Metaphorical Framing in Political Discourse: A Longitudinal Study of Conceptual Metaphor Use in American Presidential Speeches

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Abstract

While extensive studies exist on conceptual metaphors in political discourse, a comprehensive longitudinal analysis investigating how these conceptual metaphors endure and evolve across different American presidential administrations over time is lacking. Addressing this gap, this study tracks and analyzes the usage of conceptual metaphors related to 'war' and 'national security' across different presidential administrations. Drawing on the extensive literature in the field of conceptual metaphors in political discourse, this study presents a large-scale longitudinal analysis using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) to examine eighteen pivotal presidential speeches (1941–2021), using mixed- methods approach that consists of quantitative corpus analysis (AntConc) and qualitative metaphor identification conducted according to the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP). Findings indicate that conceptual metaphors are not static, fixed rhetorical devices employed by the political actors in reference to stable specialized target domains; they appear to be dynamic instruments of rhetoric shaped by the historical and socio-political context in which they are used. This study is predominantly characterized by two complementary trends: on the one hand, a core set of conceptual metaphorical patterns persisted across the corpus, and on the other hand their source domains and specific metaphorical vehicles have undergone significant evolutionary processes. These changes are classified as lexical evolution (updating vehicles within a stable source domain) and conceptual evolution (re-assigning the target domain to a new source domain). One central observation is that it is naturalness itself, as a phenomenon of nature, that serves as the ubiquitous source domain for both war and national security as concepts. This study contributes a nuanced longitudinal perspective to the field, illustrating how political language maintains rhetorical stability while evolving to meet contemporary realities.

Keywords: Metaphorical Framing; CMT; MIP; Political Discourse

Introduction

The relation between politics and language is multifaceted, as it encompasses the overt messaging of political actors and the nuanced reception and interpretation of these messages by the public. As mentioned by Chilton and Schäffner (2008, p. 206), "politics cannot be conducted without language" . In this sense, "human interaction to a large extent involves language, and linguistic interaction is embedded in and determined by socio-cultural, historical, ideological, and institutional conditions"(Chilton & Schäffner, 2008, p. 206). The primary aim of political discourse is to induce the general public to take action or discourage them from doing so. Political language is designed to remove the doubt the public might feel towards their political leaders, who are supposed to present a plan with well-defined future actions rather than a set of hypothetical abstract ideas (Charteris-Black, 2014). Various

linguistic devices, such as lexical and syntactic choices, implicatures, speech acts, and metaphors, are employed in political discourse to persuade and manipulate the public. Therefore, the use of metaphor to convey a message is considered a powerful mode of persuasion (Wilson, 2015).

Traditionally, metaphor has been studied and treated as a rhetorical device used in ornamental language, particularly in literary texts and poetics. This view, first introduced by Aristotle in 335 BC, is still largely prevalent today among the general population. In 1980, a new revolutionary theory was put forward by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. In their work Metaphors We Live By, the authors lay out an account of the metaphor as a conceptual and cognitive device that permeates the way we think, act and interact with the world (Gabeiras, 2019). According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), metaphors are grounded in human experience; they appear first in thought and then in language, which means that we experience the world through them. Moreover, they state that metaphors are not merely a literary device but rather pervade our daily thoughts and affect our internal representation and vision of the world. The same idea is adopted by Gibbs (2011) and Ungerer and Schmid (2013), as they claim that metaphors are embedded in human thought and language to the extent that some metaphors have become part of everyday lexis. In the same line, Kövecses (2005) states that metaphors are an integral part of culture.

Furthermore, Casasanto (2009) claims that the human mind conceptualizes abstract ideas through concrete domains. These domains appear in Kövecses's (2005, p. 3) definition of metaphor as "understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain," where establishing similarities between these two domains (source and target) is called mapping, and metaphor construction is a process of cross-domain mapping. It transforms abstract and complex issues into concrete and tangible ones by linking the target domain to the source domain. Therefore, Conceptual metaphors in cognitive linguistics serve as vehicles for conveying complex ideas and values through the use of familiar and relatable imagery that emerges from our daily experiences, enabling political actors to frame issues, shape public opinion, and present their agendas in more persuasive and impactful ways (Chahbane & Zrizi, 2023).

For the sake of verifying the endurance of conceptual metaphors and the evolution of their source domains or specific metaphorical vehicles, this study tracks and analyzes the usage of conceptual metaphors related to war and national security across different American presidential speeches. We have selected these topics for being inherently abstract, charged with emotional nature, and prevalent across multiple presidential speeches. These factors make it necessary to resort to metaphorical framing to make these topics more persuasive and comprehensible for the public. In addition, they provide a rich and consistent dataset that a longitudinal study requires.

The essential research questions this study is designed to answer are: 1) How do conceptual metaphors endure across the eighteen American presidential administrations

over time? 2) How do core source domains or their specific metaphorical expressions evolve based on the changing nature of socio-political contexts and historical issues?

Literature Review

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (henceforth CMT) was first introduced and elaborated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their work *Metaphors We Live by*. It was also discussed by Kövecses (2010) and some other cognitive linguists. In this book, Lakoff and Johnson differentiate between linguistic metaphors (linguistic expressions used metaphorically), and conceptual metaphors (certain conceptual patterns we rely on in our daily living to think about aspects of the world) (Kovecses, 2010). This theory (CMT) states that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life and is not only a matter of language, but also of thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Therefore, metaphor should no longer be studied only as a merely ornamental device tied to literary texts, but as something used every day by ordinary people to structure daily activities, experiences and reasoning and thinking (Alonso Delgado, 2021). The concept of 'everyday' is central to Lakoff and Johnson's theory: metaphors are used in everyday language, by everyday people and to structure everyday activities, (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 3–4).Therefore, the prevalent impression taken on metaphors as a linguistic ornament is not only challenged, it is explicitly disproved.

In *Metaphors We Live By* Lakoff and Johnson make a reference to a 'conceptual system' which "governs" how we act and think in our daily lives. This system can be accessed through the study of language and it is metaphorical in nature, so that, metaphor can structure how we perceive, how we think, and how we do (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 3–4). As Kövecses (2010, p. 13) explains, CMT understands metaphor "as a conceptual tool for structuring, restructuring and even creating reality". According to CMT, a conceptual metaphor implicates the understanding of one domain of knowledge in terms of another, and it is composed of source and target domains, where the source domain corresponds with the target domain (Borčić & Holy, 2017). This correspondence between the source and the target domain is called mapping (Stanojević, 2013, as cited in Borčić & Holy, 2017). In mapping we create metaphorical networking where A is conceptualized in terms of B by mapping certain properties from source domain (characterized for being more concrete and familiar to human experience and knowledge) onto the target domain which is complex and abstract. The result of this cross-domains mapping is the conceptual metaphor A IS B, and never the other way around(Alonso Delgado, 2021).

Ever since Lakoff and Johnson (1980) work, which has influenced the study of metaphor in linguistics, studies on metaphor have absolutely adopted new look. The

authors' interpretation of metaphor system is mainly based on cognition, where they propose that metaphor is a matter of thought and action rather than merely a literary, poetic and rhetorical device(JASINI & JAWUR, 2016). This might be the reason why we sometimes find that this theory is called "the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor." Its main idea is that metaphors are cognitive tools that enable us to conceptualize abstract domains that would be otherwise much harder to access. This theory has been adapted by many authors to political thought and discourse since politics makes use of many abstract concepts that would be incredibly hard to represent and conceptualize without utilizing these conceptual metaphors (Gabeiras, 2019). In the same line, and As Knowles and Moon (2004) and Kovecses (2010) later introduced, these conceptual metaphors allow us to represent abstract target domains like 'life,' 'love,' 'arguments' or, for instance, 'economic growth' and 'inflation,' in terms of more concrete 'source' domains such as 'up' or 'down,' innate parts of our physical experience.

Metaphor in Political Discourse

Metaphor, in its general definition, is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase, literally denoting one kind of object or idea, is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them." (Merriam, 2014). This device works in a way that makes the audience understand one concept, which is often very complicated to understand or just not relatable or clear enough for the targeted audience, in terms of another concept (Chahbane & Zrizi, 2023). Political speeches play a significant role in leading the public's opinions and actions regarding several issues (Rycker & Don, 2013). The essential aim of politics is to attract the greatest number of supporters to govern the nation and be powerful. For that purpose, politicians try to convince the citizens to believe what their political party is interested in at any particular time. They use language as a powerful tool to spread their ideology, using strategies such as metaphors to create politically biased speeches. Metaphors are a central tool in creating aspirational discourses that sound good and express the basis for doing the right thing (Charteris-Black, 2005a).

Drawing on the pertinent literature it is clear that there is a consensus on the purpose of metaphors in political discourse in general. They are considered good devices for simplifying certain complex concepts related to politics, economy, various social topics, which are all frequently discussed by politicians, thus finding common ground with the public by focusing, through metaphor, on one aspect of some issue and ignoring other aspects that are irrelevant or undesirable (Stojan & Mijić, 2019). Thorne (2008) further affirms that metaphor explains complex arguments since one element is used to develop the understanding of the other. Studies show that utilizing metaphors in political discourse has a strong impact on swaying the audience's views regarding several issues (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). Charteris-Black (2004) highlights that metaphors are employed in political discourse in general and political speeches in

specific to serve several purposes such as allowing the audience to grasp meanings, arousing the audiences' emotions in an attempt to persuade them of political views and enhancing the Charisma of the speaker. In the same line, Thorne (2008) adds that metaphoric language is a significant part of the rhetoric used by politicians to persuade their audience, and the more original the image created; the more effective the idea is conveyed.

Generally speaking, Metaphors make political discourse more 'persuasive', and that happens when "metaphors interact with other linguistic features to legitimise policies" (Charteris-Black, 2005b, p. 17). Metaphors have the power to influence the thoughts of the targeted audience, and they can completely change the way we see the world and our opinions on certain issues (Chahbane & Zrizi, 2023). Furthermore, Charteris-Black (2004, p. 28) emphasizes "the potential of metaphor to construct representations of the world that impinge on human understanding of various aspects of social and political life" and "its vital role in forming and influencing human beliefs, attitudes and action" . Thus, this conceptual device plays a key role to persuade and manipulate the target audience of political discourses. The utilization of conceptual metaphors by political leaders in their speeches is examined by several studies. Nevertheless, studies reveal that some conceptual metaphors are more common in political discourse thank others. As Charteris-Black (2004) demonstrates, war and sports conceptual metaphors are the most commonly used in political discourse. In a study of political discourse in the USA, Howe (1988) states that the most frequently used metaphors originate from the domains of sports and war and this leads to the conclusion that politics is conceived as rule-bound contest or an exercise of power. Figar (2013) applies the Conceptual Metaphor Theory to investigate the use of conflict and sports metaphors in political discourse in daily newspapers and concludes that these conceptual metaphors arouse the emotions of readers. Other prominent metaphors employed in political discourse are game, sports and journey metaphors (Chilton, 2004; Kovecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 2004). According to recent literature, these domains such as war, disease, sport, game, journey and others are referred to by field pioneers as conceptual frames to which conceptual metaphors, as effective linguistic formulas, are linked. Through these conceptual frames target audiences perceive many abstract and complicated social, economic and political events, activities and phenomena. In this way political messages become more persuasive because they evoke things that are already known or at least familiar (Borčić et al., 2016).

Moreover, there is an important issue related to sport metaphors arises and that is whether these metaphors are understood by women or not. As Howe (1988) claims, political activity has mostly been confined to men, and which might be seen as a reason behind the most frequently use of sport metaphors in political discourse. Such statements can be compared with what Radić-Bojanić & Silaški (2008) stated when

they analyzed the use of sports metaphors in Serbian political discourse. They claim that women mostly do not understand sports metaphors in political discourse and that these metaphors obstacle women voters from understanding the intended political message and the overall political reality.

Methodology

As far as the identification of conceptual metaphors is concerned, researchers in cognitive linguistics have developed a number of relevant proposals, such as the three-stage Critical Metaphor Analysis developed by Charteris-Black (2004), the five-stage procedure developed by Gerard Steen (1999), and the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). The combined use of quantitative corpus analysis (employing AntConc) and qualitative metaphor identification (utilizing the Metaphor Identification Procedure, MIP) is adopted in this study. The corpus is composed of eighteen American presidential speeches from different administrations, spanning different eras from 1940 to 2021. The principle of selection is based on their primary focus on addressing issues related to war and national security, such as declaring military action, framing national security policy, or commemorating conflicts. The analysis is carried out in terms of Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), focusing only on the conceptual metaphors reflecting the core target domains of 'war' and 'national security.' The qualitative analysis involved the application of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). The main steps undertaken for each text are as follows:

1- Read the entire text–discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning.
2- Determine the lexical units in the text–discourse.
3- **(a)** For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit.

   (b) For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be

      - More concrete (what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste);
      - Related to bodily action;
      - More precise (as opposed to vague);
      - Historically older.
      - Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit.

(c) If the lexical unit has a more basic current contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.

4- If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical (Pragglejaz Group, 2007).

The quantitative analysis using AntConc supported this process by identifying the frequent candidate words and patterns, which were then systematically submitted to the MIP to ensure a consistent and reliable metaphor identification process.

Findings and Discussions

Table 1. Frequency and Distribution of Metaphorical Vehicles in American Presidential Speeches (1941–2021)

This table is a quantitative overview of the metaphorical tokens identified in the corpus of 18 American presidential speeches (1941–2021). It mainly shows the density of metaphor usage over time and across different presidential administrations. Moreover, it provides details about the raw frequency, relative frequency per 1,000 words, and how each speech contributes to the total metaphors identified in the corpus.

Speech Title	Total Tokens	Metaphorical Vehicles(raw count)	Relative Frequency (per 1,000 words)	% of Total Metaphors (Corpus-Wide)
S1: Franklin D. Roosevelt ,1941	557	13	23.34	6.37
S2: Harry S. Truman ,1947	6076	4	0.66	1.96
S3: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1961	1858	19	10.23	9.31
S4: John F. Kennedy -1961	1368	20	14.62	9.80
S5: John F. Kennedy, 1963	673	5	7.43	2.45
S6: Lyndon B. Johnson,1968	4899	9	1.84	4.41
S7: Ronald Reagon ,1981	2452	11	4.49	5.39
S8: Ronald Reagan, 1983	4025	8	1.99	3.92
S9: George H. W. Bush, 1991	821	8	9.74	3.92
S10: Bill Clinton, 1999	1934	15	7.76	7.35
S11: George W. Bush, 2001(policy speech)	1270	5	3.94	2.45
S12: George W. Bush 2001 (inaugural speech)	1601	13	8.12	6.37
S13: George W. Bush, 2002	3862	17	4.40	8.33
S14: Barack Obama, 2009	2407	4	1.66	1.96
S15: Barack Obama, 2014	7204	11	1.53	5.39
S16: Donald Trump, 2019	1166	6	5.15	2.94
S17: Donald Trump, 2020	6298	21	3.33	10.29
S18: Joe Biden, 2021	3342	15	4.49	7.35
Total:	**51876**	204		

The quantitative data indicate that metaphor usage rises and falls across different eras and speeches. Metaphor usage is remarkably characterized by inconsistency, fluctuating over time and reflecting the rhetorical style of each president within the specific historical and chronological contexts of each address. Clear contrasts can be recognized among presidential administrations, where some speeches involve a large amount of metaphorical expressions, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1941 speech (23.34 per 1,000 words) and John F. Kennedy's 1961 address (14.62 per 1,000 words), while others are approximately literal, as in Harry S. Truman's 1947 address (0.66 per 1,000 words). In addition, variation within the same presidential administration is also evident, as seen with Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, whose metaphor rates shift from one speech to another. As a result, the data reveal that metaphor is not a universal tool; rather, it is a strategic rhetorical choice that varies in its density across the period from 1941 to 2021.

For the sake of clearer, more detailed, and more precise qualitative analysis, the classification of conceptual metaphors is presented in two separate tables based on the key primary target domains. Table 2 tackles the conceptual metaphors of "war," while Table 3 focuses on the conceptual metaphors of "national security." In each table, all underlying specific conceptual metaphors, together with their source domain, target domain, and metaphorical vehicles, are presented.

Table 2. Classification of Predominant Conceptual Metaphors of "War" in American Presidential Speeches (1941–2021).

Conceptual Metaphors	Source Domain	Metaphorical vehicles & Temporal Distribution (Examples)
War is a Natural Phenomenon	Natural Forces/Disaster	gathering clouds (Barack O.'09), icy currents (Barack O.'09), engulf (JFK '61, Bill C.'99,), fire (Bill C.'99), flames (Bill C.'99), engulfing (Eisenhower '61)
The Enemy is a Predator/ Monster	Animals / Mythology	prey upon (Ronald R.'81), monster (Trump '20)
War is a Physical Conflict	Physical force /bodily stance	strength (Ronald R.'81), battlefield (Eisenhower '61), footing (Obama '14).
War is a Contest	Race / Competition	race (Joe B.' 21),
War is a Gamble/ Business	Gambling / Commerce	bets (Biden '21),
War is a Religious/ Mythological Event	Religion / Mythology	dark powers (JFK '61), hell (Joe B.' 21), sacrifice (Donald T.'20)
War is a Burden/ Object	Physical Weight / Objects	weight (Eisenhower '61), service (JFK '61), , swords (Eisenhower '61),
War is a Problem	Abstract Problem	problems (Bill C.'99)
Planning for Violence is a Musical Performance	Musical Activity	Orchestrated (Donald T.'20)
Status is Up	physical high	Top (military commander, Joe B.' 21)

	position	
International Conflict is interpersonal Dispute	Personal verbal conflict	quarrel (G.H.W. Bush '91)
Nuclear Policy is a Physical Process	Physical freezing	freeze (Ronald R. '83)
Temporary Cessation is a Physical Suspension	Physical suspension	suspension (George H.W.B' 91)
Evacuation/Rescue is an extraction	physical extraction	extract (Joe B.' 21)
Intensifying Conflict is Pouring Gasoline	Fuel for fire	pour gasoline (Bill C.'99)
Enemy is a web or pervasive network	Pervasive network	network(Barack O.'09)

Table 3. Classification of Predominant Conceptual Metaphors of "National Security" in American Presidential Speeches (1941–2021).

Conceptual Metaphors	Source Domain	Metaphorical vehicles & Temporal Distribution (Examples)
National Security is a Warfare	Warfare/Physical conflict	bear arms (JFK '61), war on crime (Lyndon B.J.'68), war on terror (George W.B'01, '02), front lines (JFK' 63, Lyndon B.J.'68), fight (Biden '21), combat (George W.B.'02), battle (Trump '20), faced down (Barack O.'09)
National Security is a Constructed Structure	Construction/Building	built (FDR '41, Eisenhower '61), bastion (Ronald R.'81), building peace (Bill C.'99), rebuilding trust (Obama '14), bridge of cooperation (Bill C.'99), Weld (FDR '41),
Threats are Natural Phenomena	Natural Forces/Disasters	surging wave (of tyranny, FDR '41), floods (of drugs, Trump '19), raging sea, storm & whirlwind (of threat, G.W. Bush '01), troubled waters (LBJ '68), Flames (Bill C.'99), Wave (John F.K.' 63)
Governance/Responsibility is a Heavy Load	Physical objects/Heavy load	burden (of responsibility, JFK '61, Reagan '81, Bill C.'99, Trump '20), heavy (price of freedom, Eisenhower '61), lay down (responsibilities, Eisenhower '61)
Nation is a Person	Human body/Person	heart (of the nation, Trump '19), body (politic, FDR '41), infant (America, Reagan '81), arrogance (of a nation, Eisenhower '61, G.W. Bush '01,), stand (with allies, Trump '20), courage, friend (G.W. Bush '01,)
Progress is a Journey	Journey/Movement	Road, go forward (to peace, Eisenhower '61), moving (ahead, LBJ '68), crossroads (JFK '61), advancing, Launched (Trump '20)

		price (of freedom, Reagan '81, G.W. Bush '02), guard (our security, Biden '21), squandering (freedom, Reagan '83), steals (of life, Barack O. '14)
Security is a Valuable Possession	Commodity / Object	price (of freedom, Reagan '81, G.W. Bush '02), guard (our security, Biden '21), squandering (freedom, Reagan '83), steals (of life, Barack O. '14)
Volatile situation is a powder Keg	Explosives	powder keg (Bill C.'99),
Abstract Political Concepts are Living Entities	Living Entity	Dying (Franklin D.R.'41), Young (Bill C.'99)
Democratic Values are a Symbolic Fire	Symbolic Fire	Blazed, sacred fire (Franklin D.R.'41)
Faith/Unity is Stability	Solid & constant objects	rock (George W.B'01)
Faith/Progress is Organic Growth	Plants/Natural Development	Seed (George W.B'01),

Dominance of War Metaphors

Using warfare as a master frame to understand the various and vast spectrum of challenges is the most pervasive pattern recognized in the corpus. This conceptual metaphor is not confined to armed conflict; rather it extends to cover abstract societal and political struggles, effectively militarizing national discourse. The conceptual metaphors reflecting this type of metaphorical framing are "War is a Physical Conflict" (table 2), and "National Security is Warfare" (table3). This metaphorical mapping frames any issue, such as crime, drugs, and terrorism, as a physical conflict with a defined adversary that must be encountered and conquered. It simplifies complex problems by presenting them in the form of binary "us vs. them," justifying the use of aggressive and forceful measures, and rallying public support for confrontation. The endurance of this framing over time is a remarkable feature of the corpus, though its targets evolve from crime to communism to terror. Number of Illustrative examples extracted from table (2) and table (3) are presented below:

Example (1): "Now the trumpet summons us again-not as a call to **bear arms**" (Kennedy, 1961)

The lexical unit under analysis is the phrase " bear arms". The basic meaning is "carrying weapons to prepare for or engage in combat ". The contextual meaning refers to the preparedness and vigilance in the face of the national security threats. The contextual meaning contrasts with the basic one, but it can be grasped in terms of basic meaning. This metaphorical phrase stimulates the imagery of literal combat, and applies it the abstract domain of national security. By using this metaphor, the speaker tries to convey the idea that addressing the national security threats characterized here by the abstract societal challenges such as poverty, tyranny, disease, and war itself,

requires the same level of readiness, efforts, and strategic planning as if we prepare for a real combat.

Example (2): "They appreciate our determination to fight and win the **war** against terror" (Bush, 2001).

The lexical item under analysis is "war." Its basic and contemporary meaning refers to the physical armed military conflicts or battles between organized groups or states, while the contextual meaning is pertaining to an overall efforts involving political, economic, and military actions to withstand terrorism. There is a clear contrast between the contextual and basic meaning, since the term "war" is not used here to refer literally to military operations; rather, it is merely based on military imagery and logic (plans, strategy, technology, enemies). This means that the lexical item "war," is used metaphorically in this context. This metaphor enables the public to easily understand a complex and multifaceted problem_terrorism__ in terms of a more concrete domain--- warfare. It also justifies the militarization of police measures and reinforces the moral urgency. War metaphors, as stated by Chilton, 2004, frequently divide the moral landscape into clear opposites: good versus evil or lawful versus unlawful. In this view, terror is portrayed as a physical enemy that must be fought and defeated, while counterterrorism is seen as the defender of social order. Furthermore, such use of metaphor facilitates mobilization and attaining the required political support.

Example (3): "America must move off a permanent war **footing**" (Obama, 2014).

The lexical item in focus is "footing." Its basic meaning denotes a process of standing firmly on a slope or dangerous surfaces," implying balance and controlled movement. The contextual meaning refers to the US policy state or national security orientation. The contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning since it does not refer to a literal bodily posture, and it can be understood in comparison with the basic literal meaning. This mapping indicates the metaphorical use of the lexicon "footing." This metaphor, generally reflecting the conceptual metaphor "National Security State is a Physical Posture," and more specifically that "Military Engagement is a Physical Posture or Stance," frames a nation as a soldier standing in a constant state of alertness and vigilance. By using this metaphor, the speaker creates a vivid bodily image characterized by tense muscles, a firm standing, and readiness to move and strike. This allows the audience to intuitively grasp the cost, strain, energy, and focus required to sustain such a posture. In the current political context, it is evident that keeping such a stance open-ended is exhausting and unsustainable. This supports the speaker's suggestion to shift away from perpetual military engagement and instead focus on more targeted and strategic engagement (Chilton, 2004).

Example (4): "we can do both: **fight** terrorism and take on new threats" (Biden, 2021).

The lexical unit under analysis is " fight." It is used in this text as a reference to an efforts spent to eliminate an abstract and ideologically complex phenomenon which is "terrorism.". The basic meaning is "to use physical force to try to defeat another person or group of people," which clearly denotes physical combat. The contextual meaning of the verb 'fight' indicates the continuous work to resist and eliminate the abstract challenges embodied in "terrorism," through a broad range of diplomatic, military, and strategic actions, but not necessarily physical actions. The contrast between both the contextual and basic meanings indicates the metaphorical use of the verb "fight' in this context. Using this metaphor is an attempt to simplify the complexity of the abstract concept of 'terrorism' through framing it as a clear and physical adversary that can be fought. Furthermore, it helps legitimize the aggressive military responses taken by the US leaders.

Constructing and Protecting the Nation: Building, Bonds, and Burdens

This is a second major theme that can be perceived from the corpus, which conceptualizes the nation and its security not through physical conflict, but through creation and maintenance. It apparently covers metaphors of construction, physical bonds, and carried loads or burdens that portray governance as a deliberate and effortful process of construction and support. The conceptual metaphors subsumed under this theme are: National Security is a Constructed Structure (Table 3), Governance/ Responsibility is a Heavy Load (Table 3), and War is a Burden/Object (Table 2). These conceptual metaphors emphasize stability, national unity or collective effort, and weight of leadership. The construction metaphor reflects a structured plan and a solid, lasting result (e.g., bastion, bridge), while the burden metaphor evokes the sense of sacrifice and cost associated with preserving security and freedom (e.g., burden, price). The physical bond metaphor powerfully frames national unity as a permanent, forged tie (e.g., weld). Number of illustrative examples extracted from table 2 and table 3 are produced below:

Example (1): "the task of the people was to create and **weld** together a Nation" (Roosevelt, 1941).

The lexical unit "weld" is the lexical unit under analysis. The basic meaning is to " join the materials " typically metal and plastics" using the heat and pressure ". The contextual meaning of "weld" in this text is " unifying or binding the American citizens or regions in one cohesive unit. The contextual meaning contrasts the basic meaning, but it can be grasped if it is compared with the basic meaning. we can understand that speaker utilize the image of welding process to depict how the American nation is

united and strong, where this image stimulates ideas like strength, integration, skill and efforts required for unifying the nation.

Example (2): "but a call to bear the **burden** of a long twilight struggle" (Kennedy, 1961).

The word ' burden' is the lexical unit under analysis. The basic meaning of ' burden' is " a heavy load that you carry". The contextual meaning here refers to the abstract concept of responsibility. The shift in using this word ' burden' from the literal physical load to the abstract concept of responsibility confirms the metaphorical nature of this lexical unit in this context. Using this metaphorical expression is an attempt to liken the responsibility or challenge to endure the long-lasting struggle to carrying a physical and tangible heavy load.

Example (3): "to preserve this last and greatest **bastion** of freedom" (Reagon, 1981).

The word ' bastion' is the lexical unit under analysis. The basic meaning of ' bastion' is " a projecting part of a fortification, shaped so as to allow defensive fire in several directions, and typically located at an angle or corner of ". The contextual meaning refers to the American nation that is considered here as the defender of the freedom. There is a contrast between the contextual meaning and the basic one, but we can understand the contextual meaning in terms of the basic meaning. By using this metaphor, the speaker intends to attract the American citizens' attention to the significant role that America can play in defending and protecting the concept of freedom all over the world.

Example (4): "…. and rebuilding the trust of the people who sent us here" (Obama, 2014).

The lexical unit in focus is "rebuilding." Its basic meaning denotes the physical reconstruction of damaged structure (e.g.., house or building), while the contextual meaning pertains to restoring lost public-confidence in the US government. The clear mapping of the physical construction domain onto the abstract process of recovering American's civic faith in the governmental performance indicates the metaphorical nature of the lexeme "rebuilding." This metaphor, that copes with "building democracy metaphor," extends the speaker's usage of construction metaphor to transform an abstract process of restoration into tangible and visceral action. Besides, this metaphor differs from "building democracy," metaphor for being referring to recovering and restoring damaged or collapsed structure, while the latter indicates an establishment of new structure. Briefly, this metaphor frames trust as a physical structure that once existed and was destroyed. It presents trust as a preparative or recoverable action (fixing something broken) rather than foundational (a new start), and it also implies that

trust was vulnerable to sabotage and needs stronger materials and collective efforts from the citizens and government in the process of restoration.

Framing the Threat: Natural Phenomena, Explosives, and Monstrous Enemies

In this theme, the speakers utilize various methods to frame threats to national security, highlighting uncontrollable, inhuman, and insidious forces. This framing ultimately reflects the dehumanization of the enemy, as well as the potency and pervasiveness of these threats. The conceptual metaphors this theme covers are: Threats are Natural Phenomena (Table 3), The Enemy is a Predator/Monster (Table 2), Volatile Situation is a Powder Keg (Table 3). On the one hand, metaphors of natural forces or disasters (wave, storm, flood) frame threats as overwhelming, out of hand, and inevitable, thereby minimizing the administration's perceived accountability and justifying the use of a powerful response as well. On the other hand, metaphors of predation (prey upon), monstrosity (monster), and man-made explosives present the enemy as intentionally malicious, immoral, and on the verge of causing total destruction. Number on illustrative example extracted from both (Table 2) and (Table 3) are presented below:

Example (1): "tyranny and slavery have become the **surging wave** of the future" (Roosevelt, 1941).

The lexical unit under analysis is " surging wave". The basic meaning of " wave " is "a moving ridge or swell on the surface of a liquid (as of the sea)". The contextual meaning reflects the powerful and advanced nature of ' tyranny and slavery,' which are expected to be prevalent within the American nation in the future. The contextual meaning contrasts the basic meaning; however, it can be understood if it is compared with the basic meaning. we can understand that the speaker tends to frame the abstract political concepts "tyranny and slavery" as familiar natural phenomena that can be easily conceptualized by the public. Consequently, American citizens might be more aware of the internal threats that affect the national security in case the practices of 'tyranny and slavery' find their way to be more dominant within community.

Example (2): "We act to prevent a wider war, to diffuse a **powder keg** at the heart of Europe " (Clinton, 1999).

The phrase " powder keg" is the lexical unit under analysis. Its basic meaning refers to gunpowder barrel which is highly dangerous and explosive. The contextual meaning refers to the unstable and dangerous situation in Kosovo that might lead to a larger conflict. The contrast between the basic and contextual meaning confirms the metaphorical nature of this phrase usage in this text. By using this metaphor, the speaker intends to conceptualize the dangerous, unstable, and unpredictable political

and military situation in this area as explosives that might explode in any time causing a wider conflict that can be easily contained.

Example (3): "…. a **monster** who murdered or wounded thousands of American service members in Iraq" (Trump, 2020).

The lexical unit under analysis is "monster." Its basic and contemporary meaning refers to a mythical and imaginary creature taking the shape of strange and terrifying animal, while the contextual meaning pertains to the Iranian military leader, Qasem Soleimani who is described here as a character of vicious, cruel, and brutal actions. The contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning, but it can be understood when it is compared with terrifying monster. This contrast indicates that the lexeme "monster" is used metaphorically in this context. It is another powerful and dehumanizing metaphor used by the speaker to attribute a non-human characteristic to Iranian military leader Qasem Soleimani. This dehumanization positions him outside the bounds of humanity, framing him as a supernatural evil that must be eliminated, rather than as a soldier or officer who should adhere to the rules of military engagement. Additionally, transforming the target from a political and military leader into an embodiment of evil evokes the audience's emotional and visceral responses—fear, disgust, and a desire for revenge—making the situation easier to understand. Furthermore, it morally justifies extreme retribution by portraying the speaker's actions not as a debatable military and political decision, but as a necessary and heroic act of killing a beast, thereby transforming a contentious act into a noble and inevitable measure to deter a global threat.

The Nation as a Person and Its Progress as a Journey

This theme encompasses the ontological personification of the state and the directional framing of its trajectory. These are among the most deeply rooted and persistent metaphors in political discourse. As shown in the tables, the conceptual metaphors: Nation is a Person (Table 3), Progress is a Journey (Table 3), and Abstract Political Concepts are Living Entities (Table 3) reflect this major theme.

In this metaphorical framing, the personification of the nation (heart, body, infant, stand, arrogance) creates a collective identity that provides a space for discussion revolving around national 'character,' 'will,' or 'health.' The journey metaphor (road, crossroads, move, advancing, go forward) simplifies historical processes by providing a simple, tangible, and intuitive structure or image that implies a shared destination, a chosen path, and the possibility of deviation. Additionally, the conceptual metaphor 'Democratic Values Are Sacred Fire' can fit here, as it animates an abstract ideal, giving it energy and sacred value. Illustrative examples are presented below:

Example (1): "the **sacred fire** of liberty" (Roosevelt, 1941).

The lexical unit under analysis is " sacred fire". The basic meaning is " perpetually burning fire used in religious and ceremonial activities". The contextual meaning reflects the important and valuable ideals of liberty and democracy. The contextual meaning contrasts the basic meaning, but it can be grasped in comparison with the basic meaning. It can be clearly seen that the use of this phrase" sacred fire " is to express the importance and value of the democratic ideals and principles that need to be preserved, protected and nurtured to continue to next generations exactly as the fire needs fuel to keep giving the light and heat.

Example (2): "Democracy is not **dying**" (Roosevelt, 1941).

The lexical unit under analysis is " dying". The basic meaning is "very ill and likely to die soon." The contextual meaning is that democracy is a fragile and vulnerable, but it can revive and grow since it is described as a living being. The contextual meaning contrasts that basic meaning but it can be understood in comparison with basic meaning. The speaker here tries to portray the abstract concept of democracy as a living being that can live, die, revive and grow. a matter which makes the grasp of this concept is easier to the audience for being depicted in tangible and more related term which is here " living being". As such, the statement " democracy is not dying" indicates the resilience and enduring nature of democracy

Example (3): "do what little I can to help the world advance along that **road**" (Eisenhower, 1961).

The lexical unit under analysis is "road." Its basic meaning refers to the physical path used for movement and travel such as street and highway, while the contextual meaning is turning around the global efforts towards peace. Comparing the two meanings, it is clear that contextual meaning pertains to abstract process (progress towards peace), versus the basic physical meaning, and this indicates that "road" is used metaphorically. This metaphor is part of Journey metaphors, where global continuous efforts towards peace is conceptualized as a journey to an abstract goal (peace). In addition, framing the progress toward peace as a road highlights the challenges of achieving peace, the global cooperation needed to move forward, and the sustained action required to reach this goal.

Example (4): "He led America out of revolutionary victory into **infant** nationhood" (Reagon, 1981).

The lexical unit under analysis is "infant." Its basic meaning is "a baby or a young child." The contextual meaning refers to the first stages of a nation. The contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning, but it can be grasped if it is compared with the basic one. This metaphor frames a nation as a vulnerable entity in its early stages; thus, it needs guidance, growth, and protection. Conceptualizing a nation

as a young child often justifies strong leadership, defensive procedures, and the establishment of robust national security measures to maintain survival and growth. This metaphor clearly confirms the idea that nations, like people, have life stages: birth, growth, and maturity.

Evolution within the Persistent Conceptual Metaphors

While the preceding sub-sections shed light on the endurance of the generalized conceptual metaphors, a closer investigation reveals the evolution of the specific metaphorical vehicles used within these persistent conceptual mappings. This evolution has two distinct patterns. The first is the lexical evolution within enduring source domains, where the core conceptual mapping remains the same, but specific metaphorical vehicles are updated over time. The second is the conceptual evolution in which the target domain is re-conceptualized through mapping it onto a new source domain reflecting a deeper shift in the changing historical contexts, political challenges and strategies. This evolution shows how political leaders revise familiar cognitive frames to address new political challenges. This analysis moves from what conceptual patterns endure to how they remain relevant across decades. The stability of conceptual mapping provides a basis for understanding, while the novelty of the vehicle redesigns the message to cope with the situation. A brief explanation of the persistent conceptual metaphors with both lexical and conceptual evolution patterns are presented below:

The evolved metaphorical vehicles subsumed under this conceptual metaphor can be divided into three parts. The first part includes the lexemes "bear arms," "battle," and "front lines," which frame national security as conventional, traditional, and military conflict (uniformed armies on a well-defined battlefield). The second part covers the lexemes "war on crime" and "war on terror," which expand the target domain from a nation or a state to abstract concepts like "crime," "terror," etc. This type of metaphorical mapping militarizes domestic security measures and law enforcement. The third part or phase includes the lexemes "combat," "network," and "fight," which are used in the context of ideological struggles, pandemics, and cyber threats. These vehicles move from framing the enemy as an army on a well-defined battlefield to framing the enemy as a decentralized and evasive network. This clearly indicates that warfare metaphorical vehicles are strategically updated to conceptualize the invisible, spread, and non-traditional threats and to legitimize responses to the most critical threats of each era as well. Briefly, this evolution moves from traditional war to a metaphorical war on abstract concepts to war against decentralized threats.

As shown in table 3, within this persistent conceptual metaphor, the lexeme 'build 'is the most prevalent metaphorical vehicle that appears across different periods of time and different presidential administrations. The evolution here is the use of 'bastion' by Reagon,1981 to refer to a static and defensive fortress, while Clinton, 1999

uses the lexeme 'bridge' to refer to cooperation and relations among nations. Both these lexemes come under the same core source domain "construction," but each one is used to address specific historical context and purpose.

It is clearly evident that while the overarching frame of threats as uncontrollable, destructive forces endures, the specific source domains reflecting this endurance have evolved significantly over time. In the early 20th century, the metaphorical framing of threats relied heavily on natural forces and disasters, portraying threats as external, impersonal, and inevitable attacks. This type of source domain is instantiated in the use of lexemes such as "surging wave," "storm," "floods," "raging sea," etc.

In the 21st century, the framing of threats moves from the source domain of "natural forces and disasters" into biology (diseases), conceptualizing threats as internal, systemic, and malicious processes. This type is embodied in lexemes such as "metastasized" (Biden '21) and "parasites" (G.W. Bush '02). The evolution lies in the remarkable shift from perceiving threats as external onslaughts to grasping them as internal, systemic illnesses. This pattern of evolution does not occur within the same enduring core source domain; rather, it is a reconceptualization of the target domain by mapping it onto an entirely new source domain.

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, framing the target domain 'enemy' as a dangerous and life-threatening entity reveals a significant evolution in its perceived nature. This metaphorical framing commenced with the source domain of "predator" ("prey upon," Reagan 1981), presenting the enemy as a physical, instinctive, and animalistic threat. Later, it evolved into the domain of mythology ("monster," Trumb 2020), depicting the enemy as an imaginary creature with supernatural evil and wickedness surpassing mere animal behavior. A further conceptual shift is evident in Bush's (2020) use of the term 'time bombs,' which transforms the enemy from a living being into a mechanical or industrial object, framing it as a passive, inanimate, and unpredictable explosive device. This progression in the metaphorical mapping of 'enemy' leaves the impression that there is a notable evolution in the perception of its character.

A clear lexical evolution is observed in the enduring core source domain of this conceptual metaphor, manifesting in two distinct patterns. The first pattern employs physical and relational attributes, such as "infant," "body," "friend," and "heart," to portray the nation as a concrete living entity with social ties, evoking a sense of vulnerability and organic unity. The second pattern maps psychological and moral qualities onto the nation using metaphorical vehicles like "arrogance" and "courage." Briefly, this evolutionary shift transitions from focusing on "what the nation is"— depicting its body as a physical entity in need of protection and care—to emphasizing "how the nation behaves" by describing its character with spiritual and psychological

traits like "courage" and "arrogance." By attributing a personality to the nation, presidents can assess its actions, simplifying complex political decisions into a dichotomy of good "courage" versus bad "arrogance."

In this conceptual metaphor, the nation's trajectory is framed as a path with a shared destination, obstacles, and continuous forward movement. All metaphorical vehicles reflecting this metaphor are derived from the same enduring source domain, resulting in a lexical rather than conceptual evolution. However, this lexical evolution from guided movement to a more decisive, self-driving motion signifies a change in presidential rhetoric. For instance, Eisenhower (1961) uses the vehicle "go forward" to evoke a sense of collective and determined progress, conceptualizing the nation's political and military advancements as a physical bodily experience. In 2020, Trump employs the vehicle "launched" to portray the great American comeback manifested in political, economic, and cultural renewal, likening it to the physical act of setting a vessel or rocket into motion. This metaphorical mapping not only emphasizes the national effort but also conveys the idea that this effort was powerful, had a clear trajectory or purpose, and resembled a "rocket or ship launch."

Conclusion

In brief, this study has investigated the endurance of conceptual metaphors in American presidential speeches, along with the evolution of their source domains or specific metaphorical vehicles. The results confirm that conceptual metaphors are dynamic rather than static rhetorical devices that political actors adapt in terms of historical contexts and socio-political events. While a core set of conceptual metaphorical patterns showed persistence across the corpus over time, significant evolution was observed in their source domains and specific metaphorical expressions. This evolution manifests in two patterns. The first is lexical evolution, where the core source domain endures while its metaphorical vehicles are updated. The second pattern is conceptual evolution, in which the target domain is re-conceptualized by mapping it onto an entirely new source domain. The non-endurance of conceptual metaphorical framing is also diagnosed, where a number of conceptual metaphors appear once or twice in the whole corpus. Furthermore, natural phenomena (natural forces, disasters) are the shared, pervasive, and enduring source domain for both target domains: "war" and "national security."

By analyzing both endurance and evolutionary shifts across different presidential speeches, this study contributes a longitudinal analysis perspective to the field of metaphor analysis in political discourse. The focus on two broad areas like "war" and "national security," while providing a comprehensive view, also presents limitations. This scope made it necessary to adopt a selective analysis, concentrating on metaphors where "war" and "national security" were the target domains, which may exclude other relevant metaphorical structures. Consequently, future research could achieve greater depth by focusing on a single topic. Moreover, fruitful comparisons

could be made by investigating metaphor usage across different genres of presidential speech (e.g., inaugural speech, policy speech, and State of the Union).

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