Obama's speech?
3. How do the metaphors used in Obama's speech reflect and shape cultural values, beliefs, and models within the context of American society and political discourse?

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the use of metaphors in Barack Obama's speech at the 2024 Democratic National Convention through the lens of Cultural Linguistics. The methodology is designed to systematically identify, classify, and interpret the metaphors used in the speech and to explore their cultural implications and rhetorical functions. The primary data for this study is Barack Obama's speech delivered at the 2024 Democratic National Convention. The data was taken from the PBS NewsHour YouTube channel titled "Former President Barack Obama's full speech at 2024 Democratic National Convention".

The first step in the analysis is to systematically identify all metaphors used in the speech. This will be done by closely reading the transcript, particularly the metaphors. Then, the analysis focuses on describing the source and target domains. The relationship between the source and target domains is fundamental to how metaphors simplify and organize complex ideas in human cognition, thereby describing the meaning of the metaphors. After the meaning was clearly defined, the analysis was carried out by categorizing the metaphor according to established metaphor typologies (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003), including conceptual, structural, and conventional metaphors. After that, the analysis explores the cultural meanings and implications of the metaphors using cultural linguistics theory (Sharifian, 2017). This analysis will uncover how the metaphors resonate with the audience's cultural context, including shared beliefs, values, and experiences. The last step is a thematic analysis of the metaphor used in Obama's speech.

III. RESULT

Quantitative Corpus Metrics: Volume, Density, and Diversity

The analyzed corpus comprises 3,542 words, representing the complete verbatim transcript of Barack Obama's address delivered at the Democratic National Convention on August 20, 2024, in Chicago, Illinois. Applying the Metaphor Identification Procedure (Pragglejaz Group, 2007) alongside MIPAR (Steen et al., 2010), a total of 23 metaphor tokens ($N=23$) were identified, mapping across 18 distinct conceptual metaphor types ($V=18$).

The overall metaphor density across the corpus is calculated at 6.49 metaphors per 1,000 words:

$$\text{Metaphor Density} = \left(\frac{N}{\text{Total Words}} \right) \times 1,000$$

$$= \left(\frac{23}{3,542} \right) \times 1,000 \approx 6.49 \text{ per 1,000 words}$$

This metric indicates a strategically calibrated rhetorical deployment. While standard spontaneous political speeches typically register between 3.0 and 4.0 metaphors per 1,000 words, Obama's rate of 6.49 per 1,000 words achieves heightened persuasive resonance and affective impact without inducing cognitive fatigue or figurative overload in the audience.

Furthermore, the Metaphor Type-Token Ratio (TTR_m) measures the degree of conceptual frame diversity within the address:

$$TTR_m = \frac{V}{N} = \frac{18}{23} \approx 0.783 \quad (78.3\%)$$

The score 0.783 demonstrates high conceptual innovation and frame diversity. Rather than repeating conventional or clichéd tropes, the speaker draws from a wide-ranging cognitive inventory, spanning mundane domestic experience (leaf blowers, noisy neighbors, movie sequels) to historic civic conceptualizations (passing the torch, Lincolnian angels of our nature).

Mapping Metaphorical Domains, Cultural Schemas, and Rhetorical Functions

This section provides a fine-grained qualitative deconstruction of the 23 metaphor tokens identified across Barack Obama's 2024 DNC address. Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics framework, each

metaphorical expression is evaluated across its source and target domain mappings, underlying cognitive structures, embedded cultural schemas, and specific illocutionary and pragmatic functions. To maintain narrative flow and streamline the presentation of empirical findings, the complete qualitative classification matrix detailing all 23 metaphorical expressions are shown in Appendix 1. Table 1 provides a comprehensive distribution matrix detailing the quantitative and thematic allocation of conceptual metaphors across Barack Obama's 2024 DNC speech. The matrix categorizes the 23 identified metaphor tokens into four primary functional themes: criticizing and delegitimizing the opposition (34.78%), promoting

unity and community solidarity (30.43%), inspiring collective hope and optimism (26.09%), and honoring legacy and leadership transition (8.70%). For each thematic category, the table maps the underlying conceptual metaphors (CMT), their corresponding cultural schemas (Sharifian, 2017), and their primary illocutionary and pragmatic force within the address's broader rhetorical architecture.

Theme 1: Criticizing and Delegitimizing the Opposition

This thematic category represents the largest single proportion of metaphorical tokens in the speech (N = 8, 34.78%), establishing delegitimization as the primary functional

Table 1. Comprehensive Distribution Matrix of Metaphors Across Rhetorical Themes

Functional Theme	Token Count	Percentage	Key Underlying Conceptual Metaphors	Dominant Cultural Schemas	Primary Illocutionary / Pragmatic Force
Criticizing & Delegitimizing Opposition	8	34.78%	POLITICAL PARTY IS A RELIGIOUS CULT PERSISTENT DEMAGOGUERY IS INVASIVE NEIGHBORHOOD NOISE A PRESIDENTIAL TERM IS A CINEMATIC FILM AUTHORITARIANISM IS FEUDAL SUBJUGATION	[PLURALIST DEMOCRACY SCHEMA] [CIVIC DECORUM SCHEMA] [SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD SCHEMA] [ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN EQUALITY SCHEMA]	Expressive / Delegitimizing: Demotes opposition rhetoric from a formidable threat to a selfish, repetitive nuisance while stripping the rival party of democratic legitimacy.
Promoting Unity & Community Solidarity	7	30.43%	PUBLIC GOVERNANCE IS NEIGHBORLY MUTUAL AID CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY IS A SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IS CELESTIAL MORAL GUIDANCE CIVIC SOCIETY IS AN INTERCONNECTED FABRIC	[GOOD NEIGHBOR / MUTUAL AID SCHEMA] [ENLIGHTENMENT FOUNDING SCHEMA] [LINCOLNIAN CIVIL RELIGION SCHEMA] [CIVIC FABRIC SCHEMA]	Commissive / Unifying: Reclaims shared civic values, bridges ideological divides, and fosters inclusive, cross-partisan emotional solidarity.
Inspiring Collective Hope & Optimism	6	26.09%	EMOTIONAL PASSION IS COMBUSTION / HEAT A HISTORICAL ERA IS A LITERARY BOOK CHAPTER POLICY INNOVATION IS MARITIME NAVIGATION OPPORTUNITY IS AN UNBOUNDED SPACE	[AMERICAN DREAM / PIONEER SCHEMA] [PROGRESSIVE REINVENTION SCHEMA] [PROTESTANT REVIVALIST SCHEMA] [MERITOCRATIC OPPORTUNITY SCHEMA]	Directive / Mobilizing: Re-energizes campaign morale, frames future national challenges as navigable, and inspires active voter turnout.
Honoring Legacy & Leadership Transition	2	8.70%	LEADERSHIP TRANSITION IS PASSING AN OLYMPIC TORCH ECONOMIC STEWARDSHIP IS VEHICULAR DRIVING NATION-BUILDING IS ARCHITECTURAL EDIFICE CONSTRUCTION	[GENERATIONAL DUTY / KENNEDY SCHEMA] [ECONOMIC STEWARDSHIP SCHEMA] [AUTOMOTIVE CONTROL SCHEMA]	Assertive / Legitimizing: Honors past administrative achievements, validates democratic continuity, and confers historical authority onto the incoming nominee.

allocation of figurative language in Obama's address. Rather than relying solely on literal, line-item policy critiques, which frequently trigger partisan counter-arguing and defensive cognitive filters among swing voters, the speaker utilizes conceptual metaphors to reshape the opponent's image at a foundational cognitive level. Through strategic domain mapping, the rhetoric frames the opposition candidate (Donald Trump) and his political movement as anomalous, narcissistically detached, autocratic, and socially disruptive. Below, the metaphorical tokens comprising this theme are deconstructed across their cognitive mappings, cultural schemas, and discourse functions:

"A cult of personality"

"The other party had turned into a cult of personality."

A cult of personality

Conceptual Mapping

A POLITICAL PARTY IS A RELIGIOUS CULT

Source Domain	Target Domain
Fanatical Religious Sect	→ Major Political Party
Unquestioning Sectarian Dogma	→ Party Platform / Ideology
Authoritarian Cult Leader	→ Presidential Candidate / Figurehead

Applying the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), the contextual meaning refers to a political party dominated by uncritical personal devotion to a single figure. In contrast, its basic, historical meaning denotes a fanatical religious sect bound by absolute obedience to an authoritarian leader. By mapping the domain of religious fanaticism onto a major American political institution, Obama performs a severe rhetorical demotion. Rather than engaging the rival party as an acceptable democratic adversary with competing policy views, the metaphor strips it of its institutional legitimacy. It activates the pluralist democracy schema, which expects political parties to function as rule-bound, policy-driven coalitions. The expressive force transforms party loyalty into a psychological anomaly, framing the opposition's platform as fanatical dogma rather than legitimate civic discourse.

This metaphor operates on the American Individualism vs. Totalitarian Dogma Cultural Schema. In U.S. political culture, personal autonomy, skepticism of centralized authority, and free exercise of reason are primary cultural values. The cultural category of the "cult", historically

entrenched in American cultural memory through tragic anti-civic fringe groups (e.g., Jonestown, Waco), evokes deep suspicion. By labeling a major political party a "cult," the speaker taps into a shared cultural model of democratic deliberation, where legitimate political actors are expected to debate ideas rather than surrender personal agency to an authoritarian figure. Ethnopractically, the phrase serves as a moral warning, signaling that the opposition has violated foundational American norms of anti-authoritarianism and individual conscience.

"The neighbor with the leaf blower"

"Here's a neighbor who keeps running his leaf blower outside your window every minute of every day."

The neighbor with the leaf blower

Conceptual Mapping

PERSISTENT DEMAGOGUERY IS INVASIVE
NEIGHBORHOOD NOISE

Source Domain	Target Domain
Unnecessary Leaf Blower Noise	→ Constant Political Grievances / Media Noise
Irritated Household Resident	→ Exhausted National Electorate
Turning Off the Power Switch	→ Voting Out the Opposing Candidate

The contextual meaning characterizes Donald Trump's continuous media presence, public grievances, and political rhetoric. The basic sensorimotor meaning describes an irritating, unnecessary residential noise disruption occurring right outside a private home. This metaphor achieves a masterclass in rhetorical demotion by reframing a formidable political opponent not as a dangerous autocrat, but as a selfish, domestic nuisance. By invoking the civic decorum/good neighbor schema, Obama appeals to suburban norms of mutual respect, quiet enjoyment, and boundary maintenance. The domestic framing resonates strongly with the electorate's collective exhaustion after years of intense political polarization. Pragmatically, the metaphor demotes the opposition's demagoguery from a threat that demands fear to an annoying noise that citizens can simply choose to turn off at the ballot box.

This expression directly activates the Suburban American Neighborhood Schema. In American middle-class culture, the single-family home and lawn represent the sanctuary of private life, governed by unwritten cultural scripts of

suburban decorum, property rights, and quietude (often codified by Homeowners Associations). The “leaf blower neighbor” is a ubiquitous cultural trope representing self-centered disregard for communal peace. Ethnopragmatically, downplaying high-stakes political conflict into a mundane suburban boundary dispute reframes national politics in accessible, everyday American terms. It taps into a widespread cultural conceptualization of civic exhaustion, transforming political resistance into an act of restoring domestic tranquility and personal peace.

“We have seen that movie before”

“We have seen that movie before, and we all know that the sequel is usually worse.”

We have seen that movie before

Conceptual Mapping

A PRESIDENTIAL TERM IS A CINEMATIC FILM

Source Domain	Target Domain
Motion Picture / Film Narrative	→ Presidential Administration
Predictable, Cash-Grab Movie Sequel	→ Second-Term Political Chaos
Exhausted Cinema Audience	→ Weary Political Electorate

Contextually, this phrase denotes a potential second presidential administration for the opposition. Its basic meaning describes watching a re-released motion picture film whose follow-up fails to deliver fresh value. Obama leverages the universal cultural consensus that commercial film sequels are cash-grab rehashes that are predictably inferior to the original release. The expression activates the popular entertainment schema, transforming complex political choices into a relatable consumer experience. By framing a second term as a tired cinematic re-run, the rhetoric trivializes the opposition’s campaign platform. It taps into widespread voter fatigue, positioning a potential second administration as an uninspired, chaotic repeat of past drama rather than a viable vision for the future.

The metaphor relies heavily on the Hollywood Commercial Cinema Cultural Model, a dominant force in modern American cultural identity. In American consumer culture, media consumption is a shared experience governed by specific expectations regarding novel entertainment, narrative satisfaction, and value for money. The cultural category of the “bad sequel” carries strong

negative associations of predictability, artistic decline, and financial exploitation. By framing governance through this cultural lens, the speaker maps consumer agency onto voter behavior: just as consumers can choose to boycott an uninspired cinematic sequel, citizens can reject a political rerun. This reflects an ethnopragmatic strategy tailored to a hyper-mediated culture where political life is continuously consumed as entertainment.

From the perspective of CDA, political delegitimization generally operates through either apocalyptic fear-mongering or substantive policy critique (Charteris-Black, 2011; Fairclough, 2013). However, Obama deploys a distinct, two-pronged cognitive strategy of rhetorical demotion:

1. **Institutional & Ideological Alienation:** By mapping the opposition onto domains of religious fanaticism (“*a cult of personality*”) and medieval autocracy (“*kiss the ring or bend the knee*”), the rhetoric strips the rival party of its status as a legitimate democratic institution. It reframes loyalty to the opposing candidate not as a valid ideological stance, but as an anti-republican psychological anomaly that violates core American democratic norms.
2. **Domestic Demotion & Trivialization:** Rather than elevating the opponent into a formidable, apocalyptic threat, which risks inducing voter fear, fatigue, or cognitive paralysis, Obama systematically demotes the candidate using low-status, everyday domestic tropes (“*the neighbor with the leaf blower*”, “*riding down a golden escalator*”, “*a bad movie sequel*”).

This strategy of domestic demotion accomplishes a vital affective purpose: it reduces political anxiety while restoring agency to the electorate. By recasting demagoguery as an annoying domestic disruption, the rhetoric implies that the solution is neither panic nor despair, but a simple, decisive civic choice at the ballot box.

Theme 2: Promoting Unity, Community Solidarity, and Shared Values

Representing nearly one-third of the total metaphorical tokens (N = 7, 30.43%), this thematic category establishes the positive affective counterweight to the delegitimization strategy observed in Theme 1. In direct contrast to the metaphors of out-group demotion and political alienation, Obama deploys a rich figurative repertoire drawn

from domains of domestic warmth, neighborhood mutual aid, physical tethers, scientific trial, and sacred civil religion. Below, the seven metaphors comprising this theme are deconstructed across their cognitive mappings, cultural schemas, and discourse functions:

“The neighbor rushing over to help”

“She’s the neighbor rushing over to help when you need a hand.”

The neighbor rushing over to help

Conceptual Mapping

PUBLIC GOVERNANCE IS NEIGHBORLY MUTUAL AID

Source Domain	Target Domain
Helpful Residential Neighbor	→ Presidential Administration
Household Crisis / Need	→ Socioeconomic Distress
Extending a Helping Hand	→ Implementing Supportive Public Policy

This expression defines Kamala Harris’s approach to public governance. While its contextual meaning refers to an empathetic, accessible civil service, its basic meaning describes an attentive resident who offers immediate physical assistance during a household emergency. This metaphor serves as a direct structural counterbalance to the “leaf blower neighbor,” contrasting disruptive demagoguery with domestic mutual aid. By activating the good neighbor/mutual aid schema, the rhetoric grounds presidential power in familiar, communal values of care and solidarity. It humanizes the candidate, stripping away bureaucratic abstraction and recasting executive authority as an extension of community care. The illocutionary force reassures the electorate that government can function as a supportive, compassionate presence in times of personal or economic distress.

This metaphor anchors itself in the Small-Town American Mutual Aid Cultural Schema, historically rooted in frontier survival traditions, barn-raising, and local community reliance. While American culture strongly values individual self-reliance, it also holds an equally cherished cultural model of neighborly solidarity in times of crisis. The “helping hand” is a core cultural category symbolizing unpretentious, immediate assistance free of institutional red tape. By framing executive leadership in terms of neighborly helpfulness, the speaker bridges the gap between individualist

values and collective welfare, painting social safety net policies not as bureaucratic overreach, but as an authentic expression of traditional American community spirit.

“The American experiment”

“That is why this American experiment works.”

The American experiment

Conceptual Mapping

CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY IS A SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT

Source Domain	Target Domain
Laboratory Scientific Trial	→ System of Democratic Self-Governance
Ongoing Testing & Adjustment	→ Societal Progress & Legislative Compromise
Experimental Hypotheses	→ Diverse Civic Ideas & Policies

Contextually, this metaphor refers to the constitutional system of self-governance. Its basic concrete meaning refers to a scientific laboratory trial in which hypotheses are tested, refined, and adjusted over time. By describing democratic governance as an ongoing experiment, Obama frames the nation’s political system as a dynamic, evolving process rather than a fixed or rigid dogma. The phrase activates the Enlightenment founding schema, invoking the intellectual heritage of the American republic. Pragmatically, the metaphor encourages civic patience, open-mindedness, and compromise. Reminding citizens that an experiment inherently involves trial, error, and adjustment helps de-escalate ideological perfectionism and schism, framing political diversity as necessary data in an ongoing journey of democratic refinement.

“The American Experiment” is a foundational cultural conceptualization embedded deep within American Civil Religion and political mythology. Originating with Enlightenment thinkers and popularized by figures like Alexis de Tocqueville and the Founding Fathers, it reflects the American Pragmatism Cultural Schema. Under this model, the nation is not defined by ancient bloodlines or immutable land, but by an empirical commitment to liberty and self-governance. The cultural category of “experiment” legitimizes political adaptation, reform, and institutional self-correction. Ethnopractically, invoking this conceptualization appeals to national pride while subtly demanding intellectual humility, urging citizens to treat democracy as a shared, unfinished

scientific endeavor that requires constant care and collaborative problem-solving.

“Bonds of affection”/“Better angels of our nature”

“Restoring those bonds of affection... summoning the better angels of our nature.”

Bonds of affection / Better angels of our nature

Conceptual Mapping

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IS CELESTIAL
MORAL GUIDANCE

Source Domain	Target Domain
Celestial Guardian Angels	→ Higher Moral Conscience
Physical Tethers / Shackles of Affection	→ Shared National Identity & Civic Ties
Overcoming Internal Discord	→ Depolarizing Partisan Conflict

This dual expression denotes national reconciliation and moral elevation. Contextually, it urges voters to look past partisan hostility. Its basic meaning combines physical tethers of fellowship with celestial spiritual entities guiding human morality. The phrase is a direct intertextual citation of Abraham Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address (1861), delivered on the eve of the American Civil War. By drawing on Abraham Lincoln’s historical prose, Obama activates the Lincolnian civil religion schema. This connects contemporary political competition to historic moments of national healing. The rhetoric transforms campaign discourse into a sacred civic duty, appealing to the electorate’s higher ethical conscience. It asserts that underlying cultural unity remains intact despite temporary partisan polarization.

This phrase draws heavily on American Civil Religion and historical Civil War Cultural Memory. Abraham Lincoln occupies an iconic status as the ultimate martyr-unifier in the American pantheon of cultural heroes. By deploying Lincolnian intertextuality, the rhetoric taps into a deeply revered cultural schema of moral redemption, wherein the nation overcomes existential division by appealing to a higher transcendent covenant. The term “angels” reflects the pervasive Judeo-Christian moral undertones embedded in American political discourse, while “bonds of affection” frames civic unity as a matter of moral and emotional commitment rather than mere legal obligation. This activates a cultural model that views patriotism as a shared ethical striving toward national harmony.

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013), these metaphors perform the essential discourse function of constructing an inclusive, highly appealing “in-group” identity that extends beyond partisan boundaries to encompass the broader national electorate. Rather than defining national belonging through ideological conformity or grievance, the rhetoric utilizes conceptual metaphors to anchor civic unity in everyday socio-cultural experiences and shared historical memory:

1. Domestic Mutual Aid & Communal Care: By framing public governance through domestic archetypes (“*the neighbor rushing over to help when you need a hand*”), the rhetoric operationalizes Sharifian’s (2017) [GOOD NEIGHBOR / MUTUAL AID SCHEMA]. This mapping strips government action of bureaucratic distance, humanizing the presidential nominee and recasting state power as an extension of familiar, compassionate community support.
2. Reclaiming Ideological Keywords: The speaker strategically re-conceptualizes foundational democratic keywords, most notably “freedom”, by mapping them onto protective physical shields (“*our broader idea of freedom*”) rather than unchecked deregulation (“*poison in our rivers*”). This spatial expansion reframes the campaign platform not as government overreach, but as the genuine fulfillment of American liberty.
3. Intertextual Activation of Civil Religion: The rhetoric reaches its highest affective resonance by invoking physical tethers (“*ties that bind us together*”) and sacred intertextuality (“*bonds of affection*”, “*better angels of our nature*”). Direct citations of Abraham Lincoln’s 1861 First Inaugural Address activate the [LINCOLNIAN CIVIL RELIGION SCHEMA], elevating secular political discourse into a moral imperative. This intertextual framing reassures the electorate that underlying cultural solidarity survives temporary partisan polarization.

By transforming abstract civic obligations into felt moral and domestic relationships, these seven metaphorical tokens provide a psychological refuge from political hostility, inviting swing voters

and exhausted citizens into a shared, constructive national identity.

Theme 3: Inspiring Collective Hope and Optimism

Comprising over a quarter of the total metaphorical tokens (N = 6, 26.09%), this thematic category serves as the kinetic, action-oriented engine of the speech. While Theme 1 delegitimizes the political opponent and Theme 2 constructs an inclusive “in-group” community identity, Theme 3 performs the vital communicative function of overcoming voter fatigue, cynicism, and affective paralysis. Below, some metaphors comprising this theme are deconstructed across their cognitive mappings, cultural schemas, and discourse functions:

“Fired up”

“I don’t know about you, but I’m feeling fired up!”

Fired up

Conceptual Mapping

EMOTIONAL PASSION IS COMBUSTION / HEAT

Source Domain	Target Domain
Thermal Ignition / Fire	→ Grassroots Campaign Enthusiasm
Heat / Energy Output	→ Active Political Mobilization
Fuel Source	→ Shared Civic Purpose & Hope

Contextually, this phrase conveys intense, enthusiastic readiness to engage in political action. Its basic physiological meaning relates to igniting a furnace, combustion engine, or fire. The metaphor relies on the primary physiological mapping emotional passion is combustion/heat, translating abstract political commitment into physical, thermal energy. The expression reactivates Obama’s iconic 2008 campaign slogan (“Fired up, ready to go!”), bringing a sense of shared history and nostalgia to the convention arena. The illocutionary force functions as an affective ritual designed to transform voter anxiety into active enthusiasm. By declaring his own thermal/emotional state, the speaker invites the audience to share in a collective spark of grassroots campaign energy.

“Fired up” sits at the intersection of the Protestant Revivalist Cultural Schema and contemporary American Campaign Rituals. American rhetorical history has long drawn from the emotional fervor of religious camp meetings

and evangelical revivals, where public declarations of spiritual renewal and emotional awakening were central. In modern political culture, this translates into a cultural model of participatory enthusiasm, where voter passion is seen as the vital spark driving political change. Furthermore, the phrase functions as a ritualistic element of cultural memory, explicitly re-activating the collective nostalgia of the landmark 2008 campaign. Ethnopragmatically, it operates as a call-and-response chant that transforms individual voters into a unified, energized political movement.

“A new chapter”

“America is ready for a new chapter.”

A new chapter

Conceptual Mapping

A HISTORICAL ERA IS A LITERARY BOOK
CHAPTER

Source Domain	Target Domain
Printed Book / Bound Text	→ Continuous National History
Turning to a Fresh Chapter	→ Transitioning to a New Administration
Closing an Old Chapter	→ Moving Past Exhausting Political Chaos

The contextual meaning of this metaphor denotes transitioning to a new presidential administration and historical era. Its basic concrete meaning describes turning to a fresh section in a printed book. By conceptualizing national history as a narrative text, the speaker implies that the current state of political conflict is merely a temporary passage that can be turned the page on. The phrase activates the progressive reinvention schema, which reflects the cultural belief in the nation’s capacity to rewrite its destiny. Pragmatically, the metaphor validates voter desire for change while presenting the presidential nominee as the author of the next era. It offers a clean narrative break from past political drama, encouraging the electorate to look forward with optimism.

This metaphor is deeply rooted in the American Self-Reinvention/Frontier Thesis Schema. American culture is characterized by a strong forward-looking orientation and a teleological model of history, in which the future is consistently viewed as an open realm of progress, opportunity, and clean slates (“fresh starts”). The literary conceptualization of history treats time

not as cyclical repetition but as an authorial, linear narrative in which citizens possess agency to “turn the page.” Ethnopragmatically, “a new chapter” promises a clean narrative break from political exhaustion, tapping into the deep-seated cultural belief that American society is never permanently bound by past mistakes, but retains the inherent power to rewrite its collective future.

“Chart a new way forward”

“We need to chart a new way forward.”

Chart a new way forward

Conceptual Mapping

POLICY INNOVATION IS MARITIME NAVIGATION

Source Domain		Target Domain
Nautical Map / Sea Chart	→	Policy Roadmap / Strategic Vision
Vessel Captain / Navigator	→	Presidential Leadership
Navigating Uncharted Waters	→	Solving Modern Socioeconomic Challenges

Contextually, this expression represents innovative policy to address modern economic and social challenges. Its basic meaning is plotting a nautical course on a nautical chart to navigate through uncharted waters. The metaphor builds on the classic purposeful activity is a journey framework, casting political leadership as skilled seamanship. The metaphor activates the pioneering exploration schema, equating governance with vision, skill, and proactive navigation. By framing policy solutions as a forward nautical course, the rhetoric instills confidence in the campaign’s administrative competence. It reassures voters that, despite complex or stormy economic conditions, the leadership possesses the necessary strategy to guide the nation safely to its destination.

This metaphor operates on the Pioneer Explorer/Frontier Maritime Schema, a foundational mythos in American history associated with seafaring founders, western trailblazers, and space explorers. In American cultural conceptualizations, true leadership is measured by the ability to venture into the unknown and pioneer new paths rather than merely maintaining the status quo. The category of “charting” implies technical skill, courage, and foresight. Ethnopragmatically, the phrase connects administrative policy-making to the romanticized American spirit of exploration and horizon-expanding progress, assuring the

electorate that the administration possesses both the strategic compass and the boldness required to navigate modern uncertainties.

Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Affective Campaign Theory (Brader, 2006), these metaphors transform abstract political anxiety into organized kinetic energy, framing the electoral process not as a burdensome chore but as an empowering, forward-moving journey. Rather than relying on vague platitudes, the rhetoric deploys three distinct cognitive mechanisms to cultivate collective optimism and voter agency:

1. **Affective Ignition and Kinetic Mobilization:** By activating the primary physiological mapping [EMOTIONAL PASSION IS COMBUSTION / HEAT] (“*fired up*”) and the structural frame [ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNING IS CIVIC COMBAT] (“*fight for the America we believe in*”), the speaker converts passive hope into active participation. These metaphors frame voting and grassroots volunteering as urgent, courageous acts of civic duty that overcome apathy by instilling a sense of heroic purpose.
2. **Spatial and Navigational Agency:** Through spatial domain expansion (“*a country where anything is possible*”) and nautical course plotting (“*chart a new way forward*”), the rhetoric operationalizes the primary meta-metaphor [PURPOSEFUL ACTION IS FORWARD MOTION]. By mapping policy innovation onto maritime navigation, the speaker restores administrative confidence and reassures the electorate that complex economic and social challenges are fully navigable under skilled leadership.
3. **Narrative Renewal and Economic Inclusion:** The deployment of literary turning points (“*a new chapter*”) and transit accessibility (“*ticket to the middle class*”) activates Sharifian’s (2017) [PROGRESSIVE REINVENTION SCHEMA] and [MERITOCRATIC OPPORTUNITY SCHEMA]. These mappings validate voter desire for structural renewal while explicitly broadening the American Dream to encompass non-college-educated, working-class citizens.

By providing a clear, optimistic directional vector, these six metaphorical tokens re-energize campaign morale and position the presidential

nominee as the author of a brighter, more inclusive national future.

Theme 4: Honoring Legacy and Intergenerational Leadership Transition

Although it represents the smallest quantitative proportion of metaphorical tokens in the corpus (N = 2, 8.70%), this thematic category performs a crucial institutional and democratic function. In high-stakes political convention addresses, particularly those precipitated by unprecedented candidate withdrawals, a former chief executive faces a delicate communicative imperative: they must validate past administrative achievements while simultaneously transferring personal charisma and institutional legitimacy to a new nominee. Below, the metaphors comprising this theme are deconstructed across their cognitive mappings, cultural schemas, and discourse functions:

"Drive what would become the world's strongest recovery"

"A leader with the determination to drive what would become the world's strongest recovery."

Chart a new way forward

Conceptual Mapping

ECONOMIC STEWARDSHIP IS VEHICULAR DRIVING

Source Domain	Target Domain
Motor Vehicle Operator	→ Chief Executive/President
Steering & Accelerator Control	→ Implementing Economic Recovery Policies
Navigating Rough Terrain	→ Overcoming Global Economic Crises

This expression characterizes Joe Biden's economic stewardship following global disruption. Contextually, it refers to steering macroeconomic recovery policies. Its basic sensorimotor meaning describes operating and controlling a heavy motor vehicle. By mapping vehicular control onto economic management, the rhetoric presents complex macroeconomic outcomes as the direct result of purposeful steering. The metaphor activates the economic stewardship schema, framing the outgoing president as an experienced operator capable of navigating difficult terrain. Pragmatically, it validates the administration's legacy, establishing a solid foundation of achievement before introducing the transition to the new nominee.

This metaphor taps directly into the American

Automobile & Highway Cultural Schema. In the United States, driving a car is not merely a form of transport, but an iconic cultural symbol of individual agency, self-determination, and economic independence. The cultural model of leadership as "being in the driver's seat" carries strong associations of hands-on control, decisive action, and physical mastery. By describing economic stewardship as "driving," the speaker translates complex global macroeconomic forces into a tangible, mechanical task executed by a determined worker. This aligns with the blue-collar, pragmatic work ethic valued in American political culture, framing presidential accomplishment in terms of rugged, reliable, hands-on labor.

"The torch has been passed"

"The torch has been passed."

The torch has been passed

Conceptual Mapping

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION IS PASSING AN OLYMPIC TORCH

Source Domain	Target Domain
Flaming Relay Torch	→ Executive Power & Democratic Vision
Outgoing Athlete/Runner	→ Outgoing President
Incoming Athlete/Runner	→ New Presidential Nominee

This phrase describes Joe Biden relinquishing the presidential nomination and endorsing Kamala Harris. Its basic physical meaning describes relay runners passing a burning flame from one athlete to the next. The phrase echoes John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address ("The torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans"), drawing on a rich line of historical precedent. By activating the generational duty/Kennedy schema, the metaphor elevates a political decision into a noble act of patriotic service. It frames the candidate transition as a smooth, dignified continuation of shared democratic values rather than a sudden political shift. The illocutionary force confers historical authority onto the new nominee, legitimizing her candidacy as the rightful bearer of the nation's democratic vision.

This expression relies on the Civic Succession Ritual Schema and carries rich intertextual weight from American political mythology. Citing JFK's iconic 1961 inaugural address activates a cultural model of youthful renewal and intergenerational

responsibility. The “torch” functions as a sacred cultural symbol representing Enlightenment ideals, liberty, and democratic leadership passed down through generations. Ethnopragmatically, framing a candidate substitution through this heroic cultural lens casts what might otherwise be seen as internal party maneuvering as an act of selflessness, patriotic duty, and historic continuity. It elevates the transition into a sacred civic ritual, conferring historical legitimacy onto the incoming nominee.

“Build a country that is more secure”

“To help build a country that is safer, more secure, and more just.”

Build a country that is more secure

Conceptual Mapping

NATION-BUILDING IS ARCHITECTURAL EDIFICE CONSTRUCTION

Source Domain	Target Domain
Physical Masonry & Structural Construction	→ Institutional & Legislative Reform
Architectural Blueprint	→ Democratic Principles & Vision
Construction Laborers / Co-Builders	→ Engaged Democratic Citizens

This expression refers to long-term institutional reform, social justice, and economic policy development. Its basic meaning denotes physical masonry, architectural drafting, and structural construction. By conceptualizing nation-building as structural construction, the rhetoric emphasizes that societal progress requires planning, strong foundations, and collective labor. The metaphor activates the collective nation-building schema, presenting citizenship as a shared construction project. It connects the legacy of past administrations with the future responsibilities of the electorate. Pragmatically, the phrasing invites voters to see themselves as active co-builders of an equitable society, reinforcing a sense of intergenerational duty and shared accomplishment.

This metaphor is rooted in the Protestant Work Ethic/Builder-Pioneer Schema, which places high moral value on physical labor, craftsmanship, and structural durability. From early puritan “City upon a Hill” imagery to industrial manufacturing pride, physical construction is conceptualized in American culture as an inherently noble, moral endeavor. The cultural category of “building” suggests tangible results, honest sweat, and intergenerational investment, leaving something

sturdy for one’s children. By framing national progress as a construction project, the speaker aligns political action with traditional American pride in craftsmanship, transforming abstract civic participation into an act of collaborative, enduring national creation.

These metaphors serve as the cognitive bridge that dignifies political succession and stabilizes party identity. Rather than treating the leadership transition as a sudden administrative pivot or a symptom of internal party friction, the rhetoric utilizes two primary conceptual mechanisms to construct a narrative of seamless, noble continuity:

1. **Dignifying Succession via Intergenerational Duty:** By activating the structural mapping [LEADERSHIP TRANSITION IS PASSING AN OLYMPIC TORCH] (“*the torch has been passed*”), the speaker draws upon the [GENERATIONAL DUTY / KENNEDY SCHEMA]. This mapping echoes John F. Kennedy’s 1861 inaugural motif, transforming a potentially disruptive political withdrawal into an unselfish, heroic act of civic stewardship. The Source Domain of an athletic relay race dignifies the outgoing leader while conferring unquestioned competitive legitimacy upon the incoming candidate.
2. **Institutional Validation and Constructive Co-Ownership:** Through the architectural construction frame [NATION-BUILDING IS ARCHITECTURAL EDIFICE CONSTRUCTION] (“*build a country that is safer, more secure, and more just*”) and vehicular control (“*drive what would become the world’s strongest recovery*”), the rhetoric anchors past executive accomplishments in solid physical foundations. By framing national progress as an ongoing, intergenerational building project, the speaker positions the new nominee as the rightful master builder equipped to continue the work, while mobilizing citizens as active co-laborers in preserving democratic institutions.

By elevating a party transition into a sacred civic relay, these metaphorical tokens ensure that the accumulated political capital of established leaders (Barack Obama, Joe Biden) is effectively transferred to Vice President Kamala Harris, reinforcing the stability and endurance of the democratic republic.

IV. DISCUSSION

The quantitative baseline and qualitative findings of this study demonstrate that Barack Obama's 2024 Democratic National Convention address operates as a finely calibrated, cognitively structured piece of political communication. By identifying 23 metaphor tokens mapping across 18 distinct conceptual metaphor types within a 3,542-word corpus, the empirical results establish an overall metaphor density of 6.49 metaphors per 1,000 words and a high metaphor type-token ratio of 0.783. This quantitative profile reveals a calculated rhetorical architecture that achieves heightened persuasive impact and emotional resonance without inducing cognitive fatigue or figurative clutter. Dominating the figurative landscape, structural metaphors account for 73.9% of all tokens, indicating that the speaker relies primarily on complex domain mappings to restructure political reality rather than on simple physical or orientational tropes. Interpreted through Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, this empirical density demonstrates that metaphors in high-stakes political conventions function as active cognitive frameworks. Furthermore, the thematic distribution—allocating 34.78% of tokens to delegitimizing the opposition and 30.43% to building community solidarity—establishes a dual rhetorical strategy that balances out-group critique with inclusive in-group cohesion.

These empirical results address a major gap in contemporary political communication scholarship regarding how conceptual metaphors facilitate surrogate endorsement and the transfer of political charisma during sudden candidate successions. While previous political discourse studies focus overwhelmingly on direct candidate self-presentation or literal endorsements, this research reveals how structural metaphors build a conceptual bridge between an established leader's historical authority and a new nominee's candidacy. By mapping Joe Biden's withdrawal and Kamala Harris's nomination onto the Olympic relay domain through the metaphor of passing the torch, and framing economic management as vehicular driving, the rhetoric operationalizes Max Weber's sociological concept of charisma transfer (Smith, 2013). This fills a crucial theoretical void by proving that abstract institutional legitimacy cannot be transferred effectively through literal assertions of competence alone. Instead, it requires

figurative conduit mappings that dignify political succession, reframe potential party turmoil as an unselfish act of civic duty, and confer historical authority onto a surrogate candidate.

Obama's strategic use of metaphors in political communication is a powerful tool for establishing emotional connections with voters, essential for shaping public perception and influencing voter behavior. This technique not only enhances the accessibility of complex political issues but also fosters a sense of shared identity and collective purpose among constituents, thereby rallying support for political figures. The effectiveness of metaphor in political discourse has been widely documented; for instance, Otieno et al. (2016) argue that metaphors are crucial rhetorical devices that politicians employ to persuade audiences and convey intricate political ideas. Similarly, Kövecses (2005) highlights the significance of metaphors in communication, suggesting that they facilitate understanding by framing abstract concepts in more relatable terms.

Moreover, the role of metaphors in political discourse extends beyond mere simplification of messages; they also evoke emotional responses that resonate with voters. Shah (2024) notes that emotional connections are deeply embedded in political engagement, emphasizing how metaphors can evoke feelings that drive societal discourses. This aligns with the findings of Zinken (2003), who discusses the interplay between metaphor and ideology in political discourse, illustrating how metaphors can shape collective beliefs and attitudes. Furthermore, the cognitive linguistic perspective posits that metaphors are not just linguistic constructs but fundamental cognitive tools that influence how individuals perceive and interpret political realities.

In addition, the cultural context in which metaphors are employed significantly impacts their effectiveness. For instance, Kusmanto (2016) explores how cultural cognition shapes metaphorical conceptualizations in Indonesian expressions, demonstrating that cultural frameworks influence the interpretation and emotional resonance of metaphors. Furthermore, Handoko et al. (2024) explore how the cultural cognition of the Minangkabau people is reflected in metaphors and proverbs related to the environment and nature, as well as in their political and leadership perspectives.

This notion is echoed by Pham (2024), who asserts that metaphors reflect cultural values and societal norms, thereby affecting how political messages are received by diverse audiences. The cross-cultural analysis of metaphors, as discussed by Zhou and Xiang-Yong (2020), further underscores the importance of understanding the cultural dimensions of metaphorical language in political contexts.

Another significant gap addressed by these findings is the over-reliance in political discourse literature on apocalyptic fear-mongering models. Rather than elevating the rival candidate into a formidable, terrifying threat, the rhetoric employs a novel strategy of domestic demotion through paired counter-metaphors. By contrasting the disruptive neighbor with a leaf blower against the compassionate neighbor rushing over to help, the rhetoric re-anchors political competition in suburban civic decorum and Cultural Linguistics framework (Sharifian, 2017), specifically activating the Good Neighbor, Civic Decorum, and American Dream schemas. Trivializing political demagoguery into an annoying, self-absorbed domestic noise restores democratic agency to the electorate. It demonstrates that political persuasion benefits significantly from lowering affective polarization through relatable, culturally resonant domestic archetypes rather than escalating existential anxiety.

Emotional appeals play a crucial role in political communication and campaign strategies. Research shows that politicians effectively use emotional appeals to engage voters and influence their behavior (Noor et al., 2022; Brader, 2006). These appeals can have significant impacts on voter participation, decision-making, and loyalty (Brader, 2006; Jones et al., 2012). Specifically, enthusiasm-based appeals can motivate participation and reinforce existing loyalties, while fear-based appeals can increase vigilance and facilitate persuasion (Brader, 2006). The effectiveness of emotional appeals extends to online platforms, where candidate-expressed emotions can strongly increase citizens' political participation both online and offline (Jones et al., 2012). Interestingly, politically engaged citizens are more susceptible to emotional manipulation than less-involved citizens (Brader, 2006; Jones et al., 2012). While emotional appeals are powerful tools in political campaigns, their use raises ethical concerns about potential manipulation and exploitation of voters (Noor et

al., 2022).

Hence, Obama's use of metaphors as a means of political communication is a powerful strategy for creating emotional connections with voters. These metaphors simplify complex political messages, align them with culturally significant values, and foster a sense of shared identity and purpose. For Kamala Harris's presidency, the emotional connections established through these metaphors are particularly advantageous, as they build trust, inspire hope, and position her as a leader capable of uniting the nation. By using metaphors to tap into voters' emotions and values, Obama lays the groundwork for Harris's successful leadership, ensuring that her presidency is understood and emotionally embraced by the electorate.

The theoretical and practical implications of these results extend across cognitive linguistics and campaign strategy. Theoretically, the findings prove that metaphor analysis must move beyond isolated semantic classification to evaluate how figurative language orchestrates broader discourse goals, such as charisma transfer, threat demotion, and identity construction. Practically, the results provide speechwriters and political strategists with a proven roadmap for effective communication. Substituting apocalyptic fear appeals with paired domestic counter-metaphors builds sustainable voter engagement and emotional affinity without exacerbating public exhaustion. Framing policy proposals through accessible cultural schemas, such as meritocratic transit tickets and pioneering navigation, allows political actors to communicate complex governance visions without triggering partisan counter-arguing or cognitive overload.

Notwithstanding these contributions, several methodological limitations of the current research must be acknowledged. First, the empirical scope is bounded by its reliance on a single-speech textual transcript of 3,542 words, which limits the direct generalizability of the quantitative density metrics across other speech genres, such as presidential debates, town halls, or legislative lectures. Second, the textual focus excluded multimodal dimensions of political delivery, including vocal prosody, pitch accents, acoustic pauses, and manual bodily gestures that co-occur with metaphorical expressions in live performance. Third, the qualitative coding of cultural schemas, while guided by validated protocols such as the

Metaphor Identification Procedure, inherently involves interpretive synthesis that may vary across observers' backgrounds. To address these boundaries, future scholarship should pursue longitudinal comparative studies that track the evolution of metaphor across multi-decade campaign speech corpora, conduct cross-party comparative analyses of competing convention addresses, and integrate multimodal annotation tools to examine the real-time interaction among figurative language, prosodic stress, and bodily gesture during live political delivery.

V. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that conceptual metaphors in Barack Obama's 2024 DNC speech function as fundamental cognitive tools for political persuasion, charisma transfer, and national unification. Across a 3,542-word corpus, the deployment of 23 metaphor tokens across 18 conceptual types (6.49 per 1,000 words; TTR_m = 78.3%) establishes a finely calibrated rhetorical architecture grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cultural Linguistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis. Rather than resorting to apocalyptic fear appeals, the address operationalizes a strategy of domestic demotion, reframing political demagoguery as mundane, low-status nuisances (e.g., an invasive leaf blower, an out-of-touch golden escalator, or a bad movie sequel) to reduce affective polarization and restore voters' democratic agency. Simultaneously, structural relay tropes ("passing the torch", "driving recovery") dignify candidate succession and transfer institutional authority to Vice President Kamala Harris, while deeply embedded cultural schemas (good-neighbor mutual aid, meritocratic mobility, and Lincolnian civil religion) bridge partisan divides to foster collective hope and constructive civic engagement. Despite these contributions, the scope of this study remains limited by its reliance on a single-speech textual transcript and the exclusion of multimodal features such as vocal prosody, acoustic pitch, and manual gestures. To build upon these findings, future research should pursue longitudinal corpus studies that track the evolution of presidential metaphor use over multi-decade spans, conduct cross-party comparative analyses of competing convention addresses, and employ multimodal

video-annotation tools to examine the real-time interaction among figurative language, prosodic stress, and bodily gesture during live political delivery.

ETHICS STATEMENT

We have read and complied with the ethical requirements for publication in *Jurnal Arbitrer*, and the current work does not involve human subjects or animal experiments.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Nozimjon Bobojon o'g'li Ataboev: Data collection, data analysis, manuscript drafting, and revision.

Bahor Bahriddinovna Turaeva: Research design, manuscript review, and revision.

Zokirova Sokhiba Mukhtoraliyevna: Methodology, data analysis, proofreading, and revision.

Sabirova Zebo Zokirovna: Proofreading, manuscript formatting, and revision.

Xolmatova Elnura Sherali qizi: Editing, proofreading, and revision.

Zahriddin Xazratqul o'g'li: Data collection, proofreading, and revision.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research did not receive any grant from the government or sponsors. AI was used for language editing and grammar checking.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

AI USE STATEMENT

The authors used ChatGPT and Grammarly to assist with language editing, including improving grammar, clarity, readability, and sentence structure. All scientific content, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions were developed by the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, revised, and verified all AI-assisted suggestions and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the final manuscript.

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Appendix 1

No.	Metaphorical Expression	Source Domain → Target Domain	Cognitive Structure	Cultural Schema	Rhetorical & Pragmatic Function
1	<i>"I'm feeling fired up"</i>	Combustion/Heat → Emotional Passion	Ontological / Physiological	[GRASSROOTS PASSION SCHEMA]	Establishes immediate affective alignment and activates shared campaign nostalgia.
2	<i>"In a country where anything is possible"</i>	Unbounded Physical Space → Socioeconomic Opportunity	Orientational / Ontological	[AMERICAN DREAM / PIONEER SCHEMA]	Reinvigorates hope, upward mobility, and the belief in self-determined destiny.
3	<i>"A leader with the determination to drive what would become the world's strongest recovery"</i>	Vehicular Driving → Economic Policy Guidance	Structural	[ECONOMIC STEWARDSHIP SCHEMA]	Frames macroeconomic stewardship as active, directional control over a moving mechanism.
4	<i>"The other party had turned into a cult of personality"</i>	Fanatical Religious Sect → Personality-Driven Party	Structural	[PLURALIST DEMOCRACY SCHEMA]	Delegitimizes the opposition by contrasting policy-based democracy with leader-veneration.
5	<i>"The torch has been passed"</i>	Olympic Flame Relay → Intergenerational Leadership Transfer	Structural / Extended	[GENERATIONAL DUTY / KENNEDY SCHEMA]	Honors Biden's transition while conferring historical legitimacy onto Kamala Harris.
6	<i>"It will be a fight... fight for the America we believe in"</i>	Physical Warfare/Combat → Electoral Campaigning	Structural	[CIVIC COMBAT SCHEMA]	Rallies supporters to active campaign participation and counters political complacency.
7	<i>"Donald Trump is not losing sleep over that question"</i>	Physical Sleeplessness/ Anxiety → Empathetic Public Concern	Ontological / Conventional	[EMPATHETIC STEWARDSHIP SCHEMA]	Critiques Trump's perceived indifference and failure of empathetic public care.
8	<i>"Rode down his golden escalator"</i>	Luxury Architecture/ Elevation → Ostentatious Class Privilege	Ontological / Metonymic	[WORKING-CLASS REALISM SCHEMA]	Frames Trump as an out-of-touch aristocrat seeking personal spectacle over public service.
9	<i>"The neighbor who keeps running his leaf blower outside your window every minute of every day"</i>	Invasive Neighborhood Noise → Persistent Political Demagoguery	Structural / Extended	[CIVIC DECORUM / GOOD NEIGHBOR SCHEMA]	Trivializes Trump's rhetoric as an irritating, selfish nuisance rather than a formidable force.
10	<i>"We have seen that movie before and we all know that the sequel is usually worse"</i>	Cinematic Film/Sequel → A Second Trump Presidential Term	Structural	[POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT SCHEMA]	Frames a potential second term as predictably chaotic, redundant, and inferior.
11	<i>"America's ready for a new chapter"</i>	Literary Book / Chapter → Historical Era / Administration	Structural	[PROGRESSIVE REINVENTION SCHEMA]	Conveys systemic renewal, progress, and moving past toxic political exhaustion.
12	<i>"She's the neighbor rushing over to help when you need a hand"</i>	Solicitous Neighbor Aid → Empathetic Public Service	Structural / Counter-Metaphor	[COMMUNITY MUTUAL AID SCHEMA]	Contrasts Harris's helpful, pragmatic approach directly with Trump's "leaf blower" nuisance.
13	<i>"Refuse to kiss the ring or bend the knee"</i>	Feudal Monarchy Subjugation → Authoritarian Political Loyalty	Structural / Historical	[ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN EQUALITY SCHEMA]	Repudiates autocratic coercion and defends democratic equality among citizens.
14	<i>"We need to chart a new way forward"</i>	Maritime Navigation → Policy Innovation & Strategy	Structural / Orientational	[PIONEERING EXPLORATION SCHEMA]	Calls for pragmatic policy adaptation rather than dogmatic attachment to past solutions.
15	<i>"College shouldn't be the only ticket to the middle class"</i>	Transit Pass / Ticket → Socioeconomic Accessibility	Ontological / Conventional	[MERITOCRATIC OPPORTUNITY SCHEMA]	Redefines economic mobility to encompass non-degreed, working-class families.

16	<i>"Freedom means the powerful can do what they please... poison in our rivers" vs. "our broader idea of freedom"</i>	Unchecked Predation vs. Civic Shield → Deregulation vs. Democratic Rights	Structural	[POSITIVE VS. NEGATIVE FREEDOM SCHEMA]	Reclaims the concept of "freedom" from libertarian deregulation to communal protection.
17	<i>"This American experiment works"</i>	Laboratory Experiment → Multicultural Constitutional System	Structural	[ENLIGHTENMENT FOUNDING SCHEMA]	Reminds citizens that democracy is ongoing, fragile, and requires active trial and cooperation.
18	<i>"Our blind spots and contradictions"</i>	Ocular Vision Obstruction → Ideological Prejudice	Ontological / Physiological	[CIVIC HUMILITY SCHEMA]	Urges civic grace, persuasion, and self-reflection over polarization and shaming.
19	<i>"Build all manner of walls and fences around ourselves"</i>	Physical Architectural Barriers → Social Isolation & Cyber-Alienation	Structural	[COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY SCHEMA]	Diagnoses modern social loneliness caused by hyper-partisanship and digital isolation.
20	<i>"The ties that bind us together are still there"</i>	Physical Tethering Ropes → Mutual Civic Obligations	Structural / Conventional	[CIVIC FABRIC / NATIONAL UNITY SCHEMA]	Reassures the nation that grassroots social unity survives despite political polarization.
21	<i>"An unshakable foundation of love"</i>	Structural Edifice Base → Matriarchal Family Nurture	Structural	[INTERGENERATIONAL SACRIFICE SCHEMA]	Grounds political values in working-class family heritage and intergenerational sacrifice.
22	<i>"Bonds of affection" / "Better angels of our nature"</i>	Fellowship Shackles / Celestial Moral Agents → Reconciliation & Higher Conscience	Structural / Intertextual	[LINCOLNIAN CIVIL RELIGION SCHEMA]	Invokes historic civil religion to call for national healing and moral elevation.
23	<i>"Build a country that is more secure and more just"</i>	Edifice Construction → Legal & Institutional Development	Structural	[COLLECTIVE NATION-BUILDING SCHEMA]	Mobilizes voters as active co-constructors of an equitable society.