

Trump's Audience About The Requirements Of The Right Candidate

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Introduction

Donald Trump's June 28, 2016, remarks in Monessen, Pennsylvania provide a useful case for examining how political rhetoric defines an audience and constructs the qualities of the "right candidate." Speaking in a region associated with steel and manufacturing, Trump framed globalization as a betrayal of American workers and presented himself as an outsider capable of reversing economic decline. The speech's persuasive force did not rest on one appeal alone. It combined pathos through stories of loss, anger, pride, and restoration; ethos through the candidate's claimed independence and business experience; and logos through references to trade, manufacturing, and economic statistics (Aristotle, 2007; Trump, 2016). A rhetorical analysis should not treat the later election result as proof that every claim was accurate or every appeal was ethically sound. Instead, it should ask how the speech constructed a relationship between speaker and audience, which facts supported its economic narrative, where causal claims exceeded the evidence, and why the style could appear authentic to supporters while appearing imprecise or exclusionary to critics.

The Implied Audience and the Politics of Identification

The Monessen speech constructs its ideal audience as hardworking, patriotic, productive, and neglected by political leaders. Trump praised Pennsylvania steelworkers for helping build bridges, railways, skyscrapers, and the industrial landscape, then argued that their loyalty had been repaid with economic "betrayal" through globalization (Trump, 2016). This framing preserves the audience's dignity because job loss is not presented as individual failure; responsibility is assigned to political and economic decision-makers. Kenneth Burke's concept of identification helps explain the technique. A wealthy candidate and industrial workers do not need identical biographies if rhetoric can establish a shared identity through patriotism, grievance, and opposition to a common system (Burke, 1969). Pronouns such as "we," "our," and "they" make that division emotionally legible. The strategy can create strong solidarity, but it also raises questions about exclusion. When a candidate defines "the people" around a particular image of industrial citizenship, workers in other sectors, immigrants,

consumers, and communities with different economic experiences may be left outside the narrative or positioned as causes rather than participants in national change.

Pathos: Loss, Anger, Fear, and Restoration

Pathos is central to the speech because manufacturing is presented not merely as an economic sector but as a source of identity, pride, and national contribution. Closed factories and reduced industrial employment become symbols of abandonment, allowing listeners to interpret local hardship as evidence of a broader moral failure. Anger is directed toward political elites and trade arrangements, while fear appears through warnings that jobs, factories, wealth, and sovereignty are being taken away. The speech then converts those negative emotions into hope through a restoration narrative: America once built extraordinary things, the audience belongs to that tradition, and decisive leadership can revive it. This structure is rhetorically effective because it acknowledges experiences that technical economic language can seem to minimize. Its limitation is that emotional clarity can compress several causes into one explanation. Manufacturing change reflects trade, automation, productivity, corporate strategy, demand, energy, exchange rates, education, and investment, among other factors. A story of betrayal can therefore be persuasive without being a complete causal account. Ethical rhetorical analysis should distinguish recognition of real hardship from unsupported simplification of why that hardship occurred.

Ethos and the Outsider Candidate

Ethos is broader than formal government experience because audiences judge a political speaker through perceived character, competence, judgment, independence, and goodwill. Trump's 2016 outsider position allowed him to present distance from established political institutions as a qualification rather than a deficiency. His business identity was offered as evidence that he understood negotiation, money, construction, and economic competition, while confrontational language signaled that he was not constrained by conventional political etiquette. For supporters, those traits could establish credibility precisely because they differed from professional politicians. For critics, the same style could raise doubts about preparation, truthfulness, temperament, or the transferability of private-sector experience to constitutional government. Rhetorical analysis should therefore treat ethos as audience-dependent rather than declare it simply present or absent (Jamieson & Taussig, 2017). Governing requires public accountability, legal constraints, diplomacy, distributional decisions, and rights that cannot be reduced to commercial bargaining. Business experience can contribute useful skills, but the speech still needs evidence connecting those skills to the particular responsibilities of the presidency. Outsider status establishes a rhetorical identity; it does not independently prove policy competence.

Logos, Trade Claims, and Historical Accuracy

The speech uses logos through statistics, historical references, and causal claims about manufacturing, trade deficits, factory closures, and China. Such evidence can strengthen persuasion, but a number is only as useful as its definition, baseline, and causal interpretation. The timing of China's accession to the World Trade Organization is particularly important. U.S. Trade Representative records show that China became a WTO member on December 11, 2001, after years of negotiations and after Congress had enacted permanent normal trade relations legislation in 2000 (Office of the United States Trade Representative [USTR], 2001). Hillary Clinton did not become secretary of state until 2009, so attributing China's WTO accession to her later service would be historically inaccurate. Research on the "China shock" nevertheless supports the conclusion that import competition produced concentrated employment losses and adjustment costs in some U.S. communities (Autor, Dorn, & Hanson, 2016). The stronger argument therefore separates valid criticism of trade-related disruption from imprecise assignment of personal responsibility. Logos depends not merely on selecting real economic pain but on connecting facts, dates, mechanisms, and proposed remedies accurately.

Populist Structure, Plain Speech, and Policy Complexity

The speech follows a recognizable populist structure by opposing ordinary citizens to political leaders, financial elites, multinational interests, and established institutions. This structure can draw attention to genuine failures of representation and unequal economic adjustment, but it can also make counterevidence harder to incorporate if criticism itself is framed as proof that the establishment is hostile to the candidate. Trump's plain style—short sentences, repetition, direct accusation, and strong superlatives—reinforces the message. Supporters may experience that language as authentic because it differs from polished political speech, while critics may hear exaggeration or insufficient qualification. Simplicity is not inherently misleading; democratic communication often requires complex issues to be made understandable. The relevant question is whether simplification preserves the most important facts and tradeoffs. A comprehensive economic argument would need to explain which industries might benefit from tariffs or incentives, what costs consumers and import-dependent firms could bear, how retaliation might affect exporters, and how retraining, infrastructure, labor standards, research, education, and regional investment would complement trade policy. Without that supporting layer, certainty can function rhetorically more strongly than analytically.

Conclusion

Trump's 2016 Monessen speech demonstrates how campaign rhetoric can transform economic change into a story about national identity, betrayal, and restoration. It builds pathos by recognizing

industrial loss, anger, pride, and hope; it builds ethos by presenting the candidate as an independent business outsider; and it uses logos through trade history and manufacturing statistics. The three appeals are intertwined rather than separable. The audience is invited to see itself as the productive core of the nation, while established leaders are portrayed as responsible for policies that weakened that core. The speech's rhetorical strength lies in recognition, identification, memorable opposition, and the promise of restored agency. Its analytical vulnerabilities lie in causal compression and historical imprecision. China's WTO accession, for example, occurred in December 2001, and responsibility for that policy belongs to a broader sequence of executive, congressional, and international decisions rather than to a later secretary of state (USTR, 2001). A rigorous assessment therefore explains why the message could persuade without treating persuasive effectiveness as proof that every factual claim or proposed remedy was complete.

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