Trump's low conceptual complexity leadership and the vanishing 'Unpredictability Doctrine'.

This article argues that the Trump administration was not guided by an unpredictability doctrine, but was unpredictable because of the President's low conceptual complexity leadership style. This conclusion is derived by using grounded theory and utilising computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. We demonstrate that the notion of an unpredictability doctrine was introduced exclusively within the 2015-16 Republican primary season to avoid accountability; especially in the realm of foreign policy. The notion of being unpredictable served an important political function but was not part of a doctrine nor conviction in any meaningful sense. As a result, there was no commitment to an unpredictability doctrine throughout President Trump's time in office, except as a persistent myth broadcast by the various media outlets. We show that the notion of unpredictability and low complexity leadership was most evident with regards to the Trump administration's confrontation with the Islamic State. Whereby Trump's early evasion of accountability, and lack of a plan, was justified with appeals of needing to act secretly. Our analysis shows that Trump's unpredictability was not intentional, but rather a by-product of low conceptual complexity informing the formulation of policy.

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"We have to show some unpredictability -- I want to be unpredictable." Candidate Donald Trump; The O'Reilly Factor, Fox News

This article argues that the Trump administration's foreign policy was not guided by an 'unpredictability doctrine' in any meaningful sense. To demonstrate this, we set out an important distinction between *conviction* and *style*. A distinction that gets to the heart of whether unpredictability in the Trump administration was driven by an overarching doctrine, or simply a consequence of policymaker's behaviour leading to unpredictable results. Ultimately, our contribution shows that *unpredictability* in the Trump presidency was a *consequence* of style, and not *caused* by conviction to a particular doctrine. This conclusion was derived by applying grounded theory to a large qualitative dataset nested within sophisticated computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. This allowed an examination and reconstruction of how the specific, and associated, terms 'unpredictability' and 'predictability' were used by Donald Trump before and during his presidency. As a result of this analysis, we determine that President Trump's commitment to 'unpredictability' as a doctrine was transitory, and the administration's foreign policy was volatile because of the impact of Trump's low conceptual complexity on his leadership style.

To demonstrate our findings, this article follows a familiar structure. Firstly, we outline how we understand conceptual complexity within leadership styles and situate it within the current foreign policy literature. We then examine how the current literature situates unpredictability within Trump's foreign policy and its relationship to different schools of thought on the Trump doctrine. Significantly, the academic literature in this area is lacking, and therefore we argue that there is a need to explore how unpredictability features within Trump's foreign policy through sustained qualitative analysis. We detail our data gathering and analysis methods, before outlining how Donald Trump has used the concept of unpredictability before running for President, during his Presidential campaign, and throughout his time in office. We show that asserting the importance of being unpredictable was near exclusively limited to the primary season, between weeks ten and forty-eight after Trump announced his candidacy. This proved politically expedient but was rapidly dropped once in office. To the contrary, the need for predictability has been put forward in official documents. Whilst using the term *unpredictable* during the campaign, Trump was explicit, that he should not be expected to explain or provide a reason for his actions (*unaccountable*) and should be allowed to hide his intentions from others (*secretive*). We argue that Trump elided the meaning of unpredictability with unaccountability, and broke with democratic norms. This functioned in a way that allowed Trump to avoid deep engagement with foreign policy questions on the campaign trail. This was particularly the case with the Islamic State (ISIS), which is the central issue around which unpredictability was articulated, and where Trump's low conceptual complexity leadership style was particularly pronounced.

Unpredictability and the Trump Doctrine Literature

There has been considerable fanfare regarding President Trump's desire to be seen as 'unpredictable' (Miller 2017; Rachman 2017; Saletan 2016; A. Sullivan 2017; K. Sullivan and Tumulty 2017). This has included discussion of how unpredictable Trump was as a presidential candidate but also throughout his presidency. Lines have been blurred between discussions of the individual's unpredictability and the President's desire to project a series of unpredictable policies. We argue that these blurred lines are to be expected given the nature of foreign

policymaking. Indeed, Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), has long maintained that who decides matters (Schafer & Walker, 2006). Significantly, the personal characteristics of a President influence the formulation and conduct of foreign policy. As Barber set out in his defining work on Presidential leadership,

> [a] President's personality is an important shaper of his Presidential behaviour on non-trivial matters (Barber, 2016, p. 6)

In an era of the personalised imperial presidency, this is perhaps not a surprising proposition. However, our central thesis is that Trump's unpredictability is part of his leadership style, which favours low conceptual complexity, and not from a committed doctrine. We reject the notion that 'unpredictability' was a central tenet of candidate Trump's proposed foreign policy and certainly did not rise to the level of being a 'doctrine of unpredictability' in its own right (Fuch 2017b, 2017a). Our argument therefore hinges on a significant distinction between *style and conviction*; between conceptual complexity and doctrine.

Conceptual Complexity

To structure this article, we study President Trump's Trump's use of unpredictability, we articulate with the cognitive behaviour through the heuristic lens measure of conceptual complexity. Whilst conceptual complexity this is not the totality of Trump's leadership style;, it is a crucial component and one that is important for our purposes. This is not least with regards to helping us understand Trump's unpredictability. Before proceeding with the necessary definitions, it is important that we explicate the substance of our overarching argument and explain why these concepts are articulated together. Accordingly, we concede that it is possible to be unpredictable and exhibit high levels of conceptual complexity. This could be derived by *deliberate* strategy, whereby complex convictions and the need for secrecy underlie the need for various forms of political feinting. On the contrary, however, unpredictability can also be the *result* of low conceptual complexity, whereby a wanting worldview and lack of knowledge itself results in gaps of understanding, engagement and preparedness. In this scenario, a shallow, inconsistent, and ad hoc approach to policymaking is adopted, and unpredictability is the result. The problem with this scenario is that it creates a Gordian knot, whereby an individual can 'bluff' the former whilst fitting into the latter. They can profess conviction – a so-called unpredictability doctrine - when their unpredictability is a result of a low conceptual style and the need to obscure significant gaps in policymaking. At the centre of our analysis then is the question, did President Trump uphold a conviction to an unpredictability doctrine, or were his assertions lacking substance as he sought to 'con' his audience into believing there was more depth to his approach?

To address this question, we must first unpack how we are defining conceptual complexity. In broad agreement the most persuasive literature, we argue that he conceptual complexity influences how observant or sensitive a leader is to their decision-making environment, and the extent to which they use available information in their decision-making (Hermann, 1980a; 1987a; Nydegger, 1975; Preston, 2001; Tetlock, 1985; Ziller, Stone, Jackson & Terbovic, 1977). This complexity then influences their receptivity to opinions from their advisory group (Dyson and Preston, 2006). There are two components to conceptual complexity identified in the literature: (1) Differentiation, (2) Integration (Harvey, Hunt and Schroder, 1961; Schroder, Driver and Streufert, 1967). Differentiation refers to the ability of the leader to ascertain more than a single dimension in the information they are presented with or perceive information from more than a single perspective. Integration refers to the ability of the leader to combine these multiple levels in a bigger picture. A low conceptual complexity leader would struggle

to differentiate and integrate the different dimensions of information they receive. The higher the conceptual complexity of a leader, therefore, the more likely they are to differentiate and integrate dimensions of the information they receive.

The measure of conceptual complexity should be considered as a spectrum between extremes of high and low complexity. Leaders, leaders are classified as "high" or "low" depending on which end of the spectrum they are closest. A leader who has a high conceptual complexity is typically more able to address the complexities in a situation they face. They are more likely to be able to deal with ambiguities in the information given to them and are more likely to integrate feedback from their advisory group into their decision-making (Nydegger, 1975; Ziller et al., 1977). Leaders with a higher level of conceptual complexity are likely to perceive shades of grey in a situation and consider the consequences of their decision (see Table One).

In contrast, a leader who displays low conceptual complexity, is less likely to be receptive to information or views that contradict their preconceived ideas. The view of the situation they face is likely to be black-and-white, and so lacking the nuances that a high conceptual complexity leader would perceive. They are likely to filter information, selecting information that supports their view, and ignoring or dismissing information that opposes this view (Glad, 1983; Hermann, 1984; Vertzberger, 1990). They are, to put it simply, less adaptive to layers of complexity even when new or contradictory information is presented.

> There are obviously situations where lowered complexity may be adaptive: when decisions must be made immediately … when one faces an implacable opponent who will not negotiate; when single-minded devotion to a cause is necessary for morale or to overcome unfavourable odds; or when well-structured methods are more effective than innovation (1988, p.441).

When required to operate under conditions of stress, a leader may resort to "sense-making heuristics": affiliative, egocentric, and cognitive (Janis, 1982). This is particularly the case when there is an absence of expertise or tacit experience. Affiliative heuristics involve a focus on group dynamics; group members seek a solution to protect harmony within the group. A well-known example of this would be *groupthink*, where group members prioritise conformity in the group to the exclusion of consideration of decisions (Janis, 1982). Within Egocentric heuristics, decisions are made to satisfy personal motives or the emotional needs of the leader. With cognitive heuristics, however, simplified images of reality and selective information processing are crucial as they provide the mental map from which leaders strategisestrategize. To explicate this further, we provide a comparative table of conceptual complexity (Table One), which allows us to establish the binary parameters of conceptual complexity, and consequently demonstrate how Trump fits within these binary characteristics.

Table One: Comparing High and Low Ceonceptual Ceomplexity Leadership within Leadership

High Conceptual Complexity Leader	Low Conceptual Complexity Leader
They are more likely to perceive the nuances and shades of grey in a situation. They are more adept at differentiating dimensions in a	Their perception is black-and-white, typically they miss the nuance in a situation. As such, they struggle to differentiate

situation and are equally more able to interpret how these different dimensions relate to one another (Harvey, Hunt and Schroder, 1961; Schroder, Driver and Streufert, 1967).	dimensions, and are not likely to interpret how different dimensions relate to one another (Harvey, Hunt and Schroder, 1961; Schroder, Driver and Streufert, 1967). They perceive the world in binary terms (good/bad, friend/enemy). As such, they are more likely to make decisions based on emotion or intuition based on a single basic worldview (Dyson, 2006; 2018; Foster and Keller, 2014; Hermann, 1987; 1993; Yang, 2010).
Typically, they are adept at dealing with ambiguities in the information they are given. They are likely to integrate the opinions of others into their decision-making, taking on board advice. This can make such leaders appear more collegial and consultative in their interactions.	Typically, they are unreceptive to information that contradicts their previously held views. They filter information in line with these views, ignoring or dismissing information that does not support these previously held views. Filtering the information that they receive contributes to the inability to differentiate and interpret dimensions. ~~This filtering of information can lead to them appearing to be confrontational.~~
Usually, they are aware of the international context within which they are operating. Their willingness to listen to advice helps in achieving this. They pay attention to the reception of their actions by various international and domestic audiences. As such, they make decisions after deliberation and consideration.	Typically, they are less sensitive to international opinion. They are more likely to make decisions based on their intuition and emotion.

Within the parameters of Table One, President Trump is a prime example of a low conceptual complexity leader ~~with a low conceptual complexity~~. He has a particularly black-and-white, binary perception. For but one example, his~~H~~ use of the term "nasty" to refer to many of those who critique him individually or his policies is an example of this. These critics are "nasty" because they question or criticise Trump. Representative Nancy Pelosi, Vice Presidential Candidate Kamala Harris, Democrat Presidential candidate Hilary Clinton, Senator Ted Cruz, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senator Lindsey Graham, San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulin Cruz are just a small number of those called "nasty" for critiquing Trump (Blake, 2019; Parker, 2020). This label of "nasty" was used by Trump to dismiss their points of criticism or question. This concurs with Müller's (2017) assessment of Trump's populist rhetoric in his inauguration speech: "As Trump explained, because he now controls the executive, the people control the government. By implication, all opposition is illegitimate—if you oppose Trump, you oppose the people" (Müller, 2017b).

The many absolutist statements that Trump makes when referring to various areas of foreign policy are also indicative of a low conceptual complexity. Describing NAFTA as the "Worst

trade deal ever", or the Iran nuclear deal as "disastrous", or referring to treaty allies in Europe and Asia as trying to "steal the wealth" from the USA are all indicative of a lack of awareness of nuance. There is no acknowledgement of any good or useful aspects to these deals or alliances, or any recognition that there may have been good ~~intentions~~intent behind them. In each case, Trump does not differentiate between the various dimensions. For example, Trump considered all European and Asian allies to be trying to "steal the wealth" from the US, with no differentiation between different allies. Equally, there is no acknowledgement of the potential impact of such statements on relations with those involved in these deals or alliances. In these comments, Trump shows he is not interested in how these comments would be received. There are no grey zones in Trump's worldview (Hassan, 2017).

In addition, numerous well-grounded evaluations have highlighted Trump's emotionality. For example, Immelman (2017), deployed a personality assessment of Trump, conducted from ~~the~~ theoretical perspective of personologist Theodore Millon. Immelman found that a ~~critical~~key feature of Trump's personality is that he is "emotionally responsive". This has even emerged as a feature in official testimony. For example, *The Mueller Report* provides a litany of testimonials that repeatedly characterise Trump as emotionally driven and immature. Reince Priebus, one of Trump's former White House Chiefs of Staff, testified, for example, that when Trump was angry at the then- national security advisor Michael Flynn, Trump would pretend that Flynn was not present (Mueller Report, 2019). These emotional responses may appear to be both alarming and entertaining, leading~~and have~~ to descriptions of Trump as the "Toddler in Chief" (Drezner, 2020), yet they have foreign policy implications. There were contemporary reports that suggested that when Trump ordered the targeted killing of the Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, the decision was based on his angry reaction to footage showing the US Embassy in Baghdad being over-run by mobs backed by Iran (Cooper et al~~.,~~, 2020).

Throughout Trump's time in office~~,~~ there is simply sparse empirical evidence to suggest he adopted anything approaching a high conceptual complexity dynamic within his leadership style. To the contrary, there is an abundance of evidence suggesting he fitted at the extreme end of the low conceptual complexity description provided in Table One (also see Siniver and Featherstone, 2019). Simply put, President Trump displayed all the key characteristics of a leader with predominantly low conceptual complexity elements to his leadership style; binary perception, typically missing nuances, unlikely to make differentiations of the situations he faced, failure to integrate information, and an unwillingness to be receptive to ~~advise~~advice or information that does not support his own previously held views. The importance of this is that it facilitates a significant step in our *a posteriori* reasoning; the establishment of Trump's low conceptual complexity helps us deduce the probable reasons for his appeal to a so-called 'unpredictability doctrine'. It points our analytical compass in the more likely direction, whereby it was Trump's style that led to the need to obscure significant gaps in policymaking; rather than the existence of a new operating doctrine in American foreign policy. This moves us forward in postulating that Trump's exhibition of low-level complexity in policymaking is the more probable source of his presidency being unpredictable, rather than the conviction to any new well thought out doctrine. In and of itself, this is not conclusive however, and so it is to explore the possibility of unpredictability within a so-called Trump doctrine that we now turn our analytical gaze.

~~We contend that President Trump exhibits low- level complexity in policymaking, and that this helps explain why his presidency has often been unpredictable. Trump's unpredictability is a consequence of style. This is particularly the case in the area of foreign policy. The literature~~

It is commonplace in the study of American foreign policy to search for an overarching Presidential 'doctrine'. That is a prevailing view or belief system of how the US should engage with the world and orientate its foreign policy. Indeed, as Brodin proposes, we can understand a doctrine to be,

> a system of normative and empirical beliefs about the international system and the role of one's own country in that system, as declared in public by the official decision-makers of that country (1972, 104).

Similarly, we can imagine a doctrine to be an emergent subset of what Barber famously referred to as 'A President's *world view*', which '*consists of his primary, politically relevant beliefs, particularly his conceptions of social causality, human nature, and the central moral conflicts of the time*' ([1977] 2016, 5 emphasis in original). Herein, for there to be a 'doctrine of unpredictability' in its own right or as part of a more extensive 'Trump doctrine', we argue that unpredictability would need to feature within the Trump administration's foreign policy in the following ways:

1. Unpredictability would need to be consistently presented as a primary belief.
2. Unpredictability would need to fit within a more extensive system of beliefs – moral or normative.
3. Unpredictability would need to describe the international system and/or America's role within it.
4. Unpredictability would need to be adopted as a shared policy paradigm by Trump administration officials.
5. The need for unpredictability would need to be consistently explained to the public by the officials in point four, either verbally or in official documents.

These five points provide an effective benchmark from which to access how embedded unpredictability is within anything amounting to a doctrine. However, whilst there has been a great deal written about President Trump, there has been little sustained scrutiny of any "Trump Doctrine" and even less regarding the role 'unpredictability' plays within it. Perhaps this is because such doctrines are usually summarised sometime after a president has left office? Indeed, there is still considerable debate around both the G.W. Bush and Obama doctrines. Neither is fully defined despite considerable discussion (see Jervis, 2003; Coll, 2008; Goldberg, 2016). Accordingly, while it would be asking too much to definitively define what constitutes the "Trump Doctrine" at this stage, we see it as important to further the academic debate and establish any role unpredictability has played (see Hill and Hurst 2020; Hassan 2020; Kitchen 2020).

Already with regards to the Trump doctrine, discussions of unpredictability have not featured within the academic debate, despite being heavily featured within the media and commentariat. Nevertheless, there are already two distinct schools of thought emerging within the literature. The first focuses on the atypical nature of the "Trump doctrine" and considers it to be a distinct departure from those that have preceded it and indeed any tradition of American foreign policy. For Michael Anton, a former member of the Trump administration's National Security Council, the key feature of the "Trump Doctrine" is how unusual it is. Trump is atypical because he is not a 'dove' or 'hawk', not an interventionist nor isolationist, not a Neo nor Paleo Conservative, not a traditional realist nor a liberal interventionist. For Anton, Trump draws on each of these

listed above, formulating them into his own foreign policy doctrine. The "Trump Doctrine" to Anton is summarised by Trump's "America First" declarations, and his use of the phrase "great awakening of nations" in his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2017. This constituted a recognition of the patriotic/nationalist turn globally, and a complimenting of this development. In Anton's consideration, this is the critical aspect of the "Principled Realism" doctrine the Trump White House published; each sort out their own first. There are others who see the "Trump Doctrine" as even more simplistic than this "America First"/"Principled Realism" conception. Instead, the Trump doctrine is evidenced in the US troop withdrawal from Syria in 2019. In this consideration, the "Trump Doctrine" is that the US should only fight wars when the US has a clear national interest, and when they can expect to win (Ward, 2019). This is arguably too narrow to be determined as a "doctrine", although that may be a feature of the Trump doctrine rather than a flaw in the conceptualisation.

The second, downplays the unusual nature of the "Trump Doctrine", seeking to place it within traditional schools of thought on foreign policy. Dueck (2019), for example, considers Trump to be a conservative nationalist. In this framing, Trump adheres to one of the oldest foreign policy traditions in the US. This conservative nationalism prioritises the nation-state system, political realism, and emphasises nationality over any form of supra-national government. In stark contrast to the other conceptions, this more discriminate account considers the unusual nature of Trump's foreign policy to be a matter of style rather than doctrine. Yet, crucially, in neither of these conceptions is unpredictability accounted for or discussed as a central or peripheral part of Trump's worldview. As a result, it is necessary to go beyond the limitations of this literature and evaluate how unpredictability features within Trump's foreign policy. In what follows is a sustained qualitative analysis of Donald Trump's use of the term set against our five markers of what would constitute an unpredictability doctrine.

Data science and Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software Methods

To establish whether unpredictability is a consistently presented primary belief, and a consistent node of Trump's worldview, we cast the widest net possible to gather our data. That is to say, we sought information from before Trump ran for office, throughout the 2016 presidential campaign, and through his time in office up to the date of January 2020. This provided us with an extensive qualitative dataset of Trump's many public expressions in addition to the administration's publicly available executive records.[2] It included all of Trump's published books, campaign speeches, media interviews, press releases, and Tweets.[3] Also, we deployed data science tools to web scrape and reconstruct the White House website on a local hard drive.[4] Once this data was captured, we began to organise, integrate and analyse our data. To do this, we used computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) methods inside the software package *Prosuite* by *Provalis Research*. Most documents were routinely imported as they were existing .PDF, .RTF and .CVS file formats. However, to import the relevant data from the White House pages stored on our local hard drive, we used *Document*

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[2] We were unable to gather Trump's transcripts, for example, from the Apprentice. Indeed, questions were raised over their utility given the reverse engineered nature of the show (see Keefe 2019).
[3] This included all nine books from *The Art of the Deal* published in 1987 through to *Crippled America* in 2015; 990 documents from the campaign and 45122 tweets.
[4] The cut off point for our data was January 31, 2020, for both Twitter and the official White House website.

Conversion Wizard v.2.3. This removed unwanted files by format, for example .png, .ico, .html. In practical terms this stripped the webpages headings and indexes leaving us with .pdf and .rtf files.[5] These qualitative documents were then automatically converted into diachronically ordered cases. To search and manually code these cases, we used *QDA Miner*. This was supplemented with *Wordstat*, that allowed us to deploy text mining tools and careful and precisely measure the qualitative content we gathered. Our findings with regards to unpredictability are presented below.

Our overall approach used grounded theory to establish if *unpredictability* met the criteria for being part of, or in its own right, a doctrine. These were benchmarked against the five criteria set out above. Accordingly, we strongly agree with Byrne and Callaghan'sCallaghan's conclusion that,

> Computer- based qualitative 'analysis''analysis' packages … make bridging the qualitative/quantitative divide a relatively simple process … These tools … have embedded within them a grounded theory frame of reference. Grounded theory as it has developed in practice is an exploratory approach in which understanding is itself in large part an emergent from the research process and theory … what is required as a basis for this is a very carefully constructed history or, even better, histories (2014, 199).

It is precisely in using CAQDAS and a grounded theory framework that we have been able to reconstruct a historical account of how Trump has used unpredictability.. It is to this that we now turn.

Reconstructing 'Unpredictability'

Unpredictability in Candidate Trump's Discourse

Candidate Trump's original assertions that he is 'unpredictable''' can be traced through a close analysis of the corpus underpinning this research. Between announcing his candidacy in Trump Tower, on June 16 2015, and his first professed utterance of *unpredictability*, Trump made no fewer than ninety-four public speeches and media appearances. It was not until August 27 2015, that candidate Trump appropriated the term 'unpredictable' and began to articulate it as a prospective presidential approach. He asserted that,

> Someone said it was a great compliment, a great business guy, [Trump is] the most unpredictable guy ever. That's what we need, some unpredictability. We really do. And this business guy who is a tough cookie said it as a compliment. We need unpredictable. We're so predictable. We're like bad checker players and we're playing against Putin, who I would get along with great. I would get along with Putin. (Press Conference, Greenville, SC: Case 95).

A week later, Candidate Trump clarified this originally garbled message, saying in a radio interview,

> somebody wrote a very good story about me recently, and they said there's a certain unpredictable, and it was actually another businessman, said there's a certain

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[5] This reduced 8GB of data down to 31424 individual qualitative documents, which were then made into text cases.

unpredictability about Trump that's great, and it's what made him a lot of money and a lot of success. You don't want to put, and you don't want to let people know what you're going to do with respect to certain things that happen. You don't want the other side to know. I don't want to give you an answer to that. If I win … I don't want people to know exactly what I'm going to be doing (The Hugh Hewitt Show, Salem Radio Network: Case 101).

Significantly, overtime this crystallised into a significant trope of the Trump campaign. Between weeks ten to forty-eight of his overall Presidential campaign, candidate Trump would consistently espouse the need for greater *unpredictability*. This was a strong feature of the 2015-16 primary season. However, an analysis conducted on our cases within *wordstat* shows that Trump all but dropped the usage of this term shortly after becoming the Republican Party's presumptive nominee in May 2016; after Senator Ted Cruz and Governor John Kasich withdraw from the race (See Figure One).

Figure One: Candidate Trump's usage of the term "Unpredictab*" in paragraphs throughout campaign weeks 1 to 74 (starting on June 15, 2015, to November 8, 2016) taken from Trump Campaign Corpus Cases only.
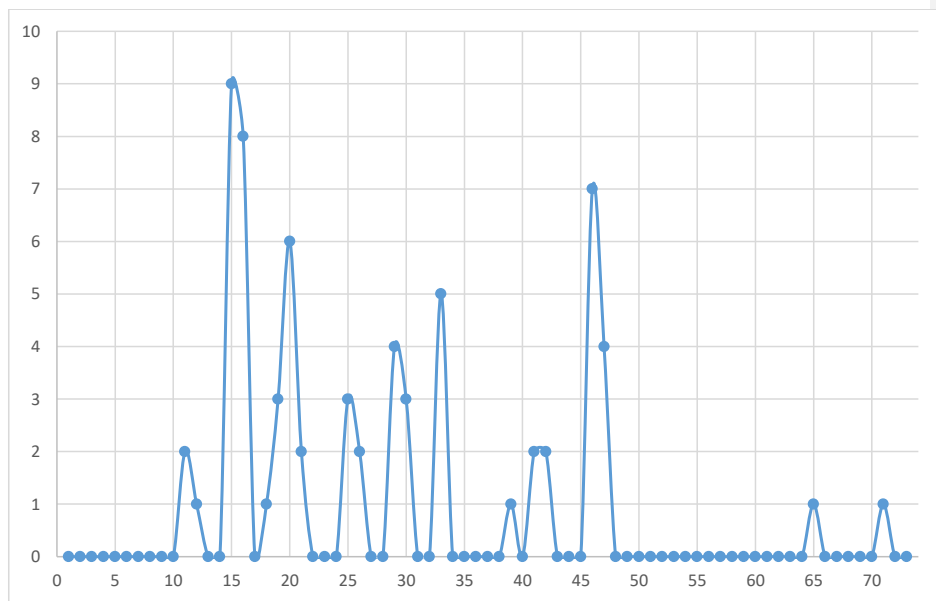
Unpredictability Before the Republican Primaries

Reviewing Donald Trump's published books, released before running for office, the need to be *unpredictable* in business, self-help, domestic politics or international affairs was not something the author espoused even as a peripheral quality needed in these domains. The three

times the term is used in *The Art of the Deal* (1987), it is inscribed negative connotations. Trump directly links the term to the unpredictability of licencing casinos, mental illness/poor judgement, and the unpredictable decisions of court juries; nowhere in this volume was unpredictability described as the mark of good deal-making or business. In *The America We Deserve* (2000) the term features twice, firstly to argue that 'There's something haphazard, impulsive, and unpredictable about American foreign policy today', and secondly about the 'unpredictability of the weather'. Indeed, the former inscribed that unpredictability in foreign policy was to be conceived negatively. The only positive inscription of the term *unpredictability.*[6] Before running for office are the two instances in *Trump: How to Get Rich* (2004), co-authored with Meredith McIver. The first usage was to see if, during a negotiation, your 'negotiating partner' is 'comfortable with unpredictability' (p.133). The second was by way of defining creativity:

> *Creativity.* The ability to see beyond the obvious, to think unpredictably and imaginatively, to make connections others might not envision. This is perhaps the hardest quality to develop—you've either got it or you don't (p.224).

No sense of the term unpredictable features in any of the books: *Trump: Surviving at the Top* (1990), *Trump: Think like a Billionaire* (2005), *Trump Never Give Up: How I Turned My Biggest Challenges into Success* (2008), *Think Like a Champion: An Informal Education in Business and Life* (2010), and *Time to Get Tough: Make America No.1 Again!* (2011). The importance of this is that for nearly three decades, whereby Trump was a public figure, media celebrity and author of several books on a wide range of topics, the notion of needing to be unpredictable in any meaningful or significant sense was absent. Through decades of building the Trump brand, unpredictability was not a central feature and was negatively classified rather than espoused as a central or peripheral doctrine to economic or political success. Looking at the facts of the case, there simply is no evidence of *unpredictability* being espoused as a central component of Trump's worldview before week ten of his presidential campaign; whereby he takes the label of unpredictability from a businessman he claims to have a positive sentiment towards. As such, prior to the Republican primary campaign, unpredictability did not meet the level of doctrine in any of the five principles set out above.

Trump and the Unpredictability Doctrine in Office

Analysing President Trump's corpora whilst in office, the terms unpredictable* and predict* are infrequently used. This is especially the case given the considerable attention his apparent 'unpredictability doctrine' has garnered. By Trump's third year in office, there were only three uses of the term unpredict* within our extensive dataset. Firstly, concerning the problems of reliable Federal Government funding for the military and national infrastructure. Secondly, in a tweet about the unpredictability of Hurricane Dorian. And finally, a re-Tweet, from the Fox News show @TheFive asserting that,

> "@POTUS being unpredictable is a big asset, North Korea knew exactly what President Obama was going to do."- (see Appendix).

Indeed, it is notable that from what is a very limited number of appeals to unpredictability by the President, a search of the ProQuest Database's full resources reveals considerably media

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[6] This included searches using the search term predict* and unpredict* where the * acts as a placeholder for any unknown or wildcard terms.

attention to Trump being unpredictable and to a so-called 'unpredictability doctrine'. A search garners nearly 50000 results, demonstrating just how strong the observed frequency of collocation outside of Trump's discourse itself is. Indeed, within the media, there can be no doubt that the terms 'Trump' and 'unpredictability' co-occur to form a significant collocation.[7] There is perhaps the case to be made that the notion of an *unpredictability doctrine* is far more an emergent product of the media than President Trump himself or his administration. Indeed, in several examples where Candidate Trump appealed to the need to be unpredictable, it is was often preceded with reporters leading with the assertion – reminiscent of the @TheFive tweet above. For example, an NBC News anchors interview with Trump provides an excellent example, and the exchange is worth quoting at length:

> MATT LAUER: Let me stay on ISIS. When we've met in the past and we've talked, you say things like I'm going to bomb the expletive out of them very quickly. And when people like me press you for details like that gentleman just said on what your plan is, you very often say, I'm not going to give you the details because I want to be unpredictable.

> DONALD TRUMP: Absolutely. The word is unpredictable.

> MATT LAUER: But yesterday, you actually told us a little bit about your plan in your speech. You said this. Quote, "We're going to convene my top generals and they will have 30 days to submit a plan for soundly and quickly defeating ISIS." So is the plan you've been hiding this whole time asking someone else for their plan?

Importantly, this captures an important dynamic, not only of how the term is used to avoid accountability but the way the media (before this interview in September 2016) accepted 'unpredictability' as a legitimate stance for candidate Trump to adopt with relatively little challenge. That this occurred in week 65 of the Trump Campaign, whereby 'unpredictability' is subsequently only appealed to once within our corpora, is suggestive that this approach had run its course (see Figure One).

This is supported by a closer look at the Trump administration's withdraw from the notion of unpredictability in office. Although President Trump withdrew from appealing to unpredictability, the media persisted with the notion. This was evident in an exchange with White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer, during a Press Briefing on North Korea.

> Q. You're doing it today and you've done it before — you've stood at the podium and said you don't want to telegraph moves that the President will make to preserve that element of surprise. A Kremlin spokesperson said that President Trump is more impulsive and unpredictable than Kim Jong-un. At what point does this strategy of unpredictability become a liability?

> MR. SPICER: Well, *I respectfully would disagree*. I think that the rest of the world, when he acted in Syria, in particular, the world community — not just the world community but here at home, on a bipartisan basis, applauded the President's actions.

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[7] As of January 31, 2020 ProQuest returns 48591 results for the search *Trump AND unpredict**

Q. So you see unpredictability as an asset?

MR. SPICER: Well, I think — absolutely. But it's not — I think that you have to look at the flip. I mean, I talked about it a minute ago — when you look at some of the actions that we've taken in the past, Mosul being a good example, where we leaned in and *started to explain what we were going to do and when we were going to do it, that takes a huge element off the table of not only surprise but achieving the effect that you're trying to do.* (See Appendix).

What this example shows, is the Gordian knot of appealing to unpredictability, when transitioning from the campaign trail into government. Reporters continued to push the notion of unpredictability as a deliberate strategy, even as the administration sought to demonstrate their predictability in office. Nowhere is this clearer than in the realm of national security. If there was to be an unpredictability doctrine, we would expect the Trump administration to have laid this out, even by way of passing or obscure reference, within the December 2017 NSS. Yet, to the contrary, the document, which bears~~bares~~ the President's signature, sets out the need for 'predictable relationships' and makes a~~the~~ case for 'more predictable business environments' (p.31; p.39). There is no reference to the importance of being unpredictable, or the need for such a doctrine with regards to adversaries. Just as before running for office, variations of the term unpredictability are not evident within our extensive database. The evidence shows that whilst in office, unpredictability did not meet the level of doctrine by meeting any of the five principles laid out above. What is evident, however, is that the notion of an unpredictability doctrine is one carried over from the primaries by media sources, and not the President or his administration. Unpredictability in Trump's foreign policy exists as a media myth rather than doctrine.

What does Trump mean~~Mean~~ by Unpredictability?

The picture we have thus far constructed, by reference to the data, has largely appealed to the historical frequency by which Trump has appealed to unpredictability. The~~It is clear that the~~ only significant period in which *unpredictability* is espoused as a positive attribute was between weeks ten to forty-eight of Trump's Presidential campaign. However, we concede that the frequency with which words are uttered is only a partial indicator of their importance. Frequency is simply a quantitative proxy for what is ultimately a qualitative phenomenon. However, by way of method, this step facilitates a qualitative dive into this crucial thirty-eight-week period, ~~so as~~ to better discern Trump usage and meaning of the term unpredictability. Indeed, ~~it is entirely possible that~~ there may be~~is~~ latency within the term – whereby an *unpredictability doctrine* exists, but is concealed or unspoken as it is carried forth. To explore this possibility, it is important to carry out a qualitative examination of what Trump meant by unpredictability within this period. As a result, we coded the Trump Campaign Corpus, looking at how and why Trump briefly made a~~the~~ case for *unpredictability*. The results of this coding are visually identifiable in figure two, showing not just the codes we identified, but more importantly, their relationships within the text and number of occurrences represented by size. It is to unpacking the core of our qualitative findings that we now turn below, but this is supplemented for the discerning reader with the appendix material provided.

Figure Two: Coding Co-occurrences of Unpredictability in the Trump Campaign Corpus

Stress = 0.36682   R² = 0.3783   Time: 0.7
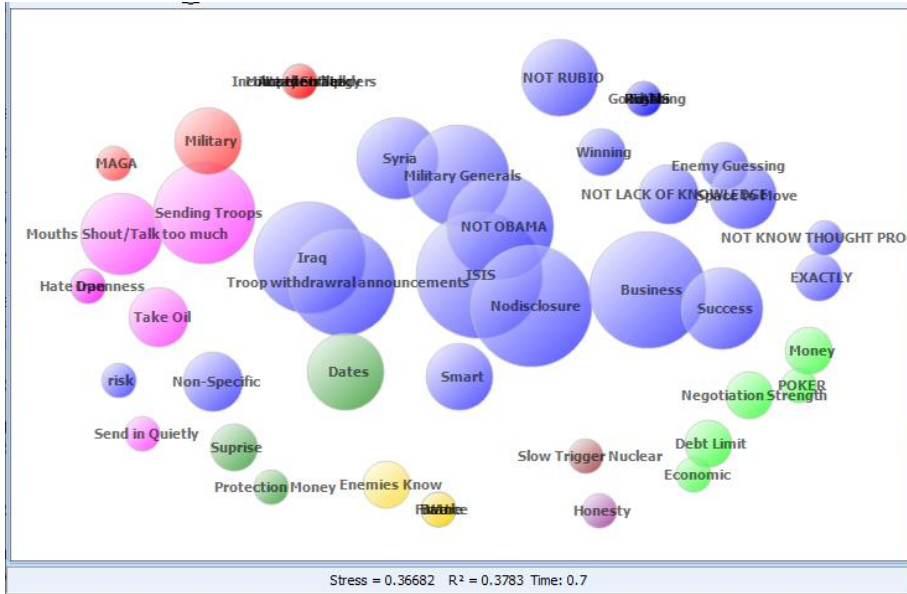
Constructing Trump's Identity: Not Obama, 'Smart' Business Success, and Strategic Military Insight

The most significant manner in which Candidate Trump deployed the notion of unpredictability was to reconstruct his identity on the campaign trail. Paramount to this was how he used the notion that business competitors complimentedcomplemented him on his unpredictability. A typical example of this recurrent theme in the discourse includes:

> … somebody wrote a very good story about me recently, and they said there's a certain unpredictable, and it was actually another businessman, said there's a certain unpredictability about Trump that's great, and it's what made him a lot of money and a lot of success. You don't want to put, and you don't want to let people know what you're going to do with respect to certain things that happen. You don't want the other side to know. I don't want to give you an answer to that. If I win … I don't want people to know exactly what I'm going to be doing (Document 101).

Candidate Trump often constructed his professed unpredictability as a necessary component of his business success. Yet, he also used it to construct his identity as 'smart', in juxtaposition to those he asserted were 'stupid' and 'talk too much'. This was in contrast to himself, who knew to keep his' mouth shut'. This clear juxtaposition, predominantly targeted at President Obama, was a way for Trump to construct his high intelligence and strategic foresight in contrast to his opponents. It was also deployed in this way against his Republican rival Senator Marco Rubio, although less frequently. Importantly, Trump was clear that the need for unpredictability was not due to a 'lack of knowledge',

> Well, you want to have a certain amount of, you want to have a little bit of guessworkguess work for the enemy. And I just don't want to be telling people, and this

is, by the way, this has nothing to do with lack of knowledge … I don't want to broadcast my intentions … I don't want to be like Obama, where he's always saying you know, we're going to do, in two weeks, we're going to do this, and then we're going to do that (Document 125).

Trump's asserted unpredictability was also articulated with a sense of strategic military expertise. This was made possible by consistently referring to 'General Douglas MacArthur' and 'General Patton' (Coded in Figure Two as *Military Generals*). Notably, within the campaign discourse, these two generals were consistently appealed to as the pinnacle of strategic military greatness. This was done weeks before the notion of unpredictability was introduced. For example, Trump made clear from the launch of his campaign, and repeatedly after, that he would focus on military renewal and,

> find the General Patton or … MacArthur, I will find the right guy. I will find the guy that's going to take that military and make it really work. Nobody, nobody will be pushing us around (Document 1 see Appendix).

Over time, and most distinctly by week six of the campaign, Trump began to use the representation of Generals Patton and MacArthur he constructed as a benchmark for himself to emulate. Indeed, when he was asked what his strategy towards the Islamic State (ISIS) was, he replied,

> Bomb them. And I'll tell you what I hate about this question. If I win -- if I win. I didn't want to answer this question. And I thought maybe I could go without answering it. Because if you look at the great General George Patton, or General MacArthur, I was a big fan of, any of this great general. They didn't talk about what they did. And I said I hate it. In fact, if you remember when I said I have a plan, but I don't want to talk about it. Everyone said, oh, he really doesn't have a plan. So, I had to do it. But I hate talking about it. Because if I win they know I'm going to do it. If I win I would attack those oil sites that are controlled and owned by -- owned. They're controlled by ISIS. They're taking tremendous money out. They are renovating a hotel in Iraq. Can you believe it? (Document 22 see Appendix).

We should ~~clearly~~ not regard 'Bomb them' and 'attack those oil sites' as particularly detailed or revealing elements of Trump's strategy. Indeed, such statements provide little strategic insight, nor conceptual complexity. They reveal a perception of a black and white world with little nuance, the desire to be confrontational, and filtering of the situation through a pre-existing financial lens. They are the epitome of low complexity leadership style. Not only does Trump recoil from providing even a superficial level of vision, but he elides military leadership and Presidential leadership, and seeks to evade norms of democratic accountability. Trump argues that, unlike Presidential contenders before him, his desire to be *unpredictable* should afford him the benefits granted to those of military leadership over civilian leadership. This provides a key function of an *unpredictability* discourse; whereby democratic accountability is undermined as the duties and responsibilities of civilian and military leadership are blurred.

Nondisclosure: Unpredictability and the Evasion of Democratic Accountability
Prior to the introduction of 'unpredictability' into Trump's discursive structure, Candidate Trump began to assert that he did not want to answer questions on international affairs, particularly in the Middle East. However, at the same time, Candidate Trump was chastising his opponents for not answering questions on the Middle East:

But all of these politicians that I'm running against now … I mean, you looked at [Jeb] Bush, it took him five days to answer the question on Iraq. He couldn't answer the question. He didn't know. I said, "Is he intelligent?"… I looked at Rubio. He was unable to answer the question, is Iraq a good thing or bad thing? He didn't know. He couldn't answer the question. How are these people gonna lead us? … They don't have a clue. They can't lead us. They can't. They can't even answer simple questions (Document 1).

Examples such as this show how Candidate Trump was able to construct a dichotomy of expectations between 'insider' politicians being unable to answer questions, and 'outsider' Trump not wanting to answer questions for strategic reasons. Within Trump's worldview, this was because they 'lacked intelligence', whereas Trump is self-referentially 'smart'. This linguistic structure, is, however, fragile. Within Trump's narrative, neither he nor his opponents were answering questions, but the caricatured identities facilitated very different reasons for this. Trump's discourse around unpredictability provided a temporary intellectual ballast explaining the difference to the audience. By articulating unpredictability within a wider construction of his identity, Trump sought to construct very different expectations of accountability within the narrative. Insiders needed to be held accountable for their failings, whereas outsider Trump, because of his business experience, intelligence and overall self-asserted prowess should not be subjected to the same levels of accountability. For Candidate Trump, unpredictability was a mode depriving the audience answers to questions of foreign policy. For Trump, between weeks ten to forty-eight of his overall Presidential campaign, it became routine not to disclose answers to foreign policy questions, and assert variations of 'I don't want to tell you':

I wouldn't want to tell you … you don't want to let people know what you're going to do with respect to certain things that happen. You don't want the other side to know. I don't want to give you an answer to that … I don't want people to know exactly what I'm going to be doing (Document 107)

And I just don't want to be telling people, and this is, by the way, this has nothing to do with lack of knowledge … I don't want to broadcast my intentions. I don't want to have, I'm so transparent, I'm so open, here's what we're going to do. They have to guess. They have to be able to say you know, he's unpredictable (Document 123)

I don't want to tell too much, you know? I don't want to tell too much. (Document 189)

We are run by incompetent people … I don't want the other side to know exactly what I'm going to do so that they can start thinking about it, planning for it. I want to be unpredictable (Document 209).

I'm going to clue them in because I have to to a certain extent. But I don't want … I don't want the other side to know what my views are, where I'm coming from, what I do … You got to be cool and you got to be unpredictable. And you just can't go in and say exactly here's my plan. And I do have plans. And by the way, plans are always subject to massive change. And they change. You got to win. And I know how to win. These guys don't know how to win (Document 233).

I didn't want to answer this question. And I thought maybe I could go without answering it (Document 297).

> I don't want to really be saying what my initial thought is. Also, my initial thought may be much different from what I want to do at the time. But I want them to not know what my thought process is (Document 125).

This is an important trope, not only because it contravenes norms of democratic accountability within the electoral process, but because it also facilitates Trump's low conceptual complexity. For Trump, the term *unpredictable* does not refer to a likelihood of sudden change without reason. This is not the core meaning presented in the examples above, and throughout the larger campaign corpus. Rather, a more precise word is *unaccountable*, as in not to be expected to explain or provide a reason for your actions. Moreover, Trump is not being unpredictable by not disclosing even basic elements of his foreign policy, rather he is ~~being~~ *secretive*, whereby he is hiding his lack of a detailed plan from others. Trump was deliberately obstructing scrutiny to mask a consequence of his low conceptual complexity. When understood in this way, Trump's use of the term *unpredictable* can be seen as an attack on democratic values of openness and accountability. To this extent, we offer a note of caution, whereby to assert that there is a master plan, or a deliberate doctrine of unpredictability is to overfit Trump's assertions with the evidence at hand. Indeed, once in office, President Trump's administration reinforced a more accurately named *unaccountability doctrine*, by often attacking the media, refusing to take questions from reporters unfavourable to the administration, and abandoning the White House daily press briefing.[8] This is not a doctrine of unpredictability, but rather a doctrine of unaccountability, which was a central feature of candidate Trump's Presidential campaign.

*~~Most evidently, this feature manifest itself with regards to ISIS. complexity?~~*Style over Conviction: Trump and ISIS

How was 'unpredictability' operationalised as a result of low conceptual complexity?~~Style over Conviction: Trump and ISIS~~

Thus far, we have demonstrated that Trump exhibits low conceptual complexity and does~~did~~ not maintain any conviction to 'unpredictability' as a doctrine; meeting zero of our five conditions set out above. We have also demonstrated that Trump's use of the term unpredictable was because of its political utility in a campaign, between weeks ten and forty-eight. Yet, ~~in addition to this~~ our analysis has revealed that 'unpredictability'~~the notion of unpredictability~~ was particularly related to issues of foreign policy. ~~, which is worthy of reflection.~~ In one respect~~,~~ this finding is unsurprising; even if it is important. The literature is generally agreed that those presidents who were more active in foreign policy in office, had an interest in foreign policy or had experience in foreign policy before coming to office (Hermann, 1980; 2001; Boettcher, 2005; Gallagher & Allen, 2014). Trump does not fall into this category, given his previous inexperience in both government and the military. ~~Trump's proclivity masked low~~Low conceptual complexity ~~was masked by Trump''s proclivity~~ for showmanship and entertainment, that produces the need for shock, attention, and an ad hoc approach to policy. This was not only outwardly visible in Trump's frequent use of Twitter as a mode of communication (Shear et al. 2019; Staff 2016) but more broadly evident in the way he was '"pushing traditional boundaries, ignoring longstanding protocol and discarding historical precedents'~~precedents'~~ to reshape 'the White House in his own image' (in Baker 2017; also see

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WashPostPR 2017). Herein, we can see the relationship between low conceptual complexity and the need to make claims about unpredictability. Claims of unpredictability helped obscure Trump's low conceptual complexity, and allowed his leadership style to flourish in the realm of foreign policy; a realm of high politics traditionally reserved for the soberest of discussions and careful styles.

That unpredictability was predominantly operationalised in the realm of foreign policy is visually demonstrated in figure two, where '

Furthermore, theThe 2018 State of the Union address was a key moment for Trump, and yet another another point where his information processing style was overtly on display. Trump declared in his speech, "I"I'mm"I'm proud to report that the coalition to defeat Isis has liberated almost 100% of the territory once held by these killers in Iraq and Syria"."... This was , in fact, rather inaccurate. In actuality, the US-led coalition had recovered significant areas from ISIS, but by no means 100%. The source of this particular claim is revealing. Rather than relying on his -administration, his claim was thought to be based on a news report from Fox News report (Tomlinson, 2017).

The confrontational style that Trump displays areis infamous, both interpersonally and in the international arena. He is known to use handshakes as a means of dominating a meeting, for example (Vespoulis, 2018). When meeting with Trump in March 2019, French President Macron implored him to be ""serious"" over the continued threat from ISIS. Trump ignored this critique, calling on Macron to take more captured ISIS fighters into France, and dismissing Macron'sMacron's answer as politician'spolitician's speak (Forgey, 2019). Trump had preceded the meeting with severala number of confrontational policies and statements, announcing tariffs on French produce (Mortazavi, 2019). WhilstThis it must be noted that there can be many sources for a confrontational approach in a leader'sleader's style, with Trump, this confrontational style in part, stems from his information processing. Trump is confrontational to other world leaders when they attempt to present him with information that he disagrees with or advise an approach that he dislikes. In this way, Trump'sTrump's low conceptual complexity has led to a negative impact on US relations with a key ally in the fight against ISIS, whilst also leading to foreign leaders labelling him as being unpredictable. However, this unpredictability is the result of style and not a conviction to anything nearing the level of doctrine.

Throughout this article, we strived to establish whether President Trump maintained a commitment to anything amounting to an unpredictability doctrine, or if like the emperor's new clothes, there was some larger non-substantive political con trick at play. Undoubtedly, despite analysing a considerable volume of data, we were unable to find any meaningful evidence to support the former. There was no *causal* conviction to a doctrine, but there was the *result* of unpredictability because of the ad hoc and ill-informed nature of policymaking within the administration. In this sense, Trump's unpredictability is not intentional, and Trump's failure to meet any of our five basic criteria for a doctrine demonstrates this. To pretend otherwise is to accept that the emperor is wearing new clothes.

We regard this as an extremely robust finding, as However, the extent of the dataset used in this study here provides great insight into Trump's use of the term unpredictability as a term and an idea. In and of itself, this is an important contribution because it shows, firstly, that

unpredictability is not part of any Trump doctrine, and secondly, our findings entirely contradict how Trump has been covered in various media sources and the existing literature on this issue. Our wider contribution is also evident in our methods. Examinations of both international security and leadership style rarelyare rare to have such extensive qualitative data informing their conclusions, but this has allowed our predominantly qualitative methods to to be reinforced with quantitative visualisationsand this forms part of the contribution of this article. Building upon this, our research demonstrates the utility of combining grounded theory and CAQDAS to analyse leadership styles and discourse. This is not least in attempting to scrutinise a leadership style where low conceptual complexity elides with a disregard for even appearing to strive for some sense of truth.

This article also reveals a weakness in the democratic system, whereby accountability is eroded. Using grounded theory, supported with CAQDAS, we have shown how Trump elided the term *unpredictable* with *unaccountable*, and that this had a distinct purpose in the months of his candidacy. There is a What we have shown is the political utility toof claiming to be 'unpredictable' in the area of foreign policy; as a way of masking low conceptual complexity. This appears to be a significant weakness in democratic ideals of accountability, and one that this article is keen to highlight in stark terms. Indeed, there is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate that there was no 'unpredictability doctrine', and allow us to agree with Fareed Zakaria's assessment that Trump was 'a bullshit artist' and someone who 'got the presidency by bullshitting' (Zakaria 2017). In and of itself, our analysis raises serious questions over the media's scrutiny of candidates, especially the media's role in perpetuating the myth of unpredictability. However, questions must also be raised of the academy, and how it deals with candidates willing to obfuscate their intentions, or lack thereof, to gain power? Our methods may provide the start of attempting to answer this most important of questions, and a way of better contributing to public discourse.

Using grounded theory, supported with computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), we have shown how Trump elides the term *unpredictable* with *unaccountable*. This had a distinct purpose in the months of his candidacy. His use of *unpredictability* served to both prevent him from needing to engage with foreign policy questions, and to mask his own low conceptual complexity leadership style. Trump continued to display this low conceptual complexity in his foreign policy, particularly in his approach to ISIS. It is from this low conceptual complexity that the unpredictability associated with the Trump presidency stems.

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