

Article

Shaping the Political Image: Kamala Harris's Case

Vilma Linkevičiūtė 

Institute of Language, Literature and Translation Studies, Kaunas Faculty, Vilnius University, LT-44280 Kaunas, Lithuania; vilma.linkeviciute@knf.vu.lt

Abstract: This research aims at identifying the prevalent conceptual metaphors in Kamala Harris's discourse and analysing their role, function and significance in shaping her personal image and the image of her political opponent Donald Trump. This research was conducted using a qualitative research method and applying a conceptual framework, encompassing political discourse analysis and Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Harris's pre-election political discourse demonstrates a three-dimensional image formation model, including conceptual models as the main image shaping tool: conceptual metaphors aimed at Harris and the political party she represents; conceptual metaphors targeted at her political opponent Donald Trump; and bi-directional conceptual metaphors aimed at both competitors, but targeted at forming reverse images and evoking opposite connotations, with diverse goals. Conceptual metaphors, aimed at a positive formation of Harris's image, include the following: STATE IS A BUILDING, STATE IS A PERSON and POLITICS IS A PLANT. A negative image of Trump is shaped upon the following conceptual metaphors: POLITICS IS WAR, POLITICS IS CHAOS, POLITICS IS BUSINESS, POLITICS IS A RACE, POLITICS IS FICTION, POLITICS IS A BURDEN, and POLITICS IS A RELATIONSHIP. The bi-directional group comprises such conceptual metaphors as POLITICS IS A KNIFE, POLITICS IS A CRIME, POLITICS IS LOVE, POLITICS IS A JOURNEY and POLITICS IS A BOOK.

Keywords: conceptual metaphors; political discourse; political image



Academic Editor: Andreu Casero-Ripollés

Received: 15 April 2025

Revised: 14 May 2025

Accepted: 14 May 2025

Published: 17 May 2025

Citation: Linkevičiūtė, V. (2025). Shaping the Political Image: Kamala Harris's Case. *Journalism and Media*, 6(2), 75. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia6020075>

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1. Introduction

The year 2024 might be called a year of suspense, uncertainty and change in US politics due to the presidential election. Although both candidates—the Republican Donald Trump and the Democrat President Joe Biden, who was later replaced by the Vice President Kamala Harris—had had their loyal electorate for many years, harsh political rhetoric aimed at both political competitors proved to be an extremely powerful tool shaping the intended public opinion about the candidates and their opponents, helping to gain more votes and leading to the desired victory.

This research aims at identifying the prevalent conceptual metaphors in Kamala Harris's discourse and analysing their role, function and significance in shaping her personal image and the image of her political opponent Trump. Thus, this research highlights the relevance of political communication and cognitive linguistics in political discourse. Moreover, the Trump versus Harris presidential debate has been analysed in this study, which marks the significance and novelty of this research.

Political discourse has been within the scope of interest of many scholars. Van Dijk (1995, 1997, 1998, 1999) analyses political discourse, treating politicians as actors or agents of this type of discourse and defining their target audience as recipients. Furthermore, this scholar emphasises the relevance of critical discourse analysis and ideology in researching

political discourse. The interrelated ties between language, power and ideology, and their significance in political discourse, the discourse of politics, have been extensively analysed by Wodak (1989, 2009). The relevance of language and power in political discourse has been widely discussed by Fairclough (1989). Connolly (1993) defined and formulated the terms of political discourse. Fairclough, Wodak, Connolly and Van Dijk defined the fundamentals of research into political discourse. Moreover, political discourse has also been extensively studied by Chilton (2004), Dunmire (2012), Wilson (2015), Horbenko (2023), etc. Conceptual metaphors in political discourse have also been a popular research topic. Lapka (2021) analyses conceptual metaphors in British and American political discourse, Linkevičiūtė (2013, 2014, 2019) discusses the role of conceptual metaphors in British and American political discourse, metaphorical framing in political discourse has been analysed by Brugman et al. (2019), and Amaireh and Rababah (2024) conducted research of conceptual metaphors in Biden's and Harris's political communication. However, the role of conceptual metaphors in image formation in political discourse within the scope of the 2024 US presidential election has not been analysed, which emphasises the novelty of this research. This research demonstrates the convergence of political communication, political discourse and cognitive linguistics, and thus might be interesting not only for the scientists working in these fields, but also for a wider audience.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Political Discourse

Political discourse may be regarded as one of the most powerful types of discourse because it exploits manipulation as a tool to influence and persuade the target audience to achieve explicit or implicit aims. Critical discourse analysis is frequently used to identify and disclose these aims due to its multidisciplinary nature, including "intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture" (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 253).

Manipulation is frequently perceived as an integral part of political discourse, evoking negative connotations in the subconsciousness of the addressees. Whitfield defines manipulation as "An act of manipulation is any intentional attempt by an agent (A) to cause another agent (B) to will/prefer/intend/act other than what A takes B's will, preference or intention to be, where A does so utilizing methods that obscure and render deniable A's intentions vis a' vis B" (Whitfield, 2020, p. 21). However, Van Dijk (2006) distinguishes two types of manipulation in political discourse: illegitimate, which involves the abuse of power, and legitimate, which is a type of non-negative persuasion. "The crucial difference in this case is that in persuasion the interlocutors are free to believe or act as they please, depending on whether or not they accept the arguments of the persuader, whereas in manipulation recipients are typically assigned a more passive role: they are victims of manipulation" (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 361). The cognitive analysis of Harris's political discourse discusses the significance of target audiences' persuasion, based on Van Dijk's notion of "who speaks to whom, as what, on what occasion and with what goals" (Van Dijk, 2002, p. 225), but not manipulation. Furthermore, Van Dijk (2002) emphasises the role of political cognition, which encompasses political beliefs, the perception of political candidates, public opinion, impression formation, etc.

Persuasion is one of the crucial and most significant goals of competing candidates in election discourse because it enables politicians to position themselves as more attractive and competent than their opponents. Thus, Landowski (2007) draws a parallel between political discourse and advertising because both of them are based on persuasion and the relevance of success. The binary dichotomy I vs. They, which is explicitly exploited in political discourse, is based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which categorises the members of society into an ingroup and outgroup. Van Dijk (2011) high-

lights the relevance of the ideological square in political discourse, since it is aimed at the representation of group relations on the ideological level. The ideological square is formed on the basis of ideological pronouns Us and Them, where the emphasis is placed on Our good and Their bad things while de-emphasising Our bad and Their good things. The application this square is extremely significant in the formation of nominations, which are usually formed on the basis that We are positive and They are negative. According to Van Dijk (1995), positive description of the ingroup is built upon emphasis, assertion, hyperbole, high, prominent position, detailed description, argumentative support, etc. Conversely, the negative image of the outgroup is formed upon de-emphasis, denial, understatement, de-topicalization, low, non-prominent position, marginalisation, etc. Moreover, this dichotomy enables the political opponents to benefit from the positive self-presentation and the negative other presentation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). In conclusion, one of the major roles of the above-discussed binary dichotomy, within the scope of political discourse, is to form the positive image of the speaker and to persuade the target audience that the political opponent is not worth voting for.

2.2. Conceptual Metaphors in Political Discourse

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) has been explicitly used in analysing different types of discourse: medical (Bleakley, 2017; Navarro i Ferrando, 2021), legal (Chiu & Chiang, 2011; Esmer, 2021), academic (Haase, 2010; Thiele, 2013), etc. However, the role of conceptual metaphors in political discourse has not only gained popularity among scholars, communication professionals, and linguists, but has also become within the scope of interest of the societies that are directly influenced by the decisions and laws issued by politicians. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) emphasise the significance of concepts in our lives because they determine our perception, behaviour and relationships, and make the conclusion that our conceptual system is metaphorical. The core notion of Conceptual Metaphor Theory states that individuals understand one domain or idea in terms of another domain, which marks the benefit of simplification of complex political language and makes it more persuasive for the target audience—the electorate. Therefore, Kövecses (2015) makes a conclusion that conceptual metaphors help their users to achieve the intended rhetorical aims. Furthermore, conceptual metaphors are extremely persuasive in political discourse because they capture the attention of the target audience, are better recalled and perceived and are more interesting than non-metaphorical language (McGuire, 2000).

Conceptual metaphors are also a helpful and effective tool to form the intended image of politicians themselves and their political opponents. According to Mio, metaphors “allow the general public to grasp the meanings of political events and feel a part of the process” (Mio, 1997, p. 130). Otieno et al. (2016) identify two functions of conceptual metaphors in political discourse, pragmatic and strategic, and discuss their significance in shaping political, economic and social perception. Finally, Carver and Pikalo (2008) arrive at a conclusion that conceptual metaphors either explicitly or implicitly affect, influence and shape our political perception, which marks the significance of metaphorical language in political discourse.

3. Materials and Methods

This research is based on the transcript of a presidential debate (10 September 2024) between Vice President Kamala Harris and the Republican candidate, former US President Donald Trump. Although there were more debates planned, Trump rejected the invitation to the second debate; thus, the research material comprises a single debate. The data for the analysis were sourced from the official media website ABC News (US), available on <https://abcnews.go.com> (accessed on 30 April 2025) (Hoffman, 2024). The analysis comprised the

identification of prevalent conceptual metaphors in Harris's political discourse, targeted at herself and her political opponent Trump. Further, the role, functions and significance of the identified conceptual metaphors, shaping the image of Harris and Trump, were analysed.

This research was conducted using a qualitative research method and applying a conceptual framework, encompassing political discourse analysis and Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Furthermore, the analysis included the identification of and research into linguistic, rhetorical and cognitive markers, significant for image formation in political discourse. The reconstruction of metaphorical linguistic manifestations of conceptual metaphors, based on cross-domain mappings, was carried out. The rhetorical effect of conceptual metaphors on the target audience within the scope of the presidential election was analysed, and the cognitive conceptions of the electorate in shaping the image of both political candidates were discussed. Therefore, this research demonstrates a multilayer analysis including and combining political rhetoric, political discourse and cognitive linguistics.

4. Results and Discussion

Kamala Harris's pre-election discourse demonstrates a three-dimensional image formation model, including conceptual models as the main image shaping tool: conceptual metaphors aimed at Harris and the political party she represents; conceptual metaphors targeted at her political opponent Donald Trump; and bi-directional conceptual metaphors aimed at both competitors, but with opposite connotations and goals.

The first dimension—conceptual metaphors aimed at shaping a positive image of Harris as the future president of the USA—is rather scanty, implying the idea that the Democrat candidate is confident in her competence, professionalism and the support of the electorate. She forms a good personal image, focusing on the concepts truly relevant for American society. Firstly, she builds her image on the foundation of the American Dream—home ownership; therefore, Harris talks about politics in terms of construction and forms the already classical STATE IS A BUILDING conceptual metaphor:

1. *I believe in the ambition, the aspirations, the dreams of the American people. And that is why I imagine and have actually a plan to build what I call an opportunity economy.*
2. *What we have done and what I intend to do is build on what we know are the aspirations and the hopes of the American people.*
3. *I intend to be a president for all Americans and focus on what we can do over the next 10 and 20 years to build back up our country by investing right now in you the American people.*

In example 1, Harris emphasises the image of her as the president who not only is society-oriented, aware of its dreams and ambitions, but also has a clear plan on how to improve the lives of all the American people. Thus, she promises to build an opportunity economy. Here, the STATE IS A BUILDING conceptual metaphor is signified by the noun *opportunity*, which refers to the idea that each member of American society will equally benefit from Harris's plan, which will have a solid foundation of opportunity and implies the idea that the political opponent Trump is not interested in equal opportunities for every member of society. The STATE IS A BUILDING metaphor in example 2 complements the image of Harris as a caring, society-oriented politician who is a common member of American society, one of them, one of the ingroup; thus, she is familiar with their hopes and aspirations, and intends to rely on them while building a new, better country for each member of society, not only for the rich and the privileged. Moreover, Harris emphasises that the process of building a new country has already been initiated and developed by the Democrat Party and the President Joe Biden. Various surveys showed that the bigger part of the American electorate supported the Democrats and their political decisions; however, President Biden was no longer a strong leader, both physically and politically. Thus, Harris's emphasis on the already ongoing, positive and beneficial building process,

initiated by the Democrats, shapes her image as a really strong candidate who will continue their political strategy. Example 3 demonstrates Harris's determination to become the president and confidence in herself. Furthermore, it implicitly counterpositions Harris and Trump due to the fact that Harris promises *to build back up our country*, implying the idea that the state's building was destroyed and ruined by the previous President Trump; thus, now it has to be restored and reconstructed by the Democrats and Harris herself.

The positive image of Harris as a caring political leader might be further shaped by treating the country as a live organism. Thus, a conceptual metaphor STATE IS A PERSON is used in her political discourse:

4. *My plan is to give a \$50,000 tax deduction to start-up small businesses, knowing they are part of the backbone of America's economy.*

Here, Harris positions herself as a professional who has the competence to take care of an economically weak state in the same manner as of an ill, and therefore weak, person. The backbone of a person, similarly to the backbone of the state, is crucial physical and metaphorical support; thus, the emphasis on Harris's plan to initiate and maintain actions, aimed at strengthening that support, refers to the idea that she is going to make America a strong and firm state. Her promise is built upon a particular plan, including real numbers, and ironically forms an opposition to Trump's vision "let's make America great again", which is constructed upon his personal ambitions, but not the welfare of American society.

A positive and beneficial image of Harris is emphasised by applying farming metaphors, because she treats health care politics as a plant and forms the POLITICS IS A PLANT conceptual metaphor:

5. *Well, first of all, I absolutely support and over the last four years as vice president private health care options. But what we need to do is maintain and grow the Affordable Care Act.*

Example 5 presents and depicts Harris as a modern, flexible future president, the *president for all Americans* (see ex. 3), because she simultaneously supports private health care and affordable health care. However, she highlights the necessity to grow *the Affordable Care Act*, which positions Harris as a caring politician who aims at making affordable health care services regardless of a person's income or status, as the symbol and representation of equality and opportunity. Thus, the conceptual metaphors STATE IS A BUILDING, STATE IS A PERSON, and POLITICS IS A PLANT, merely and explicitly aimed at Kamala Harris, shape an extremely positive image of a caring, responsible, modern political leader who is one of the members of American society, one of them, a member of an ingroup, not an outsider, which increases the attractiveness of the candidate for the target audience.

The second, much broader, dimension of Harris's political discourse includes conceptual metaphors aimed at her political opponent and competitor—Trump. The most prevalent conceptual metaphor targeted by Harris at Trump is POLITICS IS WAR, which has negative connotations and, simultaneously, shapes an extremely negative image of Trump because he does not fight for the welfare of the USA; he fights against it. Moreover, Harris exploits this conceptual metaphor to emphasise the detrimental nature of Trump's war:

6. *Donald Trump left us the worst attack on our democracy since the Civil War. And what we have done is clean up Donald Trump's mess.*
7. *To stand for country. To stand for our democracy. To stand for rule of law. And to end the chaos. And to end the approach that is about attacking the foundations of our democracy 'cause you don't like the outcome.*
8. *Well, let's be clear that the Trump administration resulted in a trade deficit, one of the highest we've ever seen in the history of America. He invited trade wars, you want to talk about his*

deal with China what he ended up doing is under Donald Trump's presidency he ended up selling American chips to China [...].

9. *And I'd invite you to know that Donald Trump actually has no plan for you, because he is more interested in defending himself than he is in looking out for you.*
10. *Understand, this is someone who has openly said he would terminate, I'm quoting, terminate the constitution of the United States. That he would weaponize the Department of Justice against his political enemies.*

Examples 6 and 7 depict Trump as an extremely dangerous politician and personality because he has been fighting against one of the fundamental US political values—democracy. Normally, in non-totalitarian states, the president is perceived as someone who should strive for protecting democracy, freedom of speech and expression. However, Trump is positioned as the politician who has already started attacking democracy in his previous term of office, and is determined to finish this war and to deprive American society of rights granted by the Constitution. The building metaphors, employed by Harris to shape her positive image, are based on the noun *foundations* in example 7, and serve as a strict opposition between her and Trump by emphasising the idea that she wants to build a strong, democratic state, but her political opponent keeps attacking and destroying its foundation. Furthermore, the negative image of Trump is intensified by the expression *the worst attack on our democracy since the Civil War*, which explicitly nominates Trump as the worst and the most detrimental political leader since the 19th century. Harris's discourse demonstrates one more conceptual metaphor, which might be identified in examples 6 and 7—POLITICS IS CHAOS—and which is inseparable from the negative consequences of Trump's war against democracy. The statement *and what we have done is clean up Donald Trump's mess* enables Harris to define Trump's political actions in terms of mess and chaos, complementing the already negative image of her political opponent and indicating that such a person cannot be re-elected to the presidency. Moreover, Harris counterpositions herself and the Democrats against Trump and evokes positive connotations attributed to her candidature for the president's post because she has already saved the USA by cleaning up Trump's mess, and has proved her political competence and personal care of American society. Finally, she complements her already positively shaped image by promising *to stand for country; to stand for our democracy; to stand for rule of law; to end the chaos*. Harris further emphasises the negative and even aggressive nature of Trump's politics because his actions and political decisions instigate international war conflicts. In example 8, Harris accuses her political competitor of *inviting trade wars* between the USA and China that had an extremely negative impact on the US economy and *resulted in a trade deficit*.

The negative image of Trump is further formed by emphasising his egoism, selfishness, and prioritization of his personal interests rather than the interests of the state. Thus, he exploits war as a tool to protect himself and to eliminate his opponents. In example 9, the image of a selfish and egoistic person is shaped on the basis of the following statement, including an explicit and harsh accusation—*Donald Trump actually has no plan for you, because he is more interested in defending himself*. Example 10 demonstrates that Trump perceives his opponents as enemies and politics as a weapon, in the form of the Department of Justice, which will be used to fight against and, finally, eliminate *his political enemies*. The elimination of political opponents recurrently demonstrates the fact that Trump is inclined to violate the fundamental right to democracy in the USA.

Donald Trump has always been more associated with business than with politics. Moreover, he has been applying business principles in politics; thus, Harris shapes his political image by forming a conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS BUSINESS:

11. *[...] under Donald Trump's presidency he ended up selling American chips to China to help them improve and modernize their military basically sold us out when a policy about*

China should be in making sure the United States of America wins the competition for the 21st century.

12. *And the American people have a right to rely on a president who understands the significance of America's role and responsibility in terms of ensuring that there is stability and ensuring we stand up for our principles and not sell them for the benefit of personal flattery.*
13. *I meet with people all the time who tell me "Can we please just have discourse about how we're going to invest in the aspirations and the ambitions and the dreams of the American people?" Knowing that regardless of people's color or the language their grandmother speaks we all have the same dreams and aspirations and want a president who invests in those, not in hate and division.*

The conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS BUSINESS intensifies the negative image of Trump as giving priority to his personal interests rather than the interests of the USA. In example 11, Trump is explicitly blamed for *selling us out*, where *us* stands for American society. Here, the business metaphor implies the idea that he sold the country together with its citizens. This conceptual metaphor is aimed at forming the intended image of Trump as the most dangerous, ruthless and egoistic political leader, who would be the worst and the most detrimental choice for the electorate. Examples 12 and 13 implicitly express the negative and malign nature of Trump's political actions because he is inclined to sell the principles and values of the American people *for the benefit of personal flattery*. In example 12, Trump is positioned as an incompetent businessperson because egocentrism, leading to narcissism, is more important for him than a real and tangible profit. In example 13, the statement, indicating that people *want a president who invests in those, not in hate and division*, implicitly depicts Trump as the businessperson who invests in the wrong values, such as *hate and division*. Here, Trump is positioned not only as an incompetent businessperson, but also as a personality who is indifferent to core moral values, who induces and provokes *hate and division*, which should be combated in democratic societies. Conversely, in the same example, Harris implicitly grants herself a positive image of a political leader and personality who is not remote because she speaks with Americans, who is aware of their expectations, aspirations, dreams and ambitions, and who is ready to fulfil them if she wins the presidential election.

In Harris's political discourse, Trump is also depicted as perceiving politics in terms of race and competition. Therefore, a conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A RACE might be identified as aimed at her political opponent:

14. *Well, first of all, it's important to remind the former president you're not running against Joe Biden, you're running against me. I believe the reason that Donald Trump says that this war would be over within 24 hours is because he would just give it up. And that's not who we are as Americans.*

The POLITICS IS A RACE conceptual metaphor is used within the context of the presidential debate when Trump shifts from discussion with Harris to the expression of his pejorative and contemptuous attitude towards the President Joe Biden. Thus, Harris reminds him who the real competitor is that Trump is *running against*. This conceptual metaphor signifies the intended image of Trump as being a weak, poorly trained competitor and unscrupulously self-proclaimed winner of the race *because he would just give it up*. Furthermore, the polarisation of US society is implicitly expressed in the last sentence of example 14, since Harris identifies herself as a member of society, of the ingroup—*we are as Americans*—while Trump is implicitly depicted as one of the outsiders, a member of the outgroup. This polarisation forms Trump's image as being distant from society and indifferent to its values—and *that's not who we are as Americans*.

The unconventional conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS FICTION, aimed at Trump, implies references to mental health disorders and is targeted at raising a question in the elec-

torate's subconsciousness of whether a mentally unstable person meets the requirements for eligibility to be elected to the office of president:

15. *You will see during the course of his rallies he talks about fictional characters like Hannibal Lecter. He will talk about windmills cause cancer.*

The image of a mentally unstable, delusional person is constructed upon Trump's focus on fictional characters, such as Hannibal Lecter, rather than on real issues or action plans in his pre-election discourse. The POLITICS IS FICTION conceptual metaphor demonstrates that Trump relies on a distorted image of politics and the world. Furthermore, this metaphor enables the target audience to perceive and position Trump as a propagandist and advocate of conspiracy theories because *he will talk about windmills cause cancer*. A sensible and competent political leader would never support or share untrustworthy and scientifically non-proven information, and would never include it in their political campaign. Further, Harris reveals that for Trump politics is not only fiction, but also an obstacle that needs to be eliminated. Thus, a conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A BURDEN might be identified in Harris's political discourse:

16. *When Donald Trump was president, 60 times he tried to get rid of the Affordable Care Act. 60 times. [...] No, you don't get rid of the Affordable Care Act. You have no plan.*

Example 16 depicts the idea that Trump is against the Affordable Care Act, which is a political burden that he intends to get rid of. Trump, being a representative of the American upper class, can afford private health care; therefore, the Affordable Care Act is not within the scope of his interest. Moreover, the fact that *60 times he tried to get rid of this Act* shows the scope and relevance of this burden to Trump and the urge to eliminate it. However, Harris takes advantage of turning this burden into a direct benefit for shaping her positive and beneficial image in the subconsciousness of the electorate and implicitly promises to discourage Trump from getting rid of the affordable health care plan—*no, you don't get rid of the Affordable Care Act*. Finally, the words *you have no plan* mark the insignificance of Trump's words and actions, and position him as a weak political competitor in presidential election.

Even within the scope of friendship, Trump gains bad publicity, represented by a conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A RELATIONSHIP, because the latter candidate perceives his relationship with the dictator Putin as friendship:

17. *And why don't you tell the 800,000 Polish Americans right here in Pennsylvania how quickly you would give up for the sake of favor and what you think is a friendship with what is known to be a dictator who would eat you for lunch.*

This distorted image of a relationship positions Trump as a politician who lacks core moral values and who is not able to perceive the negative consequences of such a false friendship or does not even care about them. The last sentence in example 17 demonstrates irony and sarcasm as Trump is ready to *give up for the sake of this friendship*, but the friend Putin does not have any moral values and does not treat this relationship similarly. He is a cold, pragmatic *dictator who would eat you for lunch*. Thus, the POLITICS IS A RELATIONSHIP conceptual metaphor not only functions as an image formation tool, but is also employed to warn Trump and American society of a possible danger as the final outcome of such a relationship.

The third dimension of Harris's political discourse encompasses bi-directional conceptual metaphors, targeted at Harris herself and Trump. These conceptual metaphors serve an important evaluative function and evoke positive connotations when forming a positive image of Harris and, simultaneously, are employed to shape a negative image of her political opponent. Harris's pre-election discourse is built on her professional career in law as an attorney. Thus, she perceives politics in terms of crime and forms several conceptual metaphors within the scope of crime. The POLITICS IS A KNIFE conceptual

metaphor enables Harris to demonstrate to the target audience that she uses this knife with the intention to help the US society, while Trump exploits it for his own benefit:

18. *And I intend on extending a tax cut for those families of \$6000, which is the largest child tax credit that we have given in a long time. So that those young families can afford to buy a crib, buy a car seat, buy clothes for their children. [...] My opponent, on the other hand, his plan is to do what he has done before, which is to provide a tax cut for billionaires and big corporations, which will result in \$5 trillion to America's deficit.*

The image of a caring and emphatic politician is built upon the promise *and I intend on extending a tax cut for those families of \$6000*. Furthermore, she shapes not only an extremely positive personal image, but the party image, as well, which is encoded in the inclusive personal pronoun *we*, which stands for the Democratic Party. Although blank weapons always evoke negative connotations, a knife, used as a tool in Harris's politics, serves the role of a means of positive image formation because it is used for the benefit of the society and not against it. However, when the knife is used by Trump, it functions as protection only for the interests of the rich, including Trump, who make up a minor part of US society. Further, Harris forms a more general bi-directional conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS A CRIME:

19. *My work that is about protecting social security and Medicare is based on long-standing work that I have done. Protecting seniors from scams.*
20. *I will be a president that will protect our fundamental rights and freedoms including the right of a woman to make decisions about her own body and not have her government tell her what to do.*
21. *But you know what happened to that bill? Donald Trump got on the phone, called up some folks in Congress, and said kill the bill.*
22. *And on that day, the president of the United States incited a violent mob to attack our nation's Capitol, to desecrate our nation's Capitol.*

In examples 19–20, Harris is depicted as a protector against crime while Trump in examples 21–22 is portrayed as a criminal. Harris's preventive and protecting actions in politics coincide with her former professional career, working as an attorney. She emphasises the fact that she has already been *protecting social security and Medicare, protecting seniors* and makes a strong promise to widen the scope of protection, including *fundamental rights and freedoms*, into her politics as a future president. Moreover, in example 20, Harris positions herself as a member of the ingroup, using an inclusive pronoun *our* and ensuring the citizens' fundamental right to make their own, non-imposed decisions. Conversely, Trump is depicted as a killer and an instigator of criminal behaviour. In example 21, Trump is accused of using criminal terminology and saying *kill the bill*. He wants to kill a border security bill that might ensure the prosecution of transnational criminal organisations for such serious crimes as human, drug and gun trafficking. Thus, the image of Trump as a US security and welfare killer is formed. Trump is further accused of inciting *a violent mob to attack the Capitol*. Here, Trump is presented as a member of an outgroup, a stranger who encroaches on the wealth of the ingroup, which is defined as *our nation's Capitol*. The image of a merciless and brutal criminal is intensified by the verb *to desecrate*, since Trump is portrayed as being guilty of desecrating one of the most important US institutions—the Capitol. The POLITICS IS A CRIME conceptual metaphor is not only used by Harris to form a positive personal image and a negative image of her political opponent, but it is also aimed at raising doubts regarding Trump's credibility and legality in the subconsciousness of his electorate.

POLITICS IS LOVE is another bi-directional conceptual metaphor identified in Harris's political discourse and targeted at herself and her political competitor:

23. *I love our small businesses.*
24. *It is well known he exchanged love letters with Kim Jong un.*

Although the concept of love always evokes positive connotations and emotions, in Harris's discourse, love is a broad term that encompasses both positive and negative feelings. The POLITICS IS LOVE metaphor portrays Harris as a loving and caring politician demonstrating a wide scope of feelings—from people to organisations. However, Trump's love shapes an extremely negative and repulsive image of a political leader due to the object of his love—the notorious dictator of North Korea Kim Jong Un. The latter political leader has a global negative image; he is a distinct representative of an outgroup on the global arena, but this fact does not deter Trump from sending his love letters to Kim Jong Un.

Harris's political discourse includes two interrelated and inseparable conceptual metaphors, POLITICS IS A JOURNEY and POLITICS IS A BOOK, aimed at shaping the intended personal political image and the image of her opponent Trump:

25. *It is important that we move forward, that we turn the page on this same old tired rhetoric. And address the needs of the American people, address what we need to do about the housing shortage, which I have a plan for. Address what we must do to support our small businesses. [...] But frankly, the American people are exhausted with the same old tired playbook.*
26. *So for everyone watching who remembers what January 6th was, I say we don't have to go back. Let's not go back. We're not going back. It's time to turn the page. [...] Let's turn the page on this. Let's not go back. Let's chart a course for the future and not go backwards to the past.*
27. *Let's turn the page and move forward.*
28. *So I think you've heard tonight two very different visions for our country. One that is focused on the future and the other that is focused on the past. And an attempt to take us backward. But we're not going back. And I do believe that the American people know we all have so much more in common than what separates us and we can chart a new way forward.*

Examples 25–27 demonstrate Harris's perception of politics in terms of a journey and a book. Further, they involve an explicit counterposition between her and her political opponent due to the fact that a new page in US politics and history and a way leading forward are associated with Harris and her political actions. Trump, on the contrary, is depicted in terms of an old book and a journey bringing the US society backwards. In example 25, Harris expresses her personal intention and a promise to find a better way, the way of change, leading forward and addressing *the needs of the American people*. She emphasises the significance of this forward-leading journey by confirming that she already has a plan regarding how to achieve it. Moreover, here, the inclusive pronoun *we* enables Harris to position herself as one of the ingroup, as a common member of US society. The journey forward is contrasted with the image of an old book—*we turn the page on this same old tired rhetoric; the same old tired playbook*. The old and tired book imagery is implicitly targeted at Trump and creates his negative image based on the negative connotative meaning of the latter adjectives within the scope of politics, and is based on the assumption that the leader of one of the most powerful countries in the world cannot be old-fashioned and stagnant. This negative image is further emphasised by Harris's statement that *the American people are exhausted with the same old tired playbook*. The way leading backwards and the imagery of an old book in example 26 are also aimed at evoking US society's memories of 6 January 2021, the attack on the US Capitol, and shaping a negative image of Trump by Harris's recurring call *let's not go back, let's turn the page on this*, referring to a similar, negative result of Trump's detrimental actions and egoism. In example 26, Harris positions herself as a totally different, modern politician who offers Americans an alternative way, leading to a progressive future—*let's chart a course for the future and not go backwards to the past*. The same call and invitation to choose a different way and a new page in the history of the

USA is repeatedly expressed in example 27 within the context of opportunities for a new generation of Americans. The recurring metaphors of a new page and the way leading forward shapes the image of a confident, strong, professional and competent political leader who has a clear future vision for her society. The implicit counterposition between Harris, Trump and their political visions is expressed in example 27, which is further validated and emphasised in example 28, where Harris explicitly draws a distinction between her and her political opponent. Trump is depicted as going backwards and Harris as moving forward. Normally, new things, ideas and concepts evoke positive connotations in the human subconsciousness while the concept of the old is usually perceived as negative and stagnant. Thus, *POLITICS IS A JOURNEY* and *POLITICS IS A BOOK* enable Harris to shape her own image of a modern and progressive political leader; however, Trump is presented as an old-fashioned, unprogressive, unchanging politician whose actions have been unbeneficial and even detrimental. Therefore, they should be terminated and the course of such actions should be totally reversed.

In conclusion, Harris employs conceptual metaphors in her political discourse as a really powerful tool aimed at shaping the intended public and political image of herself and her political opponent Donald Trump. She benefits from unidirectional conceptual metaphors, targeted merely at herself or at her political competitor, and bi-directional conceptual metaphors, simultaneously aimed at both of them, creating her own positive image and forming a negative image of Trump in the subconsciousness of not only her target audience, but of the global community, as well. Furthermore, this research demonstrates the imbalance in the number of conceptual metaphors—the number of conceptual metaphors aimed at Trump highly outnumbers the metaphors aimed at Harris. Such imbalance definitely refers to Harris's confidence in her victory in the presidential election. Moreover, placing greater emphasis on a political opponent rather than on the politician himself/herself is a prominent feature of pre-election discourse, as it is mainly targeted at shaping a negative image of a political competitor, leading to the self-evident conclusion that one politician is much more unscrupulous than the other, and thus discouraging the electorate from voting for him/her.

5. Conclusions

This research was aimed at identifying and analysing conceptual metaphors in Kamala Harris's political discourse in the pre-election period (2024), their role and functions in shaping her own image and the image of her political opponent Donald Trump, and the effect of the identified conceptual metaphors on the target audience. The analysis demonstrated that Harris applied a three-dimensional image formation model, including conceptual models as the main image shaping tool: conceptual metaphors aimed at Harris and the Democrats—the political party she represents; conceptual metaphors targeted at her political opponent Trump; and bi-directional conceptual metaphors aimed at both presidential candidates, but targeted at forming reverse images, evoking opposite connotations and serving diverse goals.

Conceptual metaphors, aimed at a positive formation of Harris's image, include the following: *STATE IS A BUILDING*, *STATE IS A PERSON* and *POLITICS IS A PLANT*. These metaphors enable the candidate to shape the image of a caring, responsible, modern political leader who positions herself as an ordinary member of American society, one of the American citizens, one of them—a member of an ingroup—which increases the attractiveness of the candidate for the target audience.

A negative image of Harris's political opponent Trump is shaped upon the following conceptual metaphors: *POLITICS IS WAR*, *POLITICS IS CHAOS*, *POLITICS IS BUSINESS*, *POLITICS IS A RACE*, *POLITICS IS FICTION*, *POLITICS IS A BURDEN* and *POLITICS*

IS A RELATIONSHIP. War metaphors position Trump as an extremely negative and dangerous political leader due to the detrimental consequences of his war against the welfare of US society and democracy. Furthermore, the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS WAR emphasises Trump's egoism, prioritising his personal interests rather than the interests of the state as he exploits this war to protect himself and to eliminate his opponents. The POLITICS IS CHAOS conceptual metaphor is inseparable from the negative consequences of Trump's war, and thus enables Harris to define Trump's political actions in terms of mess and chaos, complementing the already negative image of her political opponent and indicating that such a person cannot be re-elected to the presidency. POLITICS IS BUSINESS intensifies the negative image of Trump as giving priority to his personal interests rather than the interests of the USA. This conceptual metaphor enables Harris to accuse Trump of selling the country, the citizens and their core values. The POLITICS IS A RACE conceptual metaphor signifies the intended image of Trump as being a weak, poorly trained competitor and unscrupulously self-proclaimed winner of the race. The image of a mentally unstable, delusional person is constructed upon the POLITICS IS FICTION conceptual metaphor, which is also targeted at raising a question of whether such a person meets the requirements for eligibility to be elected to the office of president. The image of Trump as an egoistic and selfish candidate is further formed on the basis of the POLITICS IS A BURDEN conceptual metaphor in reference to the Affordable Care Act, which Trump treats as a political burden and intends to get rid of. Even relationships acquire negative connotations within the scope of Trump's image formation. Harris forms the POLITICS IS A RELATIONSHIP conceptual metaphor targeted at Trump's friendship with the dictator Putin, and the dangerous and even detrimental consequences of such relationship.

The third group of conceptual metaphors in Harris's political discourse encompasses bi-directional conceptual metaphors, targeted at Harris herself and her opponent Trump. These conceptual metaphors serve an important evaluative function and evoke positive connotations when forming a positive image of Harris and, simultaneously, are employed to shape a negative image of her political competitor. This group comprises such conceptual metaphors as POLITICS IS A KNIFE, POLITICS IS A CRIME, POLITICS IS LOVE, POLITICS IS A JOURNEY and POLITICS IS A BOOK. Although the noun knife usually evokes negative connotations, Harris uses it with good intentions aimed at helping American society and, thus, shapes her own image of a caring and emphatic politician. However, Trump exploits this blank weapon to protect only the interests of the rich, including Trump himself. The POLITICS IS A CRIME conceptual metaphor enables Harris to position herself as a defender of US society within the context of crime and Trump is depicted as a criminal. Love is also a bivalent concept in Harris's political discourse; therefore, the POLITICS IS LOVE metaphor portrays Harris as a loving and caring politician demonstrating a wide scope of feelings—from people to organisations. Conversely, Trump's love shapes an extremely negative and repulsive image of the political leader due to the object of his love—the dictator of North Korea Kim Jong Un. Finally, two inseparable conceptual metaphors POLITICS IS A JOURNEY and POLITICS IS A BOOK are used as image formation tools, aimed at both Harris and Trump. These conceptual metaphors enable Harris to shape her own image of a modern and progressive political leader who perceives politics as a journey leading to a progressive future and as a new page of a book, which refers to beneficial changes for US society. Trump, on the contrary, looks back; therefore, he is positioned as an old-fashioned, unprogressive, unchanging politician whose actions have been unbeneficial and even detrimental.

In conclusion, conceptual metaphors are powerful instruments that are successfully employed by politicians and political leaders with the aim of forming the intended public and political image of themselves and their opponents or competitors, shaping political

opinion and manipulating the perception of their target audience. However, the election results show that although conceptual metaphors enabled Harris to create the intended negative image of her political opponent Trump, they did not secure her the victory in the 2024 US presidential election. Thus, future research into linguistic, rhetorical and cognitive instruments used by Donald Trump in his pre-election discourse might be conducted.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Research data can be found on <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/harris-trump-presidential-debate-transcript/story?id=113560542> (accessed on 30 April 2025).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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