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Depictions of Terrorism and Islamophobia on CNN.com by U.S. Presidential Candidates

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Abstract

Since the 9/11 attack in New York, the U.S. government has focused on combating terrorism by pre-emptive strategy to destroy the save haven of the terrorists and punish those supporting them. Terrorism is associated with Islam, thus, discrediting Islam and spreading Islamophobia amongst the society. In their campaigns and debates, the U.S. presidential candidates have treated terrorism as a central issue to attract more Americans to vote for one of them. Hence, this paper analyzes their opinion concerning terrorism and what resolutions they offer if they are elected as president. The primary source is limited on the CNN.com and examined through adiscourse analysisof the subject matter. The analysis shows that Trump's policy in dealing with terrorism focuses on how to prevent the coming of terrorists by stopping the flow of immigrants, while Hillary Clinton's policy is more aggressive and emotional.

Keywords: discourse analysis, Islamophobia, terrorism

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1. Background

Islamophobia was awakened following September 11, 2001 attacks on the symbol of the U.S. wealth and prosperity. The terrorists succeeded in stoking fear and anxiety. In coping with the issue, the Bush government waged its war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq, two states known to support the terrorists and provide safe haven for them. The terrorists were from Islamic countries; hence terrorism is associated with Islam. The massive bombings in various parts of the world aroused the feeling of fear toward Muslims and reinforced Islamophobia in Western states.

The significant number of Muslim refugees and immigrants entering into the U.S. post 9/11 attacks has increased the anxiety of Americans. A study conducted by the Association of Religion Data Archives revealed that the number of Muslims in the U.S. increased 67% within a decade after the 9/11 attacks. In 2000, there were 1 million Moslems; the number increased to 2.6 million by 2010 and 3.3 million by 2015. Islamophobia makes Muslims living in those states live a harder life, encounter hatred, prejudice, discrimination, negative sentiments, and more crimes are attributed to them. The Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism pointed out that the rate of hate

crimes against Moslems in the U.S. has tripled since the terror attacks in Paris and mass shooting in San Bernardino, California at the end of 2015 from 12.6 to 38 incidents per month.

The portrayal of terrorism within the frame of international media has potential to spread and encourage more acts of terrorism across the globe. A research fellow at the Institute of the Study of Labour in Bonn, Germany, Michael Jetter asserted that terrorist organizations such as Taliban al-Qaida, Boko Haram or ISIS have successfully received extensive media coverage. Media and terrorism have been in a more mutually dependent relation; more to be symbiotic relations. Acts of terrorism are on TV stations, radio, newspapers, online news and social media across borders. Terrorist needs media coverage to create and spread terror, fear and to recruit followers. The popularity of terrorism on media has aroused higher degree of Islamophobia in the community, chiefly Western. Moreover, the depictions of Islam and Muslims in the news and mass media are mostly spreading negative depictions. Mass media seems to have failed in giving accurate portrayal of Muslims carefully and accurately. Such negative depictions of Islam have helped shape the community's opinions about Muslims and Islam.

The urgency to deal with this issue calls for concrete actions by the U.S. government and makes Islamophobia and terrorism paramount issues in U.S. presidential campaigns and debates. Both candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, campaigned on their views on how to cope with terrorism, Islamophobia, and Muslims in America. This paper presents the depictions of Islam and terrorism by the U.S. presidential candidates during the campaigns and debates, particularly on CNN.com.

2. Method

Hillary Rodham Clinton from Democrat Party and Donald Trump from Republican Party made terrorism and Islamophobia issues their vital key campaign mode in the US presidential election. The research conducted a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of their speeches, statements reported on CNN.com. CDA is a helpful method in multiple areas, such as education, literacy, gender, racism, ideology, economic, advertisements, institutional and media language, and, most importantly for this study, political discourse. In all these areas CDA focuses on issues like power asymmetries, manipulation, structural inequalities and exploitation (Blommaert, 451-452).

Political discourse analysis (PDA) focuses on discourse in political fields such as speeches, debates, campaigns, hearings. Political discourse theory explains that there is an interrelationship between politics and language [1]. There are impacts of those languages by political actors on the political power. Political actors are classified in two main actors, the first is the actor who wants to get the power, and the second is the actor who wants to maintain the power. In this sense, van Dijk points out that

politicians are the group of people who are being paid for their political activities, and who are being elected or appointed (or self-designated) as the central players in the polity.

In PDA, politicians are not the only actors in the politics, which from the interactional point of view of discourse analysis, various recipients in political communications are involved, such as the people, citizens or the society. In this paper, when political languages are transferred to public spheres through media, many participants such as the audiences, viewers, or readers are engaged.

Politics has vital dependence on media, which occupy people's everyday lives and has indispensable relations with the potential future voters. Undeniably, it must be taken into consideration that media plays essential roles in determining the interests of the political actors. Consequently, many of them spend significant amount of money on media campaigns. It is evident that politics and media is a mutual dependence. CNN.com is an online media chosen to be the primary sources of data in analyzing the views and future policies they will perform concerning the issues in order attract more voters.

3. Finding and Discussion

Analyzing the speeches and political languages by the U.S. presidential candidates for the following presidential term is critically essential in determining the future of the U.S. politics. Yet, not all sentences and writings dealing by the two candidates are analyzed, only those related to terrorism and Islamophobia issues on CNN.com were chosen.

3.1. Views on Terrorism

Both candidates have different style in responding to a terror incident, such as what happened on last September that an explosive device went off in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. "Clinton and Trump initially responded to the incident in contrasting styles: Trump was quick to announce that a bomb had gone off in New York, even before there was much information about the incident; while Clinton urged caution, and the importance of waiting to draw conclusions until more information was available [1]."

Likewise, in reacting to the France attack, Trump said he would ask for a declaration of war against ISIS without further information gathering concerning the assailant, whether or not the assailant had allegiance toward ISIS. Trump said to CNN.com "You know, in the old days, we would have uniforms, you knew what you were fighting. We are allowing people into our country who we have no idea where they are, where

they're from, who they are, they have no paperwork, they have no documentation, in many cases [4]."

Conversely, Clinton was more careful in responding to the issue; she called for greater intelligence gathering before taking actions. She uttered that it was "clear" that the U.S. was at war with terrorist groups, but she said it "was a very different kind of war." Therefore, greater intelligence gathering, not military force, was necessary [1]. "I would be very focused on the intelligence surge. I would be much focused on working with our partners and allies and intensify our efforts against the ideologues that pedal radical jihadism online [3]."

After his declaration of candidacy on June 16th, 2015, Trump was questioned about his knowledge of ISIS, he replied "Nobody would be tougher on ISIS than Donald Trump. Nobody" [4]. Yet, he did not give concrete action plans he is going to perform to defeat the terrorism so he will give time to his top generals for 30 days to come up with a plan to clean out ISIS. On another occasion, he declared "I know more about ISIS than the generals do. Believe me [4]."

Trump blames President Obama and Clinton's policy concerning immigration and the war in Iraq for it resulted in the bombings and shooting on American land, for instance the bombings in New York and New Jersey in September 2016. While perpetrators' motives and intentions remains unknown, the events brought significant impact on the heightening debate between the two candidates concerning how to deal with the issue. The chaos in the Middle East and the rise of the terror group was Obama's and Clinton's failure. Reacting Trump's speech blaming her policy for bringing home terrorist, the Democratic presidential nominee said she has been "part of the hard decision to take terrorists off the battlefield," and contrasted her steadiness to what she called Trump's "irresponsible, reckless rhetoric" [2]."

3.2. Future Policies

At home, Islamophobia and terrorism issues are unflattering. Hillary Clinton, U.S. presidential candidate from the Democratic Party, has commitment to fight against terrorist organization like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) both at home and abroad. However, her stand on terrorism remains to be conceptual and in broad strokes. In dealing with terror threats, she would work with U.S. allies in Europe and in the target region. She would also support local Arab and Kurdish forces on the ground. She also promises to combat ISIS propaganda online.

She assured her real commitment and that she has been part of the U.S. government to deal with the same issue. She utters it on CNN "I have sat at that table in the Situation Room, I have analyzed the threats, I have contributed to actions that have neutralized our enemies. I know how to do this," Clinton said during her news conference" [3].

Clinton has an idea to identify the terrorism groups further and do a direct attack to the core of the terrorism group or the leader of the group by employing pre-emptive strategy that has been performed by Bush administration responding 9/11 terrorist attacks. The main point of the strategy is offensive actions to take the fight to the terrorism where it grows before it attacks. In doing the strategy, Clinton suggested that,

> "We should also launch an intelligence surge to help identify and thwart attacks before they can be carried out. We need to work more closely with Silicon Valley and other partners to counter terrorist propaganda and recruitment efforts online," Clinton said, repeating policies she has long embraced" [2].

To fight against homegrown terrorism, Clinton has set forward a policy that is intended to reduce the re-emergence of terrorist attacks on American land. Jihadist attacks after 9/11 in the U.S. was executed by Americans and permanent legal residents, hence the key component to eradicate terrorism is by engaging the communities. The communities as the target for recruitment and among whom the terror actions are performed are essential defense force to fight against the terrorists. She uttered at the beginning of this year: "Millions of peace-loving Muslims live, work, and raise their families across America. They are the most likely to recognize the insidious effects of radicalization before it's too late, and the best positioned to help us block it. We should be intensifying contacts in those communities, not scapegoating or isolating them." [2].

Clinton tries to raise the plurality of American society. She believes that every people despite the various groups, races or religions have the same right to live in the U.S. for the U.S. constitution guarantees their unalienable rights. She believes that Americans can live together contiguously and respect each other. The hatred, prejudice, and discrimination toward Muslims must come to an end; therefore, Clinton keeps supplying aid to the refugees from Islamic states coming to the U.S to make a living. She does not see Islam as a threatening religion. Instead, she explains that the real threat is radical Islamic group namely ISIS, which conduct unlawful violence to inculcate fear among the community. She stressed out that the actors of terrorism are the radical groups. She said "We are going after the bad guys and we are going to get them, but we are not going to go after an entire religion and give ISIS exactly what it is wanting [2]." Obviously, Clinton tried to get votes and supports from the Muslims to win the election.

U.S. presidential candidate from Republican, Trump explained several points representing his ideas and commitments: First, Trump explained that the situation of US national security and terrorism were caused by the weakness of anti-terrorism policy

in Obama administration and Clintons position the former Secretary of State [2]. He blamed Obama's withdrawal from Iraq for it was so fatal that Trump saw Obama as the founder of ISIS. On Hugh Hewitt Show, he was asked if his statement that Obama is the founder of ISIS was that Obama created a vacuum and raised the chaos in Iraq. Instead, he has a surprising answer "No, I meant he is the founder of ISIS. I do. He was the most valuable player. I give him the most valuable player award (Trump on CNN.com.)" Such a statement spelled out so often by Trump that he habitually makes a conclusion without prior analysis, and proven to be untrue.

Trump has presumptive concern about the potential terrorists infiltrating in the U.S. by posing as Syrian refugees. Therefore, he is offering a solution that the new threat of homegrown Islamic terrorism could be solved if only the U.S adopts kind of "extreme" vetting of foreigners and drastic changes to the immigration system that he proposes and which lit a fire under his presidential campaign [2]. He strongly opposes admitting immigrants and refugees from countries with widespread anti-Semitic, anti-gay or misogynistic views and laws [2]. He called on the authorities to "temporarily suspend immigration from some of the most dangerous and volatile regions of the world that have a history of exporting terrorism," which is Islamic states [4].

Second, he is concerned with the immigration system may threaten the U.S. national security in this situation. He further said to CNN, "Hillary Clinton's decisions overseas have left us with the threat we face today and her immigration policies will invite this threat onto our shores, and it's already happening, let me state very clearly, immigration security is national security [4]." Third, he repeatedly blames Clinton for she does not have strong commitment on stopping terrorism punishing the violent extremist." Clinton wants to allow radical Islamic terrorists to pour into our country [4]."

The discourse analysis as shown in the section, used to explain how language and speech act are employed for the pursuit of pursuing power. Trump's speech acts are full of antithesis and oppositions toward Clinton's. However, it can be classified and seen that the focus of Trump is on the tightening immigration system and homeland security. It is obvious that Trump's policy is more on preventive homeland strategy. He tries to prevent the further spread of Islamophobia and terror actions by stopping the incoming flow of Muslims and refugees from Islamic states for he is assured that the extremists and radical groups are so far immigrants from those states. On the other hand, Clinton showed more concern on taking intensive information gathering to further take actions to cope with the issue. She believes that terrorism cannot always associated with Islam, only because some of the terror perpetrators are from radical Islamic organizations. She focuses more on how to deal with the terrorists abroad in their home base before they conduct acts of terrorism on U.S. land.

4. Conclusion

The revealing issue concerning the violent extremists or perpetrators terrorizing American land has attracted the two U.S. presidential candidates to project their concrete policies to stop the spread of Islamophobia and further terror acts. They argue several key points that affect nearly everyone on earth, terrorism issue, thus resulted in the different approaches.

Political Discourse Analysis is well applied in answering the question of how Islam and terrorism are depicted differently by the two U.S. presidential candidates on online media, chiefly CNN.com. Their experiences, understanding, and political interests define how they answered the questions concerning Islam, who Muslims are, who the assailants are, and how they would design the future policies.

Clinton used no campaign slogans or catch-phrases but what was called as comprehensive plan that would defeat terrorism by hunting down the terrorists and kill them. The "comprehensive plan" was easy for voters to understand that voters would support. Briefly, Clinton's strategy was more direct and aggressive than her rival competitor for she would hunt them down and then root them out from the core to prevent them from growing.

On the other hand, Trump was more into generalizing the negative depictions of Islam related to terrorism and his policy was focused on tightening the immigration system that no refugees or immigrants from Islamic states would be allowed to enter the U.S. land. Various events, past statements and gestures indicated that Trump glorified his being representative of white people, characteristic reflecting a true American. This chauvinism was reflected through his speeches, arguments, and comments on others having different skin-color. This was reflected in his depiction of Islam as the religion of hatred and violence. By articulating such speech acts, Trump represented the white people, who felt threatened with the massive coming of refugees from Islamic states post 9/11 attacks.

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