

Trump's Audience About The Requirements Of The Right Candidate

Posted on October 16, 2019

Introduction

The original essay evaluates a Politico account of Donald Trump's campaign message through the classical rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos. Its main claim is that the message connected emotionally with economically anxious voters but did not establish sufficient credibility or evidence to support its conclusions. That assignment remains valuable when treated as a rhetorical analysis rather than a judgment based only on whether the candidate later won office. Political rhetoric works by defining an audience, naming a crisis, assigning responsibility, and presenting the speaker as the person capable of restoring order. Trump's campaign language addressed workers who believed globalization, factory closures, political elites, and trade policy had reduced their security and status. A close analysis must examine how the speech constructs those listeners, how it uses manufacturing history and economic statistics, and where emotional force outruns accurate causal explanation. (Aristotle, 2007; Jamieson & Taussig, 2017)

The Rhetorical Situation

A campaign speech is not a neutral economic report. It is delivered at a particular place, to a selected audience, during an electoral contest in which the speaker seeks identification and action. Trump's message was directed toward voters in an industrial region associated with steel, manufacturing, and union labor. Location gives arguments symbolic meaning. References to closed factories and American-built infrastructure allow the speaker to connect national decline with visible local experience. The immediate purpose is persuasion: listeners should interpret economic frustration through the campaign's framework and vote for the candidate who promises reversal.

The Implied Audience

The speech constructs its audience as hardworking, patriotic, neglected, and betrayed. This identity is rhetorically powerful because it preserves dignity. Economic difficulty is not presented as personal failure; it is presented as the result of leaders who placed foreign interests, corporations, or political families ahead of citizens. The audience is invited to see itself as the authentic nation rather than as one interest group among many. This move creates solidarity, but it can also exclude people whose work, migration history, or economic experience does not fit the image. Rhetorical analysis should ask who is included in "the people" and who becomes an outsider or cause of decline.

Thesis and Central Appeal

The campaign's central argument can be summarized as follows: previous leaders accepted trade and economic policies that weakened American production; Trump understands the damage and possesses the independence to restore jobs, wealth, and national priority. The original essay argues that this case relies strongly on pathos and selected logos while suffering from weak ethos. That thesis is defensible, but ethos should be treated as constructed rather than as a checklist of prior government experience. A political outsider can claim credibility through business identity, direct language, wealth, or opposition to institutions. The relevant question is whether those qualities justify confidence in the proposed policy.

Pathos: Loss, Anger, and Recognition

Pathos appears through descriptions of workers who built bridges, skyscrapers, railways, and industrial America but no longer receive the rewards of their labor. These images transform manufacturing into a source of identity and national contribution. Factory closure is not merely a change in employment statistics; it becomes evidence that leaders have forgotten the people who made the country strong. Anger is directed upward toward elites and outward toward competitors. The emotional appeal succeeds because it recognizes experiences that technocratic language often minimizes. A voter who has seen a plant close may respond more strongly to acknowledgment of betrayal than to a general statement about long-term economic efficiency.

Fear and the Urgency of Decline

Campaign rhetoric often describes an election as a final opportunity. If decline is presented as gradual and manageable, listeners may not feel compelled to take political risk. By portraying industry, sovereignty, and prosperity as being taken away, the speaker creates urgency. Fear can focus attention and motivate participation, but it may also reduce tolerance for complexity. Economic transitions have multiple causes, including technology, demand, management, currency, labor costs, trade, taxation, and education. A message that compresses them into one betrayal is emotionally clear while analytically incomplete.

Hope and the Promise of Restoration

Pathos is not limited to fear and anger. The speech also offers hope through a narrative of restoration. America once built extraordinary things, the audience belongs to that tradition, and the right leader can revive it. Restoration rhetoric is effective because it connects future policy with a familiar past. Its weakness lies in ambiguity. Which period should be restored, whose opportunities were included in it, and which economic structures can realistically return? A persuasive slogan may function without

answering those questions, but policy credibility requires them.

Ethos as the Outsider's Credibility

The original essay treats ethos mainly as qualifications and government experience. Classical ethos is broader. It includes perceived character, judgment, goodwill, and authority as constructed through the speech. Trump's outsider position allowed him to claim that he was not controlled by the political class responsible for the problem. Business experience was presented as evidence of negotiation and economic understanding. Direct attacks on elites signaled independence. These features could establish credibility with supporters even while critics viewed the same style as impulsive or insufficiently informed. Ethos is therefore audience-dependent: the traits that persuade one group may alarm another.

The Limits of Business Ethos

Running businesses and governing a constitutional state require overlapping but distinct abilities. Government must balance law, public accountability, diplomacy, distributional effects, and rights that cannot be treated simply as commercial costs. A candidate invoking business success should explain how that experience transfers to legislation and administration. Critics can also examine bankruptcies, lawsuits, labor relations, and the difference between private branding and public service. The original essay is correct that reliance on advisers does not by itself establish competence, but every president relies on expertise. The key question is whether the candidate can select, evaluate, and coordinate expert advice responsibly.

Logos and Manufacturing Statistics

Logos appears when the speech uses numbers, historical references, and causal claims. Statements about manufacturing employment, factory closures, trade deficits, and local steel production create an impression of evidence. Numbers are persuasive because they seem independent of emotion, but they require definitions and context. A decline from a selected baseline may be real while the stated cause remains disputed. Manufacturing output can rise while employment falls because productivity and automation increase. Imports can harm some industries while benefiting consumers and firms using lower-cost inputs. Logos depends not only on citing a number but on connecting it to a justified inference.

China, the WTO, and Timeline Accuracy

The original essay repeats a claim linking China's entry into the World Trade Organization with Hillary Clinton's service as secretary of state. China joined the WTO in December 2001, years before Clinton

became secretary of state in 2009. Her husband, President Bill Clinton, supported permanent normal trade relations with China, and Congress approved the policy in 2000. This distinction matters because rhetorical arguments often connect familiar political opponents with events outside the correct timeline. Trade with China did contribute to concentrated job losses in some American communities, as economic research on the “China shock” demonstrates. Accurate criticism should identify the responsible institutions and dates rather than rely on associative blame.

Trade as Cause and Symbol

Trade policy functions rhetorically as both economic mechanism and symbol of leadership priorities. Agreements are complex and remote from everyday life, making them useful explanations for visible job loss. They allow a campaign to name decisions, negotiators, and foreign competitors. Yet manufacturing decline cannot be attributed to trade alone. Automation, changing consumer demand, corporate location strategy, exchange rates, energy costs, and domestic investment also matter. A credible policy must distinguish jobs that can return through trade enforcement from jobs transformed permanently by technology or market change.

Populist Opposition

The speech divides society between ordinary citizens and a network of politicians, corporations, media elites, and established families. This is a classic populist structure. It gives diverse grievances one opponent and portrays the candidate as the people’s direct representative. Populism can expose genuine concentrations of power and failures of representation. It can also weaken accountability if every criticism is dismissed as proof that the elite conspiracy fears the leader. Rhetorical analysis should therefore distinguish valid institutional criticism from a framework that makes counterevidence impossible to accept.

Pronouns and Identification

Words such as “we,” “our,” and “they” organize political belonging. “We” can unite speaker and audience despite differences in wealth or status. “They” can consolidate several opponents into one responsible class. Repetition makes the division memorable. Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification helps explain why voters may support a speaker whose personal life differs greatly from theirs: rhetoric creates a shared substance through patriotism, grievance, and opposition. The effectiveness of the campaign message depended less on proving that speaker and audience had identical experiences than on making them feel aligned against a common system.

Style and Plain Speech

Trump's public style often uses short sentences, repetition, superlatives, direct accusation, and conversational fragments. Supporters may interpret this as authenticity because it differs from polished political language. Critics may interpret the same style as imprecision. Plain speech can democratize communication when it makes policy understandable, but simplicity can also conceal missing evidence. The appropriate standard is not whether the language sounds formal. It is whether the accessible language represents facts and tradeoffs accurately enough for democratic choice.

The Role of Politico as Intermediary

The assignment refers to a Politico publication rather than only the original speech. A news article selects quotations, provides context, frames significance, and addresses its own readership. Analysis should therefore separate Trump's rhetoric from Politico's presentation of it. Which statements are quoted directly? Which claims are paraphrased? Does the article provide counterevidence or expert interpretation? A publication may describe a campaign message without endorsing it. Critiquing the article's ethos requires examining sourcing, accuracy, and transparency, not transferring every weakness of the candidate's speech to the journalist.

Evidence Needed for a Stronger Argument

The economic case would be stronger with clearly sourced data on regional employment, wages, productivity, trade exposure, and the likely effects of proposed tariffs or incentives. It should explain time horizons, costs to consumers, retaliation risk, and differences among industries. A complete policy argument would also address worker retraining, labor standards, infrastructure, education, research, competition, and regional investment. Campaign speeches cannot provide a technical report, but they can acknowledge tradeoffs and direct listeners to detailed plans. Without that supporting layer, logos functions more as a performance of certainty than as reasoned policy.

Counterarguments

Defenders of the speech can argue that political leaders had minimized the distributional cost of globalization and that direct rhetoric forced neglected communities into national debate. They may also argue that a campaign must simplify to communicate and that voters can evaluate detailed plans elsewhere. Critics respond that simplification became scapegoating, historical error, and promises beyond presidential control. Both positions identify real features. The speech's strength was recognition and agenda-setting; its weakness was causal overstatement and insufficient policy qualification.

Ethical Dimensions of Persuasion

Effective rhetoric is not automatically ethical rhetoric. A speaker may correctly identify pain while misdirecting blame or offering impossible certainty. Ethical persuasion respects the audience enough to distinguish evidence from speculation and to avoid treating vulnerable groups as convenient symbols. It also recognizes that policies create winners and losers. A candidate claiming to put Americans first must define which Americans, which costs, and which rights remain protected. Emotional identification should lead toward informed action rather than substitute for it.

Overall Evaluation

The campaign message succeeds rhetorically by creating a recognizable audience, giving economic loss a moral narrative, and presenting the candidate as an outsider willing to challenge established power. Pathos is its strongest appeal because it validates anger, pride, and hope. Ethos works effectively for listeners who interpret outsider business identity as independence, but it remains contested because governing competence and truthfulness require separate evidence. Logos is present through manufacturing and trade claims, yet some timelines and causal connections are incomplete or inaccurate. The rhetoric is therefore powerful as political identification and weaker as comprehensive economic explanation.

Conclusion

Trump's campaign message about manufacturing and the "right candidate" demonstrates how political rhetoric converts economic change into a story about national identity, betrayal, and restoration. The audience is addressed as hardworking Americans whose contribution has been ignored, creating strong pathos. The speaker's outsider status and business identity produce ethos for supporters, although those qualities do not by themselves establish governmental competence. Statistics and trade history create logos, but evidence must be checked carefully; China's WTO entry, for example, occurred in 2001 and cannot accurately be assigned to Hillary Clinton's later service as secretary of state. The argument's persuasive success comes from recognition and clarity. Its analytical weakness comes from reducing complex economic transformation to a single group of leaders and presenting restoration without sufficient discussion of cost, implementation, or uncertainty.

Works Cited

Aristotle. *On Rhetoric*. Translated by George A. Kennedy, 2nd ed., Oxford UP, 2007.

Autor, David H., David Dorn, and Gordon H. Hanson. "The China Shock." *Annual Review of Economics*,

vol. 8, 2016, pp. 205–240.

Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. U of California P, 1969.

Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, and Doron Taussig. “Disruption, Demonization, Deliverance, and Norm Destruction.” *Political Communication*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2017, pp. 619–630.

Office of the United States Trade Representative. “China’s Accession to the World Trade Organization.” U.S. Government.