

**EMOTIONAL POLITICS IN THE AGE OF TRUMPISM:
Analyzing the Emotional Discourses of
Trumpist and Anti-Trumpist Political Leaders***

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the political importance of emotions in the age of Trumpism and how political actors both on the right and the left have tried to activate and channel those emotions. Political life is often portrayed as the realm of reason and interests. However, any careful analysis of politics shows that the mobilization of emotions is an intrinsic part of politics and a force for good as much as ill. Donald Trump and JD Vance have been quick to recognize and mobilize emotions. However, anti-Trump political leaders – most notably, Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Zohran Mamdani – have also strongly appealed to emotions in order to mobilize their followers. This paper analyzes how Trumpists and their left wing opponents have appealed in particular to the emotions of loss and sadness, shame, fear, distrust, anger, and hope. In this analysis, the paper draws on key concepts in the sociology, psychology, and political science of emotions and of social movements. These concepts include emotion work or management, emotional discourses, symbolic power, collective identity, collective action frames, and symbolic boundaries.

Key Words: politics of emotions, emotion work, emotional discourses, collective identity, collective action frames, Trump, Trumpists, anti-Trumpists, populism, social movements

Political analysis and theory tend to be dominated by the view that good policy and good politics require less emotion and more reason. Emotions are often seen as alien forces that need to be excluded from politics because they interfere with rational, dispassionate deliberation (Hutchison, 2016; Marcus, 2000; Venizelos, 2023; Westen, 2007, pp. 133-141). As Giorgos Venizelos notes, “the hegemony of rationalism has excluded emotions from socio-political analyses, framing parties and movements appealing to emotions as folksy or mad. This framework missed the significance of discourse, be it words, gestures or symbols, in the structuring of socio-political reality” (Venizelos, 2023, p. 651).

Any careful analysis of politics shows that emotions are an intrinsic and inescapable part of politics. As Rohlinger & Klein note, “Emotion is pervasive in social life. It provides the very passion that motivates individuals to get involved in movements and lays the foundation for the commitment necessary to sustain activism over the long haul. It is not surprising, then, that leaders try to cultivate emotions that will grow movement support and advance their political goals” (Rohlinger & Klein, 2014, p. 125).

Numerous studies show that emotions powerfully affect whether people participate politically and the ways in which they do so (Demertzis, 2020; Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001; Jasper, 1998, 2011, 2018; Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019). For example, anger is a particularly potent spur to political participation, particularly among less politically sophisticated actors (Brader & Marcus, 2013; Demertzis, 2020; Fording & Schram, 2017; Kaempfer & Mutz, 2014; Phillips & Plutzer, 2023; Redlawsk & Mattes, 2022).

Right wing political actors historically have been quick to activate and mobilize emotions. Notable examples have been European fascist leaders in the 1920s and 1930s and, in the United States, white supremacist and nativist movements of the 19th and 20th centuries

(Lowenthal & Guterman, 2021[1949]; McVeigh & Estep, 2019). Similarly, Donald Trump's MAGA movement has been fueled very powerfully by appeals to emotions such as fear, shame, distrust, and anger (Hart, 2020; Hochschild, 2016, 2020, 2024a, 2024b; Lamont, Park, and Ayala-Hurtado, 2017; Smith, 2024). This reliance on emotional appeals means that Trumpian politics are far more coherent than anti-Trumpists acknowledge, but it is an emotional rather than logical coherence (Hochschild, 2020; Jasper, 2018, p. 168). As Arlie Russell Hochschild observes,

Pundits ask about "Trump's strategy" and search for logic and fact in a campaign platform that does not exist.... All of this incoherence leads some analysts to conclude Trump has no strategy. But he has one. It's an emotional strategy and it works like magic. Its aim is to evoke or suppress a range of emotions – fear, depression, anger at "fake Americans", love of "real Americans" and, above all, awe of himself. In pursuit of this strategy, emotion is everything. (Hochschild, 2020)

Trump's political standing may be weakening and he will be leaving office in 2029. Still, there is every reason to think that his Republican successors -- whether JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Josh Hawley, or Ted Cruz -- will also be speaking strongly to people's emotions (Bump, 2021; Confessore, 2022; Hawley, 2019, 2025; Rubio, 2019, 2020; Vance, 2021, 2024a, 2024f, 2024i).

For many on the left, political appeals relying on emotions are deeply disquieting. An appeal to emotions seems inimical to an appeal to reason and is reminiscent of the appeals of European fascist leaders and their American analogues on the far right (Dolger, 2016; Lowenthal & Guterman, 2021 [1949]; Marcus, 2000; McVeigh & Estep, 2019; Mouffe, 2022;

Rohlinger & Klein, 2014). As a result, leftists – particularly liberal incrementalists -- are far more comfortable making reasoned, policy-oriented appeals to beliefs, values, and interests rather than mobilizing emotions (Mouffe, 2022). Unfortunately, Chantal Mouffe argues, this rationalist orientation has greatly hampered the political efficacy of the left:

The belief that one should only use rational arguments and avoid appealing to affects leads to policies with which people cannot identify because they do not recognize in them their own problems, frustrations, and demands.... Policies that neglect to address those affects are unlikely to find resonance among the people.
(Mouffe, 2022, p. 42)

In fact, appeals to emotion are not absent from left politics (Demertzis, 2020; Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001; Jasper, 1998, 2011, 2018; Venizelos, 2023). The great progressive policy surge of the New Deal, the Great Society, and the early 1970s could not have happened without the role of emotions such as fear, anger, and hope in driving the rise of the labor movement of the 1930s and the civil rights, feminist, gay rights, and environmental movements of the 1950s through 1970s (Dolgert, 2016; Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001; Gould, 2009; Jasper, 2018; McAdam, 1982). And today, left anti-Trumpist political leaders such as Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Zohran Mamdani have actively mobilized such feelings as loss, fear, distrust, anger, and hope.

In what follows, I will analyze the political importance of various emotions in the age of Trumpism. I will explore how both right and left political leaders have mobilized these

particular emotions: loss and sadness, shame, fear, distrust, anger, and hope.² I have three reasons for focusing on these particular emotions. First, they abound in the rhetoric and practice of both the Trumpist and anti-Trumpist political movements (Hart, 2018; Hochschild, 2016, 2024a; Lamont, Park, and Ayala-Hurtado, 2017; Mercieca, 2000; Schrock et al., 2017) and in the rhetoric and practice of many other social and political movements as well (Brader & Marcus, 2013; Ganz, 2024: 62-65; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 2013, pp. 155-163; Haugaard, 2020: chaps. 7-8; Jasper, 2018; Jost, 2017; Jost, Gaucher, & Stern, 2015; Taber & Young, 2013; Westen, 2007, p. 122; Yordy, Durnova, & Weible, 2024). Secondly, they have been extensively studied by political psychologists (Brader & Marcus, 2013; Huddy et al., 2013; Jost, 2017; Westen, 2007) and sociologists of emotions (Hochschild, 2016, 2024; Jasper, 2018; Scheff, 1988, 2003; Turner & Stets, 2006). Thirdly, these particular emotions interlock in powerful ways. Loss and sadness easily bleed into shame and fear, and all of these emotions can be transmuted into distrust and anger, which are among the most powerful propellants of political movements. Hope stands apart from these emotions but it plays a crucial gatekeeping role. An absence of hope can blunt the propulsive force of the preceding emotions.

In exploring the politics of emotions, I will be analyzing how both Trumpist political leaders (Trump himself and JD Vance) and prominent left wing anti-Trumpists (Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Zohran Mamdani) have tried to mobilize various emotions. I have focused on Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez, and Mamdani because they are among the sharpest critics of Trumpism, have deployed a populist discourse that matches up with his, and have vigorously pursued a politics of emotions, as I will show.

² I should note that, while my focus will be on consciously experienced emotions, this by no means excludes unconscious emotions. In fact, emotions can operate wholly unconsciously and, even if they do enter consciousness, it is only after they first emerge unconsciously (Franks, 2006; Hutchison, 2016; Scheff, 1988, 2003; Westen, 2007).

In this analysis, I will be drawing on key concepts that have arisen in the sociology, psychology, and political science of emotions, the political analysis of social movements, and the construction of social boundaries and group collective identities. These concepts include emotion work or management, emotional discourses, collective identity, collective action frames, and symbolic boundaries.

Emotion work or management involves working to evoke, suppress, or transmute emotions in line with feeling rules – whether familial, organizational, or societal -- dictating which feelings are appropriate or inappropriate in given circumstances (Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001; Hochschild, 1979, 1983; Ruiz-Junco, 2013; Whittier, 2001). As Arlie Russell Hochschild states:

“Emotion work” refers more broadly to the act of evoking or shaping, as well as suppressing, feeling in oneself.... We can speak, then, of two broad types of emotion work: evocation, in which the cognitive focus is on a desired feeling which is initially absent, and suppression, in which the cognitive focus is on an undesired feeling which is initially present. (Hochschild, 1979, p. 561)

The concept of emotion work, while it was initially focused on how individuals work on their own emotions, has been subsequently deployed extensively in analyzing how emotional labor is done at the behest of organizations that demand that their employees present a smiling face and professional mien toward clients (Hochschild, 1983; Wharton, 2009). From this, it is a short step toward addressing how political actors also engage in emotional management in service of forming political coalitions organized around a shared sensibility or set of emotions.

Political actors manage emotions through emotional discourses that evoke, suppress, or channel the emotions of target populations by stating which emotions are appropriate to given

political circumstances (Gould, 2009; Schrock et al., 2004; Verhoeven & Metze, 2002). As Schrock et al. (2004) note, an emotional discourse

prescribes a folk theory about the causes of certain emotions, the appropriateness of emotional expressions, as well as how and when to act on one's emotions.

People and institutions can strategically employ this folk theory or culturally dominant emotional discourse to shape others' emotions for specific ends....

Naming something an injustice, for example, simultaneously instructs others that anger is appropriate and social change is necessary. (Schrock et al., 2004, pp. 63-64)

These emotional discourses typically harness powerful words, evocative metaphors, moving narratives, striking images and sounds, and ritualized motions to incite, amplify, and direct emotions (Hajer, 1995, p. 63; Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2016).³

To the degree that emotional discourses shape the emotions of those exposed to it, they can be said to exercise “symbolic power” in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense. That is, they impose classifications that become part of the habitus of its recipients (Swartz, 2013, pp. 38-39, 83-85, 89). The classifications in this case involve categorizations of what emotions are proper or improper for particular situations. These categorizations are similar to Hochschild’s concept of “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 1979, 1983).

The ultimate aim of the deployment of these emotional discourses is the creation of “collective identities,” that is groups defined not just by shared concepts, narratives, and symbols but also shared emotions (Fullerton, Gabehart, Yordy, & Weible, 2023; Hajer, 1995; Koenig &

³ This concept of emotional discourse is quite compatible with Foucault’s concept of discourse, which involves rules that govern what can be talked about; how it can be talked about; and who can talk about it (Hall, 2001; Hajer, 1995; Rabinow & Rose, 2003).

Mendelberg, 2025; McGarry & Jasper, 2015; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Snow, 2004; Taylor & Rupp, 2002; Taylor & Whitter, 1992; see also McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001).⁴ As Fullerton et al. (2023) note, “study of coalitions usually centres on their values and beliefs regarding the position or project under dispute.... Of course, these remain important, but ... emotions weave into how people express their relationship to the controversy and how others describe them” (Fullerton et al., 2023, p. 307).⁵ Emotions play an important role in defining the symbolic boundaries that differentiate one group from another (Lamont et al., 2017; Lamont & Molnar, 2002).

This examination of the political mobilization of emotion focuses on how emotion words are used in verbal and written statements by political figures. To analyze these verbal and written statements, this paper draws on a content analysis of speeches, interviews, papers, and press releases made by Trumpists and anti-Trumpists.⁶ For Donald Trump’s verbal and written statements, I have analyzed the excellent archives of his speeches and other utterances from 2015 through May 2026 compiled by the American Presidency Project

⁴ Taylor & Whitter (1992) originally defined “collective identity” as the “shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity” (Taylor & Whittier, 1992, p. 105). Since this initial statement, the definition of collective identity has expanded to include common emotions (Taylor & Rupp, 2002).

⁵ The concept of collective identity is closely related to the concept of “collective action frames” in social movement studies. Collective action frames are sets of beliefs and meanings about the sources and solutions of problems and the urgency of action that are proffered by social movement activists in order to create social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992; Snow, Vliegenthart, & Ketelaars, 2019). For David Snow and colleagues, social movements typically advance three types of collective action frames: diagnostic frames that analyze the sources of a problem and who is responsible; prognostic frames that advances solutions to that problem; and motivational frames that stress the importance and urgency of action. The early formulations of framing theory tended to focus on the cognitive content of frames and their impact on cognitions. However, in recent years, framing theory has moved toward explicitly including emotions, particularly with reference to motivational frames (Goodwin & Jasper, 2004; Snow et al., 2019; Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2016). As Snow and colleagues have stated, “Although the link between framing and emotions has not received the attention it warrants (see Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2004, on this neglect), the appeal to or use of emotion appears to be a central feature of motivational framing” (Snow et al., 2019, p. 397).

⁶ Such statements do not exhaust the many ways political actors deploy emotional discourses. Such deployment also involves the use of advertisements, social media posts, images, music, and rituals used at political events, etc. Hence, this paper can only be taken as a partial installment of a complete analysis of how Trumpists and anti-Trumpists politically mobilize emotions.

(<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>) and Roll Call (<https://rollcall.com>). For JD Vance, I have drawn on both the American Presidency Project archives and the speech and interview transcriptions produced by Rev.com (www.rev.com) that cover from 2022 (when he was ran for and was elected to the Senate) to May 2026, supplementing these with a search of the internet to find additional speeches, interviews, op-eds, and other utterances. Meanwhile, for Bernie Sanders (2015 to May 2026), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (2018 to May 2026), and Zohran Mamdani (2025 to May 2026), I have again drawn on the speech and interview transcriptions produced by Rev.com (www.rev.com) and supplemented these with a search of the internet and of press releases issued by their offices.

In analyzing these sources, I have searched not only for the specific emotional words “loss,” “fear,” “shame,” “distrust,” “anger,” and “hope” but also associated terms.⁷ For example, in the case of loss, I also searched for references to suffering and pain. In the case of shame, I searched as well for references to embarrassment. In the case of fear, I also sought references to anxiety, worry, and being scared. In in the case of distrust, I also looked for the word “rigged.” In the case of anger, I searched as well for references to resentment, frustration, and blame. For the detailed results of this content analysis, go to:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ge5BE1HfLf06DvvT-emA42q_esUpn96s/view?usp=sharing

LOSS AND SADNESS

Loss and sadness have been major drivers of political events and movements of many types, whether to avenge an attack on one’s country, restore a lost way of life, or more recently, address the consequences of disruptive economic and social change (Cohen, 1976; Hutchison,

⁷ This list of cognate words has been informed by the work of Fullerton et al. (2023).

2016; Marris, 1974). Focusing for the moment on disruptive economic change, we can note how working people of many post-industrial nations have experienced a great sense of loss of social status, as jobs have been automated or moved to low-wage areas, the best paying jobs have become concentrated in a few large urban centers, and the national economy and culture have come to value university-derived skills far more than skills acquired on the job or in apprenticeships (Cramer, 2016; Gest, 2016; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Hochschild, 2016, 2024a; Jimenez & Walkerdine, 2017; Koenig, 2022; Lamont et al., 2017; McQuarrie, 2017; McVeigh & Estep, 2019; Newman & Skocpol, 2023; Silva, 2013, 2019). This sense of loss is not just for a good job but also for a way of life and an esteemed place in society. Based on research on Trump activists in northeastern Pennsylvania, Biko Koenig notes:

Economics are not simply about individual jobs and income, but also about status-related occupational choices that shape the character of multigenerational communities. Temporary work and low-skilled service jobs were plentiful but seen as a dead-end. The idea of increasing the minimum wage and social benefits such that a low-skilled worker could have a reasonable income and government-provided health care missed the point of people who wanted meaningful careers in industries they saw as dignified and prestigious.... Related to these occupational concerns was the belief that younger generations had to leave the community to find success. (Koenig, 2022, pp. 77-78)

In addition, many working people have experienced not just a sense of loss of economic status but also of racial and gender status. Many whites of European ancestry feel a sense of loss due to a perceived decline in the relative status of their racial and ethnic groups and many

heterosexual men feel a perceived loss of gender status, as the situation of women and LGBTQI people has improved and received more affirmative attention on the part of government and leading cultural institutions (Gest, 2016; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Hochschild, 2016; Isom, Boehme, Cann, & Wilson, 2022; Koenig & Mendelberg, 2025; Knoester & Knoester, 2023; McKenna, Brienza, & Intezari, 2022; McQuarrie, 2017; McVeigh & Estep, 2019; Mutz, 2018; Schaffner, MacWilliams, & Nteta, 2018; Smith & Hanley, 2018; Talaifar, Stuetzer, Rentfrow, Potter, & Gosling, 2022).⁸ As Julian Gest notes about white working class people in the United States and England,

[W]hite working class people's rebellion is driven by a sense of deprivation -- the discrepancy between individuals' expectations of power and social centrality, and their perceptions of fulfillment. More specifically, white working class people are consumed by their loss of social and political status in social hierarchies, particularly in relation to immigrant and minority-reference groups. Their politics are motivated and pervaded by a sense of nostalgia that reveres, and seeks to reinstate, a bygone era. (Gest, 2016, pp. 15-16)

This sense of a bygone era also has an international aspect, as many Americans mourn the loss of the paramount economic and military status of the United States. Perhaps the most potent symbol of this loss of international status is the rising power of China (Gidron and Hall, 2017; Koenig, 2022; Koenig & Mendelberg, 2025).

A felt loss of economic, racial, gender, and international status is strongly associated with

⁸ This sense of loss of relative status – racial and gender – interacts with personality predispositions. The sense of loss tends to be felt most keenly by those who are higher in social dominance orientation and right wing authoritarianism (Duckitt & Sibley, 2017; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994).

support for authoritarianism and authoritarian leaders (Isom et al., 2022; Mutz, 2018; Talafair et al., 2022; Zingher, 2020). However, whether and how authoritarian and racist attitudes are expressed depends greatly on political context. For example, authoritarian and racist attitudes in working class communities did not prevent strong identification with the Democratic Party and support for liberal policy positions until the withering of industrial unions, the Democratic Party's tilt away from working class issues, and the rise of right wing populist leaders such as Trump made such voters available for recruitment by the far right (McQuarrie, 2018; Newman & Skocpol, 2023).

How Trumpists Speak to Loss and Sadness

A key component of Donald Trump's campaign, particularly in 2016, was addressing the deep sense of loss and sadness among many voters, especially white men, over their relative loss of social status (economic, racial, and gender) with the disappearance of so many well-paying jobs and the rising status of women, people of color, and LGBTQI people. This political calculation paid off since a sense of relative status loss turned out to be a major predictor of who voted for Trump (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Grossmann & Thaler, 2018; Koenig & Mendelberg, 2025; Mutz, 2018; Schaffner et al., 2018; Talafair et al., 2022).⁹

Trump's focus on loss and sadness over declining social status can be particularly seen in

⁹ There has been a lively debate over the extent to which the Trump vote in 2016 and 2020 was more concentrated among lower-income people. Some studies find little association with social class if it is measured by income (McKenna, Brienza, & Intezari, 2023; Mutz, 2018; Smith & Hanley, 2018). Other studies do find a connection to social class, particularly if it is operationalized in terms of education or a composite measure using income, occupation, and education (Koenig, 2022; Talafair et al., 2022; Zingher, 2020). Whatever the case, it is clear that white working class voters did play an important role in Trump's victory in 2016, particularly in the Rust Belt, as many shifted from voting for Obama or sitting out the election in 2012 to voting for Trump in 2016 (McQuarrie, 2018; Morgan & Lee, 2018; Newman & Skocpol, 2023). Black working class people in the Rust Belt have also experienced a great sense of economic and status loss with the spread of deindustrialization. But it expressed itself less in voting against Democrats than in not turning out to vote at all (McQuarrie, 2018).

the themes that dominated his rhetoric in many campaign appearances across the Midwest. In the 2016 and 2024 campaigns, Trump repeatedly hammered away at the theme of job loss, social dislocation, and loss of social status and national preeminence (Trump, 2016c, 2016i, 2016j, 2016v, 2024h; see also Vance, 2025j, 2025k). For example, he stated:

Right now, 92 million Americans are on the sidelines, outside the workforce, and not part of our economy. It's a silent nation of jobless Americans. Look no further than the city of Flint, where I just visited. The jobs have stripped from this community, and its infrastructure has collapsed. In 1970, there were more than 80,000 people in Flint working for GM – today it is less than 8,000. Now Ford has announced it is moving all small car production to Mexico. It used to be cars were made in Flint and you couldn't drink the water in Mexico. Now, the cars are made in Mexico and you can't drink the water in Flint. (Trump, 2016c)

Donald Trump has not been the only right wing actor addressing the loss and sadness created by economic and social disruption. This emotion has also been addressed by Vice President J. D. Vance and Senator Josh Hawley, who are leading candidates for the 2028 Republican presidential nomination (Hawley, 2019, 2025; Vance, 2024a, 2024i, 2025b, 2025k).

For example, Vice President Vance declared in 2025:

{W}hen our factories disappear and the jobs in those factories go overseas, American workers are faced not only with financial insecurity, they're also faced with a profound loss of personal and communal identity.... I think the populists, when they look at the future, and when they compare it to what's happened in the past, I think a lot of them see alienation of workers from their jobs, from their

communities, from their sense of solidarity. You see the alienation of people from their sense of purpose. And importantly, they see a leadership class that believes welfare can replace a job and an application on a phone can replace a sense of purpose. (Vance, 2025b)

How Left Anti-Trumpists Speak to Loss and Sadness

Left opponents of Trumpism have also spoken strongly to feelings of loss and sadness in order to mobilize citizens politically (Mamdani, 2026a, 2026b; Ocasio-Cortez, 2025c; Sanders, 2016a, 2019a, 2021a, 2023a). Bernie Sanders has been particularly notable for how forcefully he has addressed the economic and social losses experienced by ordinary Americans. For example, in 2016 he stated:

The wages that high school graduates receive today are significantly less, whether you are white or black, than they used to be. Why is that? Because of a series of disastrous trade policies which have allowed corporate America through NAFTA and Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China to shut down in this country, throw millions of people out on the street.... Now you are a worker, white worker, black worker, who had a decent job, that manufacturing job is gone. What have you got now? You are working at McDonald's? That is why there is massive despair all over this country. People have worked their entire lives. They're making a half, two-thirds what they used to make. Their kids are having a hard time finding any work at all.... [T]hat's why we need to start paying attention to the needs of working families in this country, and not just a handful of billionaires who have enormous economic and political power.

(Sanders, 2016a)

In contrast to the appeals to loss and sadness by the right, Sanders and other left anti-Trumpists have focused on loss of economic status and refused to validate the sense of loss of racial/ethnic, gender, and national primacy that the right appeals to (Mamdani, 2025a; Ocasio-Cortez, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Sanders, 2015a, 2016b). For example, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez stated at a “Fighting Oligarchy” rally in 2025:

[T]he same billionaires are taking a wrecking ball to our country and they derive their power from dividing working people apart. They specialize in getting us to turn on one another and they get us to turn on one another along lines of left and right, race and gender, creed and culture. They'll throw out every label and judgment and cultural debate in the book to keep us distracted because the last thing they want us to realize is that the division that is actually hurting our country the most is how endless greed is costing the lives of everyone else.

(Ocasio-Cortez, 2025b)

SHAME

Shame is an emotion closely associated with loss and sadness. Shame is a generalized feeling that one has failed to live up to one's social responsibilities (Keen, 2023; Scheff, 1988, 2003). With their loss of jobs and social status, working class people have felt not only sadness but also shame as they try to make sense of the intense economic dislocations of the last five decades. They feel themselves to be not just victims but also failures in the “land of opportunity” (Gest, 2016, p. 156; Hochschild, 2016, 2024a; Jimenez & Walkerdine, 2012; Silva,

2013, 2019; Stein, 2001). Arlie Russell Hochschild quotes one of her interviewees in Appalachia on the shame of being an unsuccessful working class white:

We think in narratives. We've got two main ones, and people like me don't fit either one. First, you've got a white middle-class narrative. You hear these success stories: a person comes from nothing and gets to something.... Then you have a second narrative for Blacks.... "You're a victim of racism." But that leaves a problem for people like me. If I'm a Moore's Trailer Park white trash person ... the only narrative I have tells me that I'm white, so I'm privileged. If you're white and poor, people think, "What's wrong with you that you're stuck at the bottom... If it's such a privilege to be born a white male, what could explain me except my own personal failure." (Hochschild, 2024a, p. 126)

How Trumpists Speak to Shame

Political actors often speak to shame by offering anger and pride as alternatives (Dolgert, 2016; Gould, 2009, pp. 249-250; Hochschild, 2024a; Jasper, 2018; Keen, 2023; Lamont et al., 2017; Schrock et al., 2017; Stein, 2001; Whittier, 2001). While we associate this kind of emotional work with movements such as the feminist, gay rights, and child abuse movements (Jasper, 2018; Whittier, 2001), it is also practiced by right wing actors and movements (Stein, 2001). For example, Trump has directly suggested that those feeling shame should instead feel pride and anger (Trump, 2016a, 2016d, 2016h, 2020c, 2024e; see also Hochschild, 2024a; Lamont et al., 2017; Schrock et al., 2017):

Our support comes from every part of America, and every walk of life. We have the support of cops and soldiers, carpenters and welders, the young and the old,

and millions of working class families who just want a better future.... These were among the countless Americans that Hillary Clinton called deplorable, irredeemable and un-American.... Hillary Clinton made these comments at one of her high-dollar fundraisers in Wall Street. She and her wealthy donors all had a good laugh. They were laughing at the very people who pave the roads she drives on, paint the buildings she speaks in, and keep the lights on in her auditorium.... Hillary Clinton spoke with hatred and derision for the people who make this country run. She spoke with contempt for the people who thanklessly follow the rules, pay their taxes, and scratch out a living for their families. (Trump, 2016h)

In 2016, Trump focused on turning around Hillary Clinton's use of the term "deplorables." In 2024, he accused Joe Biden and Kamal Harris of viewing Trump and his supporters as "garbage" (Trump, 2024d, 2024e, 2024f):¹⁰

Two days ago, Joe Biden called our supporters garbage. You're garbage. He said they're garbage. He called you garbage. He called all of us garbage. We're garbage. I remember the word deplorable. Do you remember the word deplorable? How did that work out, Hillary? Not too good. But they mean it, even though, without question, my supporters are of far higher quality and, I think, much smarter than Crooked Joe or Lyin' Kamala. My response to Joe and Kamala is simple. You can't lead America, if you don't love America. You can't do it. You can't be president if you hate the American people. (Trump, 2024e)

¹⁰ Interestingly, my search of JD Vance's speeches and statements between 2022 and the present found no use of "deplorables" and "garbage."

As Lamont et al. (2017) note, Trump's remarks turned around shame in three ways. He provided an explanation of loss and its attendant shame that pointed to structural and not individual causes. He reasserted the traditional standards of working class masculinity, focused on hard work and following the rules. And he drew strong moral boundaries that placed working class people in a status position superior to that of immigrants and even of elites – particularly political and cultural elites – who are portrayed as corrupt (Lamont et al., 2017; see also Koenig & Mendelberg, 2025).¹¹

How Left Anti-Trumpists Address Shame

The anti-Trump opposition has not developed an emotional discourse addressing shame that is as powerful as that utilized by Trumpists. To be sure, Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, and Zohran Mamdani have spoken to shame to a degree, by arguing that working people are not responsible for their depressed circumstances and that the fault lies rather with the “billionaire class.” However, left anti-Trumpists have not spoken as powerfully to shame as they could. For example, they have not stated directly that working people should not feel shame for their economic troubles but rather anger and pride. In the conclusions to this paper, I will discuss how the left anti-Trumpists could develop an emotional discourse that addresses shame more effectively but without falling into the scapegoating and xenophobia of the Trumpist emotional discourse regarding shame.

¹¹ See below for more on Trump's emotional discourse with regard to immigrants and political elites.

FEAR

Even if individuals and social groups have not experienced great loss, they may fear that it will occur (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012). Fear is one of the most fundamental emotions underlying many social movements and political developments (Brader & Marcus, 2013, p. 178; Fromm, 1941; Hall et al., 2013, pp. 155-163; Haugaard, 2020: chaps. 7-8; Jasper, 1997; Jost, 2017; Jost, Gaucher, & Stern, 2015; Taber & Young, 2013, p. 539; Webster & Albertson, 2022; Westen, 2007).

A major feature of recent US politics has been the rising fear of many working class and middle class whites about economic changes that reduce the value of high school and college degrees and demographic changes that are leading toward a “majority minority” nation (Bonikowski, 2017; Emirbayer & Desmond, 2014, pp. 117-122; Feagin & Ducey, 2019, pp. 94-96; Gest, 2016; Gest, Reny, & Mayer, 2017; Hochschild, 2016, 2024a; Kimmel, 2013; Koenig & Mendelberg, 2025; Mutz, 2018; McVeigh & Estep, 2019; see also Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 2013, pp. 55-63). This fear of social decline and loss of economic and social status fueled the rise of the Tea Party in 2009, which was heavily populated by middle class, older, conservative whites (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012, pp. 68-82).

But if right wing populism has been driven by fear, so has the resistance to it. For example, a Gallup national poll in November 2024 found that 76% of Democratic and Democratic-leaning respondents reported feeling fear as a reaction to Donald Trump’s re-election (Gallup, 2024). Trump opponents widely report fearing that Trump would create an authoritarian state that will destroy civil liberties, eliminate important social programs, and badly harm women, people of color, and LGBTQI people (DiMaggio, 2022; No Kings, 2025a; Snyder, 2017).

How Trumpists Speak to Fear

Social movements aiming to bring about change, whether reactionary or progressive, often stoke fear and strive to channel it in desired directions (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gest, 2016; Hochschild, 2016, 2024a; Lowenthal & Guterman, 1949; Nai, 2021; Snow & Soule, 2010). This politics of fear is particularly true of right wing populism. An analysis of 195 candidates running in 40 national elections across the world in 2016 and 2017 found that populist candidates were considerably more likely than nonpopulist candidates to use messages that appealed to fears (Nai, 2021).

Trump is typical of right wing populist political leaders in using a rhetoric that heavily speaks to people's fears. Trump repeatedly speaks to and foments people's fears about crime, job loss, and rising immigration (Gold, 2024; Hart, 2020; Mercieca, 2020; Schrock et al., 2017). A typical statement came in a campaign rally speech in 2020 (Trump, 2020i; see also Trump, 2016o, 2016q, 2024b, 2025b):

The murder rate in Democrat-run cities like Chicago, Baltimore, New York, so many others is higher than in Afghanistan, yet Biden supports imposing these failed policies nationwide. You will have crime like you've never seen before....

If Joe Biden is elected, far-left lunatics won't just be running failed Democrat city. They'll be running the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, and the United States Supreme Court, and we can't let that happen. No city town or suburb will be safe. On November 3rd, your vote will save America.

(Trump, 2020i)

Trump uses two rhetorical devices long favored by right-wing populist leaders: deploying powerfully connotative words that amplify a sense of dread; and invoking the metaphor of home invasion (Edensor, 2002; Hart, 2020; Lowenthal & Guterman, 2021[1949]; Mercieca, 2020). As Edensor (2002) has noted, “‘Home’ conjoins a myriad of affective realms and contains a wealth of transposable imagery” (Edensor, 2002, p. 57). In particular, “home” can be metaphorically attached to the issue of borders and immigration: “A sense of home can be threatened by the presence of otherness and in this sense is linked to national constructions of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Home is thus the subject of other kinds of exclusion, a purified space into which species of otherness must not enter, or at least not stay very long” (Edensor, 2002, p 61; see also Jasper, 2018, p. 109).

Both features of right-wing populist speech – strongly connotative words and the metaphor of home invasion – can be seen in a campaign speech Donald Trump made in September 2024 in Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin:

I will liberate Wisconsin from this mass migrant invasion of murderers, rapists, hoodlums, drug dealers, thugs, and vicious gang members. We are going to liberate our country..... Our nation will be free again if we win this election.... We will not allow these people to invade us, conquer us, and take all of our dignity and pride and everything we have stood for from the very beginning of our lives.... They want to invade -- they want to take over your homes. They want to take over your buildings. Look at what they're doing in Colorado -- Aurora, Colorado. Venezuela gangs are taking over real estate. (Trump, 2024b)

JD Vance has joined Trump in this emotional discourse of fear, albeit in somewhat more

muted terms (Vance, 2024g, 2024j). At a 2024 campaign rally in Pennsylvania, Vance stated:

There's a lot of crime committed by people who shouldn't be in this country to begin with..... Now, earlier this year, an illegal immigrant from Guatemala killed a 21-month-old child in Chester County.... In 2022, fentanyl, thanks to Kamala Harris's open borders, became the most common source of overdose deaths in this country. Thank you to Kamala Harris, who allowed the Mexican drug cartels to turn our country into a drug trafficking zone, there are a lot of people who are dying of drug overdoses, a lot of lives who've been ruined because of that.

(Vance, 2024g)

But if Trump acknowledges and amplifies the social and economic fears of his supporters, he also foments the fears of his opponents (Hughes, 2025; see also Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001; Jasper, 2018, p. 39). To other members of his Republican Party, Trump has made it quite clear that he will punish them for any opposition. This was very evident in 2026 when Trump endorsed Republican primary opponents to Senators John Cornyn (Texas) and Bill Cassidy (Louisiana) and Representative Thomas Massie (Kentucky) because he felt that they had not supported him enough. And this message has been received. For example, Senator Lisa Murkowski stated in an April 14, 2025 interview: "We are all afraid. It's quite a statement. But we are in a time and a place where I certainly have not been here before. And I'll tell ya, I'm oftentimes very anxious myself about using my voice, because retaliation is real" (quoted in Hughes, 2025).

And in the case of his opponents outside the Republican Party, Trump demonizes them, threatens them, and resorts to open brutality (Trump, 2020b, 2024l, 2025b). A favorite device in

his demonization is to brand his opponents, whether the Democrats in Congress or progressive groups outside government, as radical terrorists (Rogers & Kanno-Youngs, 2025). In a Truth Social message on September 24, 2025, he stated:

The continuing violence from Radical Left Terrorists, in the aftermath of Charlie Kirk's assassination, must be stopped. ICE Officers, and other Brave Members of Law Enforcement, are under grave threat. We have already declared ANTIFA a Terrorist Organization, and I will be signing an Executive Order this week to dismantle these Domestic Terrorism Networks. I AM CALLING ON ALL DEMOCRATS TO STOP THIS RHETORIC AGAINST ICE AND AMERICA'S LAW ENFORCEMENT, RIGHT NOW! The Trump Administration is fully committed to backing Law Enforcement, Strong Borders, securing our Homeland, deporting Violent Illegal Criminals, and fully rooting out the Left Wing Domestic Terrorism that is terrorizing our Country. (Trump, 2025b)

How Left Anti-Trumpists Populists Speak to Fear

Appealing to fear also plays an important role in the emotional discourse of the left wing anti-Trump movement. Bernie Sanders and others like him evoke and even arouse fear in order to energize opposition to Trump (Ocasio-Cortez, 2020a; Sanders, 2015a, 2016d, 2020a, 2024b). However, Sanders' invocation of fear is focused on economic dislocation. For example, Sanders spoke to the fears of older workers facing retirement, single mothers trying to pay for childcare, young people trying to pay for college, and most people facing large medical bills:

You're a 60 year old worker in the St. Louis or Kansas City. You work your whole life, you're worried about retirement. You got nothing in the bank. Maybe

you'll have \$15,000 a year Social Security, if they don't cut it. You're a working mom in St Louis..... Where are you going to find quality, affordable childcare for your kid? Virtually impossible. You're a young person coming from a working class family. You want to go to college, you want to go to a trade school, but you can't afford it. Your dream's being destroyed.... Think about a system which says, you go to the doctor, you're sick, you're diagnosed with cancer, you got enough to worry about, you're fighting for your life. And yet, now you're going to have to fight to prevent financial ruin and many people do not. (Sanders, 2020a)

However, other elements of the anti-Trump left, mobilize feelings of fear more broadly. For example, in calling for the massive No Kings rallies in October 2025, the No Kings coalition stated:

NO KINGS is a peaceful national day of action and mass mobilization in response to the increasing authoritarian excesses and corruption of the Trump administration... They are targeting immigrant families, profiling, arresting and detaining people without warrants; threatening to overtake elections; gutting health care, environmental protections, and education when families need them most; rigging maps to silence voters; ignoring mass shootings at our schools and in our communities; and driving up the cost of living while handing out massive giveaways to billionaire allies, as families struggle.... Americans across the country will not cower in response to President Trump's authoritarian takeover. (No Kings, 2025a)

DISTRUST AND SENSE OF BETRAYAL

Feelings of loss and fear often give rise to strong feelings of distrust and betrayal. Those who feel they have already lost status or fear losing it in the future also often feel that they have been tricked by conniving leaders and a social system that is “rigged” (Gest, 2016; Hochschild, 2016, 2024a; Keen, 2023; Silva, 2013, 2019). Such distrust of government and politicians is pervasive today in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2025a). For example, a political official in Youngstown, Ohio which suffered devastating job losses as its steel mills closed in the 1980s, described the pervasive distrust among Youngstown’s working class residents:

There’s a lot of anger in the area, stemming from the late 70s and the closing of the steel mills. They just don’t believe in promises, in the future of the community, leaders. They’re very skeptical about everything. We do focus groups with white working class families and they’re highly antagonistic and have almost a fervor to get into an argument. They have a feeling that they’ve been battered. (Quoted in Gest, 2016, p. 84)

Feelings of distrust in the political system played a significant role in driving support for anti-establishment candidates in 2016. Support for both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in 2016 was strongly associated with a lack of trust that the federal government would do the right thing (Dyck, Pearson-Merkowitz, & Coates, 2018).

How Trumpists Speak to Distrust

A very effective way Donald Trump has addressed and fomented distrust is to describe the social and political system as “rigged” and as “stealing” from those supporting Trump (Trump, 2016g, 2016h, 2016i, 2016j, 2016k, 2016m; see also Hochschild, 2016a, 2024a).¹² For example, in his acceptance speech at the 2016 Republican convention, Trump repeatedly described both the economy and polity as rigged¹³:

We’ll never be able to fix a rigged system by counting on the same people who have rigged it in the first place. The insiders wrote the rules of the game to keep themselves in power and in the money..... This includes fixing all of our many disastrous trade deals. ... Because it’s not just the political system that’s rigged, it’s the whole economy. It’s rigged by big donors who want to keep wages down. It’s rigged by big businesses who want to leave our country, fire our workers, and sell their products back into the United States with absolutely no consequences for them. It’s rigged by bureaucrats who are trapping kids in failing schools. It’s rigged against you, the American people. (Trump, 2016g)

How Left Wing Populists Speak to Distrust

Left-wing political figures also speak to the pervasive feeling of distrust among Americans today by using the language of “rigged” in describing our economic and political systems (Mamdani, 2025a; Ocasio-Cortez, 2025a, 2025b; Sanders, 2016c, 2019a, 2024a, 2025b). With regard to the economy, Sanders stated:

¹² Interestingly, JD Vance did not use the terms “rigged” or “distrust” in the speeches and statements I reviewed.

¹³ By 2020 and after, Trump was less often referring to a rigged economy and his focus was more on his claims about a rigged 2020 election. Very likely, this shift was due to the fact he had been president from 2017 to 2021 and therefore might be held responsible for economic conditions in 2020.

A rigged economy is about an economy, for example, where the wealthiest family in this country, the Walton family of Walmart, pays its workers wages that are so low that the middle class has to pay more in taxes to provide food stamps and Medicaid for Walmart employees. A rigged economy is when you have corporations making billions of dollars a year in taxes, billions of dollars a year in profit, and not paying a nickel in taxes. A rigged economy is where you have companies able to shut down as a result of trade agreements that they have written, and move abroad and pay people pennies an hour. That is a rigged economy. A rigged economy is when, in the wealthiest country in the history of the world, the top one-tenth of 1% now owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90%. (Sanders, 2016c)

Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez have also used the term “rigged” to describe the political system (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019a, 2021a, 2025a, 2025c; Sanders, 2016d, 2019b, 2024a):

A revolving door means that people leave Wall Street and corporate America, go into government, do the bidding of Wall Street and corporate America, and then go back to the private sector. In fact, in the last 30 years, Goldman Sachs has given this country two secretaries of the treasury, one under a Republican administration, one under a Democratic administration. That's how the system works. Big money gets their people into government, works for big money. (Sanders, 2016d)

ANGER

Frustration and anger have been pervasive political emotions for at least three decades. For example, nineteen national polls over the last 28 years find that on average 78% of US adults report being frustrated or angry toward the federal government, with only 22% reporting being “basically content” (Pew Research Center, 2025b).

Anger is a very powerful emotion driving political activity on all parts of the political spectrum (Brader & Marcus, 2013; Demertzis, 2020; Jasper, 1998, 2018; Klandermans, 1997; Koenig, 2022; Ost, 2004; Phillips & Plutzer, 2023; Redlawsk & Mattes, 2022). As Nicolas Demertzis notes,

Anger is first and foremost a “power emotion” in the sense that (a) it is triggered when individuals and/or collectives encounter physical or psychological restraints and blocks to need satisfaction or goal achievement and (b) it helps mobilization and resistance against deprivation of resources or unfavorable conditions. As long as anger is elicited in the political realm it becomes a political emotion.... In political anger, then, agents are able to locate external accountability and blame others for the precarious, risky, threatening or even traumatic situations they face, (Dermertzis, 2020, p. 156)

One reason that anger is so pervasive is that political actors on all parts of the political spectrum assiduously engage in the emotional work of transforming the emotions of loss and sadness, shame, fear, and distrust into the emotion of anger (Gould, 2009; Hochschild, 2024a; Jasper, 2018; Lamont et al., 2017; Schrock et al., 2004, 2017; Stein, 2001; Whittier, 2001; see also Lowenthal & Guterman, 2021[1949]). As Verhoeven and Metze (2022) note, they construct

chains of emotion, transforming one emotion into another. For example, notice how JD Vance tightly connected loss to anger (see also Trump, 2016f, 2024b):

[P]eople are pissed off when they don't have good jobs, and people are pissed off when things disappear and move overseas, and people are pissed off when they feel like other countries are being prioritized over the United States of America. And all of that is part of the populist resentment of the past 20 or 30 years in American politics. (Vance, 2025j)

But the aim of political actors is not just to incite and increase anger but also to channel it toward particular political targets or enemies (Benford & Snow, 2000; Jasper, 1998; Mouffe, 2022; Ost, 2004; Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Whittier, 2001). As David Ost notes, “Understanding where one stands on key issues of the day is never an easy thing. There are a myriad possible explanations for outcomes we do not like, and a myriad possible targets to blame. The role of political leaders is to solve this problem for citizens by giving them an Other: someone to blame, someone or something to be angry at” (Ost, 2004, p. 241). One of the key purposes of identifying targets of anger is to draw symbolic boundaries, especially moral ones, that differentiate one group from another, thus producing collective identity (Lamont & Molnar, 2002; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Wimmer, 2008). As Taylor and Whittier note, “Boundary markers are, therefore, central to the formation of collective identity because they promote a heightened awareness of a group’s commonalities and frame interaction between members of the in-group and the out-group” (Taylor & Whittier, 1992, p. 111).

How Trumpists Speak to Anger

Donald Trump has very systematically appealed to feelings of anger and directed it to particular targets (Hart, 2020; Schrock et al., 2017). Roderick Hart (2020) finds that Donald Trump in 2016 had the highest tendency to use anger terms in his speeches and other utterances of any presidential candidate since 1948 (Hart, 2020, p. 75). In his repeated use of anger terms, Trump is typical of populist political leaders across the world. An analysis of 195 candidates running in 40 national elections across the globe in 2016 and 2017 found that populist candidates were considerably more likely than nonpopulist candidates to use a negative campaign tone and attack their opponents' character, even when controlling for other candidate characteristics and the nature of the political system (Nai, 2021).

Right wing populists such as Trump and Vance typically proffer two different sets of targets. On one hand are political, economic, and cultural elites. On the other hand are nondominant groups – such as immigrants, people of color, women, and LGBTQI people – who are portrayed as unfairly benefiting at the hands of those elites.¹⁴ As with their rhetoric of fear, Trumpists' rhetoric of anger traffics strongly in strongly connotative terms and the powerful metaphor of a despoiled home.

With regard to political, economic, and cultural elites, Donald Trump has variously targeted political leaders, political dynasties, powerful corporations, global finance, the mass media, and higher education as corrupt, dangerous, and pandering to unworthy nonelites (Trump, 2016b, 2016n, 2020d, 2020e; see also Hochschild, 2016a; Schrock et al., 2017). In so doing, Trump draws strong moral boundaries between his working class and lower middle class supporters and corrupt elites (Lamont et al, 2017). For example, in a 2016 speech in Monessen,

¹⁴ Neither Trump nor Vance has explicitly targeted Jews but elements of their rhetoric carry an anti-Semitic tinge. And a good many of their followers, such as Tucker Carlson and Nick Fuentes, are explicitly anti-Semitic.

PA, Trump stated:

[I]f we're going to deliver real change, we're going to have to reject the campaign of fear and intimidation being pushed by powerful corporations, media elites, and political dynasties. The people who rigged the system for their benefit will do anything - and say anything - to keep things exactly as they are. The people who rigged the system are supporting Hillary Clinton because they know as long as she is in charge nothing will ever change. The inner cities will remain poor. The factories will remain closed. The borders will remain open. The special interests will remain firmly in control. Hillary Clinton and her friends in global finance want to scare America into thinking small - and they want to scare the American people out of voting for a better future. (Trump, 2016n)

However, by the 2024 election, Trump was no longer calling out an encompassing political, economic, and cultural elite. Attacks on business elites had disappeared and his focus had shrunk to top Democrats at the federal and state levels and media and higher education elites.¹⁵ With regard to top Democrats, Trump charged Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden with many different misfeasances and malfeasances (Trump, 2016f, 2016l, 2016r, 2020b, 2020g):

The policies of Hillary Clinton have produced death, destruction overseas. It's been disastrous. No matter where you look, everything she's touched has been a disaster and produced only failing schools, rising crime, job loss, shrinking incomes, and tragic poverty at home. You want four more years of it? [Audience: No]. I had a feeling you might say that. (Trump, 2016f)

¹⁵ Interestingly, JD Vance still retains some business elites among his targets of ire, as when he called out corporate monopolies and private equity hoarding apartments (Vance, 2025d, 2026e).

When Joe Biden came into his sights, Trump charged him with rigging the political and judicial systems to steal the 2020 election and to indict Trump on bogus charges (Trump, 2020b, 2020g, 2024g, 2024i, 2024j):¹⁶

Joe Biden and his thugs are so desperate to stop us. They know that we are the only ones who can stop them, and they know that. That's why they are weaponizing law enforcement for high-level election interference.... They use the DOJ, the FBI, our election systems. They rig our elections and attack free speech.... They go after the people that want to find out who it was that rigged the election.... Joe Biden and the fascists that control him are really the true threat to democracy. Those are the threat to democracy. All of this persecution is only happening because I am running for president and leading very substantially in the polls. (Trump, 2024j)

Beyond top Democrats, Trumpists also offer up the mass media and universities, particularly those that champion a multicultural America, as elite targets for populist ire. These institutions are portrayed as sources of a “wokeism” that is culturally corrosive and denigrating of “traditional” values (Trump, 2018a, 2023c; Vance, 2021, 2025k; see also Hochschild, 2024a; Schrock et al., 2017; Stein, 2001). Trump has repeatedly dismissed the mainstream news media as “fake news” and even an “enemy of the people” (Trump, 2016r, 2018a, 2020f, 2024l; Vance, 2024f, 2025i). Early into his first presidency, Trump premiered a theme that he kept repeating since:

¹⁶ While Trump focused on attacking Joe Biden, JD Vance focused on attacking Kamala Harris (2024c, 2024d, 2024f, 2024h, 2025a).

And the number one enabler of the Democrats is the fake news media right back there. And they really do, they stoke the fires of resentment and chaos. They report incorrect news.... They are truly an enemy of the people, the fake news, enemy of the people. They really are. They are so bad. (Trump, 2018a)

Similarly, Trump and Vance have taken up the cudgels against higher education (Trump, 2023c, 2023e; Vance, 2021, 2025k). Early on, Trump only criticized higher education for costing too much and touted his efforts to better fund Historically Black Colleges and Universities. But beginning around 2020, Trump moved to accusing higher education of leftist brainwashing, reverse racism in admissions, and anti-Semitism (Trump, 2023c, 2023e). For example, at a political rally in 2023, Trump stated:

We're also going to stand up to the radical left communists, Marxists, fascists, and frauds who have taken over our universities. They've taken over our schools. They have destroyed the reputations of once highly -- These were really highly respected schools like Harvard, MIT, Columbia, Stanford, University of Pennsylvania, and others, indoctrinated our youth and brought censorship and anti-Semitism to our campuses.... Under the Trump administration, if colleges and universities discriminate against conservatives, Christians, Jews, anybody, if they attack free speech, we are going to take away their tax advantages, grants, and endowment. (Trump, 2023c)

But Trumpists do not just channel anger toward elites. They also direct it to nonelites -- particularly immigrants, people of color, women, LGBTQI people, and “radical” leftists

(Cramer, 2016; Rogers and Kanno-Youngs, 2025). The level of vituperation against nonelites reaches its apex in attacks on immigrants. Immigrants are portrayed as criminal, a threat to citizens' jobs, a drain on social resources, causing housing shortages, and displacing white voters (Trump, 2016p, 2016q, 2020g, 2024k; Vance, 2024f, 2024g, 2024j, 2026e; see also Bump, 2021; Lamont et al., 2017; Mercieca, 2020, chaps. 3, 11). This is a message that resonates strongly among people, disproportionately found among working class whites, who harbor considerable racial resentment (Mutz, 2018; Schaffner et al., 2018; Zingher, 2020). By his attacks on immigrants, Trump raises the status of the white working class (Lamont et al., 2017).

To arouse and reinforce anti-immigrant resentment, right wing populists very typically use strongly connotative language portraying immigrants as criminals, invaders, or animal-like (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.; Trump, 2024b, 2024c; Vance, 2024b; see also Lowenthal & Guterman, 2021[1949], pp. 57, 62). For example, Trump has called immigrants “murderers, rapists, hoodlums, drug dealers, thugs, and vicious gang members” (Trump, 2024c). Meanwhile, Vice President JD Vance has accused Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio of eating other people's pets (Vance, 2024b; see also Trump, 2024m): “Months ago, I raised the issue of Haitian illegal immigrants draining social services and generally causing chaos all over Springfield, Ohio. Reports now show that people have had their pets abducted and eaten by people who shouldn't be in this country. Where is our border czar?” (Vance, 2024b).

In their attacks on immigrants and people of color, right wingers not only deploy strong words but also invoke the powerful metaphor of a despoiled home that has been invaded by vermin (see Edensor, 2002, pp. 57, 62; Lowenthal & Guterman, 2021[1949], p. 113).¹⁷ In a 2024

¹⁷ Leo Lowenthal and David Guterman (2021[1949]) noted how frequently American right-wing agitators of the 1930s and 1940s invoked the metaphor of an ill-kept home: “The agitator's output is full of references to the present condition of the country as an ill-kept house. He complains that the enemies ‘have littered our fair land,’ that ‘ideological and intellectual disease germs’ are contaminating the United States, and that it is ‘time to clean house.’

campaign speech in Tempe, Arizona, Trump stated: “A lot of people coming out of the Congo, not just South America. They're coming from 181 countries as of yesterday right in -- we're a dumping ground. We're like a -- we're like a garbage can for the world” (Trump, 2024c). And in a campaign speech in Wisconsin in 2024, Trump stated: “But no matter how hateful or corrupt the communists and criminals we're fighting against may be, you must never forget this nation does not belong to them. This nation belongs to you. It belongs to you. This is your home” (Trump, 2024a).

The Trumpist treatment of people of color is more mixed. On the one hand, Trump in 2016 directly appealed to Blacks and Hispanics to vote for him, citing their high rates of poverty and unemployment and blaming Democrats for these problems (Trump, 2016s, 2016t, 2020h). On the other hand, in later years Trump and Vance harshly condemned the Black Lives Matter movement, diversity programs, and “wokeism” and made negative remarks about inner cities (Trump, 2020a, 2020h, 2022d, 2025a; Vance, 2024d, 2025a, 2025g, 2025h; see also Lamont et al., 2017).¹⁸ For example, Trump said this about Black Lives Matter:

Black Lives Matter is a Marxist organization. You remember pigs in a blanket, fry 'em like bacon? That was the first time I ever heard of Black Lives Matter. I said, that's a terrible name. It's so discriminatory, it's bad for black people, it's bad for everybody.... people are tired of this stuff, what's going on, the Black Lives Matter. If you look at what's going on with the bats and the -- they're -- a lot of thugs. (Trump, 2020a)

He denounces this ‘whole smelly mess; with which this nation has been afflicted and speaks of the necessity of ‘yanking this country from its devil of a mess’” (Lowenthal & Guterman, 2021[1949], p. 113).

¹⁸ This indirect racial attack that does not so much attack nonwhites directly but rather attacks the programs benefitting them is what has been variously termed *laissez-faire racism*, *color-blind racism*, or *symbolic racism* (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Sears, 1988).

Vice President Vance has used this racial coding in similar ways. He has also attacked Black Lives Matter as inciting criminal violence and diversity programs as unfair to whites and Asians (Vance, 2025a, 2025g, 2025h):

[W]e don't treat anybody different because of their race or their sex. So we have relegated DEI to the dustbin of history, which is exactly where it belongs. In the United States of America, you don't have to apologize for being white anymore. And if you're an Asian, you don't have to talk around your skin color when you're applying for college because we judge people based on who they are, not on ethnicity and things they can't control. (Vance, 2025g)

How Left Anti-Trumpists Speak to Anger

Left anti-Trumpist leaders have also tried to mobilize anger in service of movement activism. However, they have typically proffered very different targets for that anger than have right-wing populists. They have tried to channel anger away from immigrants, people of color, and people receiving social benefits and instead direct it toward the capitalist system. In order to make their effort to direct anger against neoliberal capitalism more effective, left anti-Trumpists leaders have tried to personify it in terms of “the billionaire class,” “the 1%,” and “the oligarchs” (Mamdani, 2025a, 2025b; Ocasio-Cortez, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Sanders, 2016b, 2025a). For example, in his nomination-acceptance speech in 2025, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani cited the “billionaire class” as the proper target for popular anger:

Tens of millions of dollars have been spent to redefine reality and to convince our neighbors that this new age is something that should frighten them. As has so

often occurred, the billionaire class has sought to convince those making \$30 an hour that their enemies are those earning \$20 an hour. They want the people to fight amongst ourselves so that we remain distracted from the work of remaking a long broken system. We refuse to let them dictate the rules of the game anymore. They can play by the same rules as the rest of us. (Mamdani, 2025a)

Progressive political actors try to deflect anger against immigrants and people of color by creating a collective identity and sense of group solidarity that avoids ethnic and racial differentiation in favor of a class identity or populist identity (the 99%) (Mamdani, 2025a; Ocasio-Cortez, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Sanders, 2015a, 2016b; see also Jasper, 2018, pp. 104-108; McGarry and Jasper, 2015). For example, in a January 2025 podcast with Jon Stewart, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez stated:

The system is rigged.... . And the frustrations at that are why working people want to elect people who seek to not, you know, go along to get along. But ... they're viewing it like, oh, it's the undocumented migrants that are rigging the system and not the six billionaire oligarchs that are sitting in the front row at the inauguration. To me, that's the disconnect.... the reason why solidarity is when we build that is such an antidote to kleptocracy and corruption. I think something that's really important for people to understand, and that's something that I also think the left can do a better job at, is also explaining why this solidarity is important, not just on moral grounds, but this is our strategy for defeating the billionaire class because they are going to say, your wages are low because of an immigrant. (Ocasio-Cortez, 2025a)

HOPE

All of the above emotions can be powerful springs to political action. But their effect is mediated by whether social actors feel hopeful or pessimistic. Moods such as hope or pessimism affect how strongly other emotions will spur action (Jasper, 2018, pp. 78-79). Enthusiasm (indexed by self-reported feelings of being hopeful, enthusiastic, proud, happy, and so forth) leads to greater interest in political processes and motivates political action (Brader & Marcus, 2013, p. 176; Phillips & Plutzer, 2023, p. 1095; Redlawsk & Mattes, 2022, p. 145). Conversely, pessimism – believing that opposing forces are too strong, that resistance is too costly, or that the existing social order is immutable – inhibits political action (Ganz, 2024, p. 64; Gaventa, 1980, pp. 16-17, 255-256; Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001; Silva, 2019; Therborn, 1980, pp. 97-98). In her interviews with young working class people in a deindustrialized community in Pennsylvania, Jennifer Silva notes how pessimism and lack of hope inhibited their political activity:

The people in this chapter ... firmly believe that their “vote means nothing,” because inauthentic politicians will say or do whatever they need in order to attract donors and stay in power.... What they have in common -- distrust, a focus on self-efficacy over collective efficacy, and a dismissal of larger social concerns that do not seem to affect them personally and immediately – prove a shaky foundation for collective action. (Silva, 2019, pp. 158-159)

Given how powerfully pessimism can sap political action, political actors engage in substantial emotional work to counteract pessimism and foster hope, at least among their own supporters (Gaventa, 1980, 16-17, 255-256; Jasper, 1998; Snow et al., 2019; Snow & Soule, 2010, pp. 51-52). This management of the emotion of hope certainly has a cognitive component,

where political actors offer solutions to the problems they have identified and strategies for carrying out those solutions. But the task of fostering hope also has a strong emotional element, where powerful words and stirring narratives play an important role, in motivating people to engage in collective action (Snow et al., 2019).

How Trumpists Foster Hope

Particularly for right wingers, the narrative of reclaiming a golden past has been a powerful way of stimulating hope (Levinger & Lyttle, 2001; see also Delahanty, 2023).¹⁹ Donald Trump has made a narrative of national decline but then resurgence a central part of his political appeal (Trump, 2016b, 2016c, 2016n). This was encapsulated in his powerful slogan “Make America Great Again,” which he borrowed from Ronald Reagan (Trump, 2016b; Vance, 2024a, 2024m, 2024s). For instance, Trump stated in 2016:

Everything that is broken today can be fixed, and every failure can be turned into a great success. Jobs can stop leaving our country, and start pouring in. Failing schools can become flourishing schools. Crumbling roads and bridges can become gleaming new infrastructure. Inner cities can experience a flood of new jobs and investment. And rising crime can give way to safe and prosperous communities. (Trump, 2016c)

Trump makes this hope seem attainable by arguing that he brings unique abilities to this task. He purports to be a successful businessman who thrived in the cutthroat world of real-

¹⁹ Levinger and Lyttle (2001) argue that such narratives typically have a tripartite structure: the glorious past, where the nation was once a unified and harmonious community; the degraded present caused by traumatic events; and the utopian future in which the nation will recover its original unity and harmony (Levinger & Lyttle, 2001, p. 178).

estate development, which is much like the amoral world of national and international politics. Moreover, he is someone who will not let the constraints of ordinary politics and constitutional niceties stop him from doing what has to be done (Trump, 2016u, v).

Meanwhile, JD Vance appeals to Christian beliefs in laying the basis for hope in the MAGA project. In the aftermath of the assassination attempt on Trump at his Butler, PA rally, Vance stated: “I really believe when you see that clip of an assassin’s bullet missing him by just a few millimeters, I believe that Donald Trump is here by the grace of God, and all of us should be grateful for it” (Vance, 2024m). And in his speech to the Republican convention Vance stated, “My friends, tonight is a night of hope. A celebration of what America once was, and with God’s grace, what it will soon be again. And it is a reminder of the sacred duty we have to preserve the American experiment, to choose a new path for our children and grandchildren” (Vance, 2024a).

How Left Anti-Trumpists Foster Hope

Left anti-Trumpists also try to cultivate hope. They do so primarily by exhortations to the power of united action by ordinary people, as in “the people united will never be defeated” (Mamdani, 2025a, 2025b; Ocasio-Cortez, 2020a, 2025c; Sanders, 2025a). Bernie Sanders stated:

The reason that Trump has been successful and why demagogues around the world are successful, you know what they do? They play one group off against another. They're telling you who you're going to hate. And our job is to do exactly the opposite. The right wing wants to divide us up based on the color of our skin or where we were born, or our religion, or our sexual orientation. And our job is to come together. Now, I don't have a PhD in mathematics, but I do know this,

that 99% is a hell of a lot larger number than 1%. So if we stand together, are strong, are disciplined, are smart, I have every reason to believe deeply in my heart that not only will we defeat Trumpism, but we can create the kind of nation that we deserve. (Sanders, 2025a)

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani put this in even more stirring terms in his 2025 nomination-acceptance speech:

There are many who thought this day would never come, who feared that we would be condemned only to a future of less, with every election consigning us simply to more of the same. And there are others who see politics today as too cruel for the flame of hope to still burn. New York, we have answered those fears. Tonight, we have spoken in a clear voice. Hope is alive. Hope is a decision that tens of thousands of New Yorkers made day after day, volunteer shift after volunteer shift, despite attack ad after attack ad. More than a million of us stood in our churches, in gymnasiums, in community centers, as we filled in the ledger of democracy. And while we cast our ballots alone, we chose hope together. Hope over tyranny. Hope over big money and small ideas. Hope over despair. We won because New Yorkers allowed themselves to hope that the impossible could be made possible. (Mamdani, 2025a)

The No Kings movement has tried to give empirical substance to this politics of hope by citing the impact of past anti-authoritarian movements. No Kings has widely cited the argument by Erica Chenoweth – based on research done with Maria Stephan on a host of movements of

nonviolent civil resistance to authoritarian regimes – that nonviolent resistance movements have toppled brutal dictatorships if they engaged at least 3.5% of a population (Chenoweth, 2017). This argument has fueled the concerted attempt by the No Kings movement to push hard for a string of rallies, each with a higher turnout than the one before.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper explores the importance of emotions in political life and analyzes how political actors try to catalyze and channel them through emotional discourses that build collective identity. Such attention to the politics of emotions is crucial for understanding the success of political actors and political movements, whether Trump’s Make America Great Again or the anti-Trump opposition movement.

In the case of right wing movements, if we ignore their appeal to emotions, it is easy to dismiss them as lacking content or trafficking in ignorance (Hochschild, 2020; Lowenthal & Guterman, 2021[1949]). But their appeal to emotions is one of their central messages and it is consequential. Donald Trump’s helter skelter speaking style is often derided by his opponents as devoid of substance or even stupid. But this misses the emotional content of his speeches. They are studded with phrases, images, metaphors, and stories that are quite potent emotionally (Hart, 2020; Hochschild, 2016, 2020, 2024a; Mercieca, 2020). As Arlie Russell Hochschild notes,

Trump is an emotions candidate. More than any other presidential candidate in decades, Trump focuses on eliciting and praising emotional responses from his fans rather than on detailed policy prescriptions. His speeches – evoking dominance, bravado, clarity, national pride, and personal uplift – inspire an

emotional transformation. (Hochschild, 2016, p. 225)

Trump's emotional strategy is far from accidental. There is considerable evidence that Trump very carefully studied what worked on the Fox network and talk radio, on his TV program *The Apprentice*, and in his rallies. Moreover, he drew on the surreptitious research done by Cambridge Analytica on Facebook users (Haney Lopez, 2019, p. 155; Smith, 2024, 817).

The politics of emotions are particularly charged now. Even if there are signs that Trump's power may be fading, his capacity to move his supporters emotionally remains strong. Moreover, his likely political successors on the right almost certainly will follow his lead in appealing to emotions to attract, hold, and direct supporters (Hawley, 2019; Rubio, 2020; Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.; Vance, 2024b, 2025g).

For left anti-Trumpists, there can be no escape from the need to understand, address, and harness emotions in politics. A politics of focusing on policy prescriptions without attention to mobilizing emotions has repeatedly underperformed in engaging mass support (Hochschild, 2024b; Mouffe, 2018, 2022). An appeal to the pervasive sense of loss, shame, fear, and anger in our society may be crucial to winning back a substantial portion of the voters – both white and nonwhite – captured by Trump (Hart, 2020; Hochschild, 2016, 2024; see also Judis & Teixeira, 2023; Shenk, 2024). If powerful emotions are addressed only by the right, they are likely to be mobilized in directions quite inimical to the values of the anti-Trumpist left (Demertzis, 2020; Mouffe, 2022). As Nicolas Demertzis notes,

When shame remains repressed and unacknowledged due to chronic impotence, it is transformed into resentment, anger and hatred for alleged “enemies” of the precarious self and associated groups, such as refugees, immigrants, sexual

minorities, the long-term unemployed, political and cultural elites, and the “mainstream” media. This is the case with right-wing populism. In left-wing populism, ... shame is acknowledged and thus it is morally transformed into indignation against neo-liberal policies and institutions. (Demertzis, 2020, p. 159)

Political leaders have emerged among the anti-Trumpist left who do speak strongly to emotions. Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Zohran Mamdani, and the leaders of the No Kings movement are clearly aware of the potency of addressing such important emotions as loss, fear, distrust, anger, and hope.

Both Trumpist political leaders and their left wing opponents energetically deploy emotional discourses and exercise symbolic power with the aim of creating collective identities (whether the MAGA movement or the 99% rising against the authoritarian 1%) in which emotions play an important part. However, the Trumpist and anti-Trumpist emotional discourses differ considerably in content, strength, and direction. To begin, when it addresses loss and sadness, the Trumpist emotional discourse addresses not just potential supporters’ relative loss of economic status but also of racial and gender preeminence, particularly on the part of white heterosexual men. In contrast, the emotional discourse of left wing anti-Trumpists has focused on loss of economic status and refused to validate the sense of loss of racial/ethnic, gender, and national primacy that the right appeals to.

When it comes to shame, the Trumpist emotional discourse pays a lot of attention to the feeling of shame due to loss of relative economic and social status and offers ways of reversing it by channeling it into pride and anger. Meanwhile, left wing anti-Trumpist emotional discourse has devoted little or no attention to shame and has not offered ways of mitigating it.

In the case of fear, the Trumpist emotional discourse focuses not just on fears of job loss but also fears of criminal victimization and cultural marginalization. Moreover, the Trumpist discourse not only addresses the fears of its potential supporters but also openly foments the fears of those opposing right wing populism, deploying notably brutal language and actions. Meanwhile, left wing anti-Trumpists focus on fears of job loss, economic insecurity, and loss of civil liberties among potential supporters and pay little attention to or openly reject fears of criminal victimization and cultural marginalization.

When it comes to distrust, both right wingers and left wingers use a surprisingly similar emotional discourse focused on describing the economic and political systems as “rigged.” However, the Trumpist rhetoric also encompasses the fevered claim that the political system, particularly the electoral system, is rigged against Trumpists, with the centerpoint being the allegation that the 2020 election was stolen. Anti-Trumpists, meanwhile, do not claim that the electoral system is rigged now but they do raise alarms that it will be rigged by Trumpists in the 2026 and 2028 elections.

When it comes to anger, the Trumpist emotional discourse is quite expansive in the political targets it proffers for the anger it mobilizes: political, economic, and cultural elites on the one hand and immigrants, people of color, women and gays, and progressive political groups on the other. In the case of these elite targets, the Trumpist focus has been on political elites and cultural elites (particularly the mass media and higher education). Meanwhile, anti-Trump leftists offer one main target: neoliberal capitalism, as personified by “oligarchs,” the “1%,” or the “billionaire class.”

Finally, in the case of hope, the Trumpist emotional discourse focuses on reclaiming a lost golden past via the actions of a uniquely qualified populist leader who is blessed by God. In

contrast, the left wing anti-Trumpist emotional discourse focuses on the solidaristic action of the nonelite majority, particularly if they are not undermined by racial and ethnic divisions.

Table 1 summarizes the main differences between the emotional discourses of Trumpists and anti-Trumpists.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Three differences between the Trumpist and anti-Trumpist mobilization of emotions bear further comment. First, the anti-Trumpist emotional discourse focuses on emotions attached to loss of economic status and, unlike the Trumpist discourse, ignores or even condemns emotions attached to losing or fearing the loss of racial or gender status as heretofore nondominant groups rise in social position and cultural centrality. While understandable, this stance unfortunately leaves the field open for Trumpist mobilization of those feelings of loss and fear, particularly among working class white men (see Mouffe, 2018, pp. 22-24; Mouffe, 2022, pp. 43-45).

This raises the question of whether there is a way anti-Trumpists can address the emotions of loss and fear associated with racial and gender status loss, without falling into excusing or even amplifying racial and gender bias. In such a quest, anti-Trumpists may find it useful to draw on the work of those developing a rhetoric involving more inclusive identities (Mouffe, 2022). One example is the effort to develop a “race class narrative” (ASO Communications, 2026; Haney Lopez, 2019).²⁰ Ian Haney Lopez provides a typical statement of this narrative:

²⁰ Unfortunately, research investigating the effectiveness of a race class narrative has come to rather contradictory results. There is some research backing up the effectiveness of this narrative (Haney Lopez, 2019; Kalmoe, 2021; see also Brock-Petroshius, 2024). However, there is other research indicating that a “generic class” or “color blind” class appeal works better, especially with whites, particularly ones who are more attracted to right wing parties (Campbell-Bethancourt, Bilgili, Blonmaert, & Lubbers, 2025; English & Kalla, 2021; Lubbers & Campbell-Bethancourt, 2025).

Regardless of where we come from, what our color is, or how we worship, every family wants the best for their children. But today, certain politicians and their greedy lobbyists are putting all of our families at risk. They rig the rules to enrich themselves and avoid paying their fair share of taxes, while they defund our schools and threaten seniors with cuts to Medicare and Social Security. Then they turn around and point the finger for our hard times at new immigrants—even tearing families apart and losing children. When we reject their scapegoating and come together across racial differences, we can make this a nation we’re proud to leave all of our kids—whether we’re white, Black, or brown, from down the street or across the globe. (Haney Lopez, 2019, pp. 206-207)

Second, the Trumpist emotional discourse has been more attentive to the emotion of shame and offering an outlet for it than has the anti-Trumpist emotional discourse. It would behoove anti-Trumpists to spend more time acknowledging shame – which is often one of the most powerful catalysts for destructive anger – so as to channel it away from scapegoating and xenophobia (see Demertzis, 2020; Scheff, 1988, 2003). One way certainly is to offer a structuralist explanation of the economic status losses of working people in order to counter individualist explanations that result in their blaming themselves (Lamont et al., 2017; McDermott, Knowles, & Richeson, 2019).²¹ But anti-Trumpists also need to find ways to transmute shame into nonxenophobic anger and pride. In this, they may draw useful lessons from the movements against AIDS and child abuse and for LGBTQI rights (Britt & Heise, 2000;

²¹ It should be noted that McDermott et al. (2019) argue that structuralist explanations will work better with what they call the “class conflict aware” segment of white working class people than with the “working class patriots” who fear immigration, see whites as besieged, and are most likely to draw moral boundaries with nonwhites and welfare recipients.

Gould, 2009; Jasper, 2018; Schrock, Holden, & Reid, 2004; Whittier, 2001). For example, ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) very effectively converted shame and deep loss into pride and anger by portraying LGBTQI people as righteous fighters in the AIDS crisis and identifying the government as being the one who should be ashamed for letting that crisis develop (Gould, 2009, pp. 249-250).

Finally, the anti-Trumpist emotional discourse of hope based on collective solidarity is arguably not as stirring as the Trumpist invocation of Make America Great Again, with its appeal to American greatness and exceptionalism. Left anti-Trumpists can learn a lot from past progressive social movements in how to deploy powerful narratives and moving rituals to foster hope and commitment. Regarding narratives, Black leaders, most notably the Rev. Martin Luther King, frequently used the Exodus story to embolden members of the civil rights movement. As Selby (2008) notes,

When, on the first night of the Montgomery bus boycott, King spoke of the “long night of captivity,” when almost a year later he proclaimed, “The Red Sea has opened,” when he invited his audience to imagine the “great camp meeting in the promised land of freedom and justice,” and when he urged his hearers, “We’ve got to keep moving” because “we’ve got to get to Canaan,” he joined a long tradition in African American culture of viewing life through the lens of the Exodus.... When King used that biblical language, therefore, he was not simply quoting the Bible but was invoking a cultural myth that had been developed and transmitted over the more than 150 years in which that story was told and retold by African Americans. (Selby, 2008, p. 27)

Regarding rituals, the labor, civil rights, antiwar, women's, gay, and other progressive movements developed moving rituals involving assembling together, creating a common focus, and engaging in synchronized actions (such as marching and singing together) in order to foster feelings of solidarity, commitment, and hope (Collins, 2001, 2004; Edensor, 2002; Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001; Jasper, 2018; Newman & Skocpol, 2023; Payne, 1995; Reed, 2019; Roy, 2010; Taylor & Rupp, 2002; see also Koenig & Mendelberg, 2025). Music, particularly collective singing, was a crucial source of hope and commitment for members of the labor and civil rights movements (Reagon, 1983; Reed, 2019; Roy, 2010). Bernice Johnson Reagon, one of the founders of the Freedom Singers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, quotes the great civil rights activist John Lewis on the impact of the collective singing of a freedom song: "This song represented the coming together, you really felt it—it was like you were part of a crusade, a holy crusade. You felt uplifted and involved in a great battle and a great struggle. We had hundreds and thousands of students from the different colleges and universities around Nashville gathering downtown in a Black Baptist Church" (quoted in Reagon, 1983, p. 29).

In closing, we live in an age where the politics of emotions are crucial. The mobilization of emotions has been a fundamental driver of the creation of the Trumpist MAGA collective identity. For the anti-Trump opposition, an effective politics of emotion may be crucial to its success in blunting the Trumpist movement and pulling away many of its members. However, before they can effectively do so, anti-Trumpists have much to learn from examining on the one hand what has made the Trumpist emotional discourse so effective and on the other hand what can be learned from the emotional discourses of past progressive movements.

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Table 1
HOW TRUMPISTS AND ANTI-TRUMPISTS DIFFER
IN THEIR EMOTIONAL DISCOURSES

	Trumpists (Trump, Vance)	Anti-Trumpists (Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez, Mamdani)
Loss	Address perceived loss both of economic status and of racial and gender status.	Focus on perceived loss of economic status. No validation of sense of loss of racial and gender status.
Shame	Strong attention. Blame social forces rather than individuals for their problems. Pride and anger offered as antidotes to shame of those termed by anti-Trumpists as “deplorables.”	Much less attention. Also blame social forces rather than individuals for their problems. However, don’t offer pride and anger as alternatives to shame.
Fear	Mobilize fears of both supporters and opponents. In the case of supporters, address fears not only of job loss but also of crime and cultural marginalization.	Mobilize fears only of supporters, focusing on job loss, economic insecurity, and loss of civil liberties.
Distrust	Strong use of term “rigged.” This was applied to the economic system in 2016 but in subsequent years came to focus on the political system, particularly the claim of stolen elections.	Strong use of term “rigged,” focused on both the economic system and the political system (particularly elite domination of campaign finance).
Anger	Directed at both elites and subordinate groups. In case of elites, attention to economic, political, and cultural elites (media and universities) with focus on political and cultural elites. In case of subordinate groups, focus on immigrants and political left but attention as well to women, people of color, and LGBTQI people.	Directed at economic elites (“1%,” “billionaire class,” “oligarchs”).
Hope	Narrative of making America great again through the actions of a uniquely qualified leader who is blessed by God.	Narrative of strength in the solidarity of nonelites, particularly if they are not distracted by racial and ethnic differences.