

SLOGANS WE CAN BELIEVE IN: AN EXAMINATION OF WHAT MAKES FOR  
AN EFFECTIVE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN SLOGAN

by

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## ABSTRACT

ERIK J. BROOKS. Slogans we can believe in: An examination of what makes for an effective presidential campaign slogan. (Under the direction of DR. RICHARD LEEMAN).

Presidential campaign slogans have been a constant aspect of American presidential campaigning since 1800. However, despite slogans' continual use, very few scholarly inquiries have been made regarding what actually makes for an effective presidential campaign slogan. While various scholars, historians, and political analysts have commented on the many political uses of slogans, this study attempts to assess the rhetorical qualities that may ultimately benefit or hinder a slogan's success. Three focus groups, separated by major political party affiliation, were employed to evaluate voters' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs regarding presidential campaign slogans. The results of the focus groups illustrate that certain desirable and undesirable qualities may indeed exist for presidential campaign slogans, while also indicating that effective slogans may contain specific rhetorical capabilities. The apparent takeaways of this study offer thought-provoking and intriguing implications for scholars and political professionals alike, but more importantly exhibit the powerful rhetorical potential slogans hold and offer a significant starting point for scholars to expand and build upon the conclusions gathered.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis study to my two daughters, Anna and Juliet, and their mother Elizabeth, for whom I dedicate my entire life. This thesis would also not have been possible without the direct support, encouragement, and guidance from my mother and father throughout my entire academic career.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION & SIGNIFICANCE

Every four years in the United States the general public prepares for another election cycle to determine who the next president will be. Primaries begin, campaigns roll by state by state, and citizens are bombarded with campaign advertisements in the form of brochures, television commercials, yard signs, bumper stickers, and door-to-door visits. One constant across the spectrum of advertising is the perpetual recitation of the candidates' campaign slogans. However, despite a slogan's continual presence in presidential campaigns, scholars from numerous disciplines have scarcely explored their use, function, and power. Various studies have lightly touched on specific aspects of international presidential slogans, while numerous experts, analysts, and historians have provided commentary and opinion on specific presidential campaign slogans used throughout American history. Yet still, there has not been a single in-depth analysis or examination that has explored the rhetorical functions, capabilities, or characteristics that effective American presidential campaign slogans may exhibit. This study intends to demonstrate the powerful potential that campaign slogans carry, while elucidating the various aspects of effective slogans to create a starting point for future research. For the purpose of this study, effective slogans will be defined as those slogans that are able to enhance the campaign's messaging as measured by increased involvement of a voter in the presidential campaign in some form. That involvement may manifest itself in a variety of voter activities, including further researching the candidate, volunteering, sharing the campaign's messaging with others in a positive way, or even voting for the candidate.

“I Like Ike!” “It’s Morning Again in America.” “Yes We Can!” have been some of the most memorable presidential campaign slogans in U.S. history. Many Americans can remember these slogans, yet very little about the actual campaigns in which they were used. Many voters do not seem to appreciate or recognize the effect a candidate’s slogan may have on them. Some observers believe the electorate has become “numb” from a series of failed and meaningless slogans, thus causing a tendency for voters to simply dismiss slogans as a mere formality (Mullins, 2013). As illustrated by Hosu and Pavelea (2010), even voters in Romania have felt the numbing effect of campaign slogans. Their study found that voters were rarely able to recall a presidential candidate’s slogan, and when they could, they did not generally perceive it to be meaningful (Hosu & Pavelea, 2010). Voters interviewed by Hosu and Pavelea simply dismissed presidential slogans as a ritualistic formality, rather than an integral part of the campaign.

However, campaign professionals devote considerable time and attention to slogans. Slogans consume a great deal of forethought from campaign managers, political strategists, and political pundits, who see a candidate’s slogan as the first attempt to define their identity and create a brand around their candidacy (Jamieson, 1996). According to Eric Swartz, communications expert and president of Tagline Guru, “Political slogans still have marquee value on the national stage and can shape our perceptions of the candidates” (Swartz, 2015, p. 1). Scholars have also agreed that campaign slogans may be compelling and meaningful. According to Sabato (2015), a good slogan will give voters something to get behind; it will give them a tangible idea or concept that they can support and even become enthusiastic about. This in turn may lead them to spread their support to others and then take that enthusiasm into the voting booth.

Noted columnist and intellectual Walter Lippmann also argued that, “Slogans can shape and misshape cognition” (Seidman, 2013, p. 1), while Jamieson (1988) observed that slogans “are able to stand for entire constructions of reality, slogans are a powerful rhetorical device” (p. 124). Jamieson (1996) also noted that “slogans capsule the message of the advertising campaign. They can function as an optic through which the campaign can be viewed” (p. 98). While professionals and scholars perceive slogans as important tools, little scholarly attention has been paid to what “makes” an effective presidential slogan, or a political slogan in general. Additionally, to date no one has yet established a strategy for creating a successful slogan (Seidman, 2013).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Presidential campaign slogans throughout history

Because of the early inception and continual appearance of slogans in presidential politics, numerous historians have commented on their origins and political uses. During the combative 1800 campaign between incumbent John Adams and Democratic-Republican challenger Thomas Jefferson, Adams' campaign coined the slogan "God — and a Religious President, Jefferson — and no God" (Seidman, 2013). The slogan simultaneously praised the current president and condemned Jefferson as an atheist. Continuing on, campaign slogans were believed to have an important and practical use in the political arena. Candidates eventually formulated campaign slogans as battle cries to "rally their supporters" around a candidate's platform, as was seen with the 1844 election slogan of "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight" (Sperber, 1957). One of the most notable slogans of 19th century American politics was William Henry Harrison's 1840 slogan of "Tippecanoe and Tyler too." This slogan, referencing the ticket's "heroic" work as soldiers, was a powerful image-based slogan that helped boost Harrison's campaign to victory (Seidman, 2013). The early 20th century saw popular slogans such as Woodrow Wilson's 1916 slogan "He kept us out of war," Warren Harding's 1920 "Return to normalcy," and Herbert Hoover's 1928 "A chicken in every pot. A car in every garage." More recent decades have seen the popular slogans of President Eisenhower's "I Like Ike," President Reagan's "It's Morning Again in America," and President Obama's "Change We Can Believe In." Many effective political campaign slogans appear to reflect or "capture" the political environment or context in which they are used. Kiewiet

and Rivers (1985) noted that in 1984 “the economy was booming, unemployment was falling, inflation was under control, and Reagan was president” (p. 73). Reagan’s “It’s Morning Again in America,” though not purposefully designed as a campaign slogan, originated from his famous TV advertisement, and was said to perfectly capture the optimism, hope, and refreshed feeling that most of the country had towards this changing economy (Holbrook, 1994; Kinder, Adams, & Gronke, 1989; Jamieson, 1996; Cone, 2008; Roberts, Hammond, & Salfaro, 2012). The phrase subsequently became a repeated slogan by voters and was used in various campaign capacities (Cone, 2008). Cone (2008) additionally observed that “Better days were ahead [and] Reagan’s “It’s Morning Again in America” embodied these sentiments” (p. 75). Roberts et al. (2012) analysis of the 1916 election showed that “The national concern over possible U.S. involvement into World War I, which had erupted in Europe in August 1914, dominated the presidential campaign ” (p. 63) and propelled President Wilson’s slogan to victory. Wilson’s “He kept us out of war” played on people’s fear about the war overseas and their gratitude that Wilson had kept the U.S. out of the conflict (Seidman, 2013; Roberts et al. 2012; Claussen, 1966). Barack Obama’s “Change we can believe in” as well as “Hope,” “Change,” and “Yes We Can” all encompassed the overwhelming yearning of the electorate’s desire for a drastic change from the status quo and a government that the people can believe in once again (McGuire, 2010; Hodges, 2014; Seidman, 2013; Roberts et al. 2012). In her rhetorical analysis of the “Yes We Can!” slogan, McGuire (2010) discussed the campaign’s attempt to connect themselves to other social movements by strategically using the English version of the famous “Si Se Puede” slogan of the United Farmworkers. She asserts that the slogan was relevant to the current time period because

of the growing popularity of minority social movements. The “Yes We Can!” movement then enabled these three simple words to “inspire a generation, unite a community, and change a nation” (McGuire, 2014, p. 2). Hodges (2014) saw a connection between Obama’s slogan and American culture, arguing that “Yes We Can” “tapped into a spirit of American optimism and emphasized a determination to keep working for political change” (p. 8). Each of the aforementioned slogans were accompanied by campaigns that achieved success in their respective elections, indicating the possibility that slogans such as these may lead to success in future political elections.

Not all slogans have been as successful. Slogans such as President Carter’s “Not just peanuts,” President Nixon’s “Nixon Now,” and Ross Perot’s “Ross for Boss,” have been regarded as unimpressive and quickly forgotten. Similar evaluations have been made of the presidential slogans of John Kerry in 2004, John McCain in 2008, and Mitt Romney in 2012 (Buckley, 2004; Sanneh, 2012). In 2016, Republican presidential candidate Jeb Bush’s campaign slogans of “Jeb!” “All in for Jeb!” and “Jeb can fix it,” were also heavily criticized. Many pundits and political commentators noted how incredibly weak they believed Gov. Bush’s slogans to be, noting that “if Governor Bush was trying to convey to voters that he really didn’t care about being a serious candidate at all, his campaign slogans do just that” (Ross, 2015; Jackson, 2015; Lapotin, 2015; Sanders, 2015; Wagner, 2015). The Guardian went so far as to say that Gov. Bush’s slogan “sounds like a sitcom or a Broadway musical. It could also be someone swearing” (Jeb!, 2015). With all of the millions of dollars the Bush campaign amassed in its fundraising and with the team of political experts associated with the Bush family, it would have seemed that someone in this large and extensive campaign could have

devised a better slogan. Regardless, Gov. Bush's slogans are another example of how presidential campaign slogans may be poorly developed and thus do not take advantage of their rhetorical potential.

Presidential slogans in recent decades seem to have exemplified this misuse of slogans. Their rhetorical potential has been underrated and the result has been evident. Cone (2008) concludes that, "Most slogans since [1984] seem flat and perfunctory or just plain silly and inconsequential" (p. 75). Swartz (2015) echoes Cone's argument by saying, "most [presidential slogans] are regrettable, if not completely forgettable" (p. 2). If more and better attention were paid to political slogans this kind of criticism might not be warranted. A better understanding of what makes for an effective campaign slogan might lead to improvements in future campaigns and a better appreciation for them in the political campaign world. In addition, better "sloganeering" might also help the American voters receive a better and clearer picture of future political candidates at all levels.

## 2.2. Scholarly research on political slogans

There are very few scholarly studies pertaining to the topic of political campaign slogans, and even fewer that are specifically dedicated to presidential slogans. Seidman (2013) noted that, "Hard research scarcely exists to back any conclusions about slogans" (p. 3). Even so, Denton (1980) outlined the basic functions of both political and non-political slogans. Like other professionals and scholars, he concluded that slogans are more than simple, declarative statements but, rather, are unique rhetorical devices that may be utilized in persuasive ways. Specifically, he argued that slogans have the capacity to act as social symbols and as forms of ideographs. Denton's (1980) study left the door open to a plethora of future research possibilities, but unfortunately those possibilities

were scarcely taken advantage of, leaving a dearth of literature to be found on political slogans. Because of the absence of academic research devoted to presidential campaign slogans, or simply slogans in general, the methods, conceptual frameworks, theories, and findings surrounding campaign slogans are quite scattered and fairly inconsistent with each other. Nevertheless, several themes emerge from a survey of the scholarly work examining political slogans.

### 2.2.1. Slogans, repetition and relevancy

Mere repetition may make a slogan memorable and even slightly more credible, but without also having relevancy to the voter, it does not appear that the slogan will be effective. Research completed by Koch & Zerback (2013) explored the relationship between the number of times someone views or hears a slogan and the level of credibility they ascribe to it. The study used a perceptual psychological “truth-test” to determine if respondents viewed a slogan with more credibility the more often they were exposed to it. Results indicated that respondents did in fact view a slogan as having higher credibility the more they were exposed to it. Videos, posters, text, and audio were used in testing the respondents. The authors conceded that results may easily vary dependent upon how much a person already knows about a particular candidate, and if the slogan is associated with a group that they knowingly do not associate themselves with. What is striking about this study were the follow up answers that respondents gave. Although a respondent may have viewed a slogan more credibly after more exposure, upon being asked whether they would in turn support the slogan’s platform, most respondents said they would not necessarily do so, noting that some slogans seemed irrelevant to them. This finding suggests that a campaign slogan needs relevancy to a person in order for the

person to actually support it. Credibility and adherence to a slogan are therefore two very different things.

### 2.2.2. Slogans & public sentiment

As noted above in the historical survey of presidential slogans, some evidence suggests that effective slogans tap into voters' attitudes and concerns. Morse (1949) posited that political candidates in 1932 appeared to be influenced by the local public sentiment and crafted their slogans accordingly. Morse (1949) then analyzed the British general election of 1918 and public opinion surrounding it after the First World War. This analysis looked at the slogans being crafted leading up to the 1918 election and the public sentiment expressed at rallies and protests as reported in local newspapers. Morse (1949) found that political candidates that year appeared to be influenced by the local public sentiment and crafted their slogans accordingly. This was one of the first scholarly works to analyze political slogans and also alluded to a connection between public opinion and effective political slogans. However, no study was done within this analysis, and the conclusion, as stated by the author, was generally speculative (Morse, 1949).

### 2.2.3. Slogans as synecdoche.

Effective slogans also seem to be those that stand as synecdoche for a larger political message. Hodges (2014) was interested in answering two specific questions: (1) What factors impact the circulation of a political slogan? (2) What is the semiotic process by which a slogan does political work? He specifically analyzed a single slogan, President Barack Obama's 2008 campaign slogan of "Yes We Can!" The author begins by providing an overview of the social life of the "Yes We Can!" slogan during the 2008 election season by examining how the slogan was portrayed through various media

platforms. He then illuminates the mechanisms that allow for its diffusion in public discourse, and discusses the process by which the slogan accomplishes political work. Although he does not speak to the success of the slogan in a political sense, Hodges (2014) makes the important observation that a campaign slogan can do political work by standing in for a larger message. It helps a candidate by conveying a very long message in a few short words. In other words, the author was alluding to a slogan's function as synecdoche. Burke (1969a) noted that "An ideal synecdoche arises when the part represents (identifies with) the whole and the whole represents (identifies with) the part" (p. 508). Synecdoche can also be described as when something uses larger groups to refer to smaller groups (Nerlich & Clarke, 1999; Seto, 1999). In Moore's (1994) article on the Brady Bill, he argued that the social constructions of the handgun, in divergent synecdochic forms, shaped the debate and maintained controversy over gun control. The handgun itself could be thought of as the part, which in turn represented the whole—the right to bear arms, self-defense and liberty. When we look at synecdoche in the context of the previous successful presidential slogans noted, we can see this being used extremely well in all cases. For example, Barack Obama's "Yes we can!" elegantly summarized the belief that America can become better, can become stronger, and can become hopeful again (Hodges, 2014). In politics, "space limits what can be placed on a bumper sticker or campaign poster, and time limits what can be said in a television advertisement or a sound bite on the evening news. However, a slogan can overcome those limitations by standing in for the larger message" (Hodges, 2014, p. 358).

#### 2.2.4. Slogans & messaging

If political slogans act as synecdoche to stand in for a larger, broader message, it seems important to ask what are those messages that political slogans appear to convey. Studies by Young (2006) and Seidman (2013) analyzed political slogans in their respective countries as a whole. Young (2006) analyzed the progression of political slogans in Australia from 1949 to 2004, noting important patterns, occurrences, and changes candidates made to political slogans from decade to decade. The author found a wide range of uses and strategies of Australian political slogans. These include broad encompassing slogans, slogans used as a warning against the other political party, slogans set to music to increase cognitive effectiveness, the use of obscenities in slogans, slogans used to advocate for security, and slogans used as rallying cries. Young (2006) notes that Australian campaign slogans have demonstrated an increase in personalization and downplaying of political parties over the years. What occurred in the development of slogans over the past five decades in Australia was a microcosm of broader developments in the changing nature of election campaigning, media and political language. Although Young's article was published nearly a decade ago, his analysis was arguably an extremely accurate projection of the changes that have continued to occur in the modern political world. Young's (2006) article is still the only analysis to analyze Australian political slogans up to this point. Similarly, Seidman (2013) analyzed notable presidential slogans throughout United States history and separated them into four distinct categories. The author separated them by slogans that express values, slogans that attack another candidate, slogans that focus on specific issues, and slogans that reflect the image or persona of a candidate. Both Young (2006) and Seidman (2013) note that very little

scholarly work exists about political slogans. For their part, although both studies establish a typology of slogans, neither advance any claims about which genre of slogan is most effective, nor does either study examine the discursive form of the slogans studies. Both studies do, however, support the conclusion that the political environment (e.g., voter values, current issues, characteristics of the opponent) may be factors in a slogan's success, and also that image as it pertains to the candidate appears to be an increasingly important factor in the construction of political slogans.

Vaes, Paladino, & Magagnotti, (2011) make the additional point that emotional content may make slogans more effective. The study by Vaes et al. (2011) analyzed the reception towards various slogans that express unique human emotions in their message. Respondents tested yielded a positive relationship between political slogans using emotions and the likelihood of those slogans being viewed favorably. The study was not without its faults and limitations, most notably the fact that the study solely involved Italian political campaign slogans, and may thus reflect a culture that may react to various tactics and techniques different than the American political environment. Nonetheless, various aspects within the study proved insightful, such as the research method used and the types of slogans they chose to test.

As examined above, scholarly studies of political slogans have analyzed various aspects about slogans in general. Scholars have studied repetition as related to credibility and memorability, and the relationship of emotional appeals to persuasiveness, but none have asked the broad, fundamental question of why some slogans are successful or effective, and others are not. Effective slogans have a wide variety of purposes, but beyond very modest attention to emotional content and credibility, and the belief that

slogans are becoming more personal and less party-oriented, little attention has been paid to the formatting of the slogans itself.

Thus, the first question this study seeks to answer is:

RQ1: What characteristics or traits attract voters to one presidential campaign slogan over another?

Some scholars, such as Morse (1949) suggest that effective slogans rely on public opinion and attitudes that are latent in the audience.

Thus, the second question this study seeks to answer is:

RQ2: Do the slogans a voter finds to be favorable simply reflect their already held beliefs, or do they catalyze new opinions and attitudes?

### Summary

American presidential campaign slogans have been a continuous aspect of presidential campaigning since 1800, however very little scholarly research has been conducted to examine the various functions and capabilities of slogans. Although historians and scholars have found that slogans throughout American history have been used for numerous political purposes ranging from rally cries to campaign themes, this information has not been enough to develop any definitive conclusions on slogans. Slogans have been studied by scholars to determine if constant repetition leads to increased credibility, and how public sentiment may play a role in shaping how slogans are developed for popular effect. Synecdoche has also been implicitly implied as a method by which slogans are able to communicate large expansive messages in a short amount of space and time. Scholars have similarly looked into the various types of political messaging slogans have utilized in both Australian and American presidential

elections. Based on this review of the scholarly literature, this study seeks to discover which characteristics of slogans may attract voters to a presidential campaign, and whether good slogans are able to crystalize new opinions in voters or if they simply reflect previously held beliefs. The methods used to attempt to answer these questions will be discussed in chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Based on the questions formed as a result of the analysis of the scholarly literature, focus groups were employed in order to evaluate the thoughts, feelings, and opinions that real American voters hold toward presidential campaign slogans. The focus groups consisted of 21 participants total, divided evenly among three separate groups based on political party affiliation. Each session progressed in three distinct phases in which specific lines of questioning were deployed and fruitful discussion was facilitated. This chapter will elaborate on the specific phases and techniques used for the focus group sessions and the reasoning behind why focus groups appeared to be the best available option to gauge an accurate understanding of voter perceptions of presidential campaign slogans.

To best attempt to answer the questions posed by this study, the voices and opinions of average American voters needed to be heard and understood. While political history and previous voting behaviors and patterns are fair indicators of what to think about slogans, they do not examine the cognitive or rhetorical process by which voters think about slogans. This study employed multiple focus groups to investigate how American voters cognitively process political slogans, and by what process they sort attractive slogans from unattractive ones. As previous studies pertaining to political slogans have appeared to misunderstand, voters do not hear political slogans in a vacuum; voters hear them in conversation, with and around other people. Voters discuss presidential candidates, and consequently their respective slogans, with other voters. Presidential campaign slogans are often repeated and regurgitated during debates, town

halls, television commercials, and radio advertisements. Voters often hear these around other people, and their initial reactions are ones they share with those people in one way or another. Those initial reactions are what this study sought to replicate in order to better discover what traits and characteristics make a presidential campaign slogan attractive to voters, and which make them unattractive. Focus groups allow for the immersion into people's lives, and allow researchers to examine how people communicate or interact with different facets of life in a group setting (Davis, 2016; Smithson, 2000). In this study, a focus group approach allowed for a sampling of American voters to discuss their real-time thoughts and reactions in a group setting, replicating the same kinds of discussions and ideas that are conceived in the real world. Focus groups are the only research method that would allow for this kind of interaction to be studied in such a manner. Scholars such as Wilkinson (1998) would agree, asserting that focus groups have the distinctive characteristic of being able to provide retrospective and meta-communication about a communication phenomenon as participants share their stories about themselves in the larger social context, and at the same time observation of group discourse as it is naturally occurring in the specific focus group communication. Focus groups are also a common and frequently used method in research for political campaigns, public policy formulation, and political debate performances (Kasier, 2008; Trent & Friedenber, 2008; Friedenber, 1997). Political pollsters and campaign professionals have used focus groups for years as a method of gaining insight into constituent needs, moods, and desires, and also as a way to help form public policy initiatives and campaign policies (Kroft, 2016; Friedenber, 1997). Renowned GOP pollster Frank Luntz argues that focus groups are imperative in the study of today's

politics because, “focus groups are centrally concerned with understanding attitudes rather than measuring them” (Luntz, 1994, p. 1). Focus groups were employed in this study as a means by which to understand the attitudes voters have and form towards presidential campaign slogans.

The participants for this study consisted of 21 students from a large South-Eastern university in the United States. To qualify for participation, participants needed to be 18 years of age or older, registered to vote in the United States, and a registered Republican, Democrat, or Independent. These qualifications were made because those who are currently registered to vote were thought to be more likely to be politically active and attentive to the happenings of a political campaign, such as a campaign slogan. Currently registered voters were also assumed to be more likely to provide a richer, more complex discourse regarding their reactions to presidential campaign slogans than those who are not registered to vote and/or does not care much about political happenings. For the focus groups, 7 participants were gathered from each major political party affiliation to allow for the equal representation of possible different political viewpoints that may play a role in how participants respond to presidential campaign slogans. This allowed for the comparison of responses from each party to assess whether political party affiliation played a major role in slogan evaluation. By separating participants by political party, it also reduced possible issues of discomfort, embarrassment, or restrained answering by focus group participants due to the potential of politically charged conversations. If participants were strictly surrounded by members of their own party when discussing slogans in a political context, they may have been more open and free with their responses.

The focus groups took place over a period of 3 days, with the Independent group on the first day, the Democratic group on the second, and the Republican group on the third. In order to insure the integrity and reliability of the proceedings, the focus groups were moderated by an independent facilitator. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour and proceeded in three separate phases. In the first phase, the facilitator posed a set of questions about what the focus group participants thought or believed about political slogans in general (See Appendix A).

The questions posed in the first phase included the following: What are some general thoughts you have on political campaign slogans? How often do you notice political campaign slogans? What do you think of when you see or hear a candidate's campaign slogans? How important is a candidate's campaign slogan to you? These questions helped establish a baseline about the participants' beliefs on political campaign slogans. As various scholars, historians, and political analysts had previously observed, voters hold very few opinions on campaign slogans, but generally appear to give very little value to them. The first phase of questions were designed to investigate these previous observations and gather some general feelings that voters may truly have toward campaign slogans. After some discussion had transpired and all participants had the opportunity to express their thoughts, the facilitator moved to the second phase of the focus group session in which he asked the group to discuss their appraisals of various presidential campaign slogans used throughout American history (See Appendix B). Specifically, participants were asked about their thoughts and feelings on the following presidential campaign slogans, "President Eisenhower's "I Like Ike," President Kennedy's "A Time for Greatness 1960," and "Leadership for the 60's," President

Reagan's "It's Morning Again in America," and President Obama's "Change We Can Believe In," and "Yes We Can!" These questions were intended to begin to probe for specific positive or negative traits and qualities that may be expressed in regard to these slogans, while also assessing how participants discuss slogans that they may already associate some sort of political belief with. Some background information on the slogans were briefly provided to participants, but they also had the opportunity to ask further background questions on a slogan if they desired. The facilitator was provided with a fact sheet on all of the presidential slogans that he was asking about. Once all participants had the opportunity to participate in the discussion, and any follow up questions posed by the facilitator had been answered, the facilitator moved into the final phase in which he presented the group with a list of 15 fabricated presidential campaign slogans created for this study (See Appendix C).

Each of the 15 slogans created for this study were crafted for a general purpose. These slogans can be separated into three main groups: (1) Slogans relating to a specific political issue or policy, (2) slogans appealing to a specific political ideology, and (3) slogans that are generic and extremely vague. The slogans that relate to a specific political issue include "A Stronger, Safer America (national defense/foreign policy), "Getting America Back to Work" (jobs/unemployment), "Secure Borders, For a Secure America" (border security/immigration), "Justice and Equality for All" (equal rights/civil rights), "A New Economy for a New Century" (economics), and "Our Vets Deserve Better" (veteran affairs). Slogans appealing to specific political ideologies include "Fighting for the 99%," "Faith, Family, Freedom," "Builders, Not Bankers," and "People, Not Politics." Lastly, the slogans that were purposefully made to sound generic and

extremely vague, replicating the stereotype of many real political slogans, include “Taking Back America,” “Paving a Path to Prosperity,” “A Brighter Tomorrow,” and “Let’s Shake Up Washington,” and “Ending Business as Usual.” It is important to note that any correlation or similarities between the slogans created for this study and any real political campaign in the past or present is unintentional.

All 15 slogans were printed on individual pieces of paper and handed out to the participants before the third phase began. Participants were not informed that the slogans presented to them were fake and not associated with any real campaign, until after the focus group session had concluded. The facilitator then proceeded to ask the participants to review the slogans by themselves and try to pick out their favorite and least favorite slogan. After the participants had time to think, the facilitator opened group discussion for participants to explain which slogans were their favorite and least favorite and why. The general discussion of why each participant liked or disliked a slogan was intended to address the core of both RQ1 and RQ2. The “why” aspect of participants’ favorite and least favorite slogans were thought to be essential in clarifying specific positive and negative traits that may generally benefit or hinder a slogan’s effect, while determining if the participant’s opinions were stemming from existing political beliefs, or being inspired by the slogan itself. Because participants were unable to associate any actual campaign with these slogans, their responses could also be compared to their feelings on previous presidential campaign slogans to assess any similarities in opinion.

The facilitator began to close each session by posing a set of concluding questions (See Appendix D). These questions included the following: Does anyone have a new favorite or least favorite slogan from the list after this group discussion? As a voter,

would any of you be more likely to vote for a candidate using your favorite slogan? If so, why? Did anyone choose a favorite or least favorite slogan for how it sounded? These questions were designed to simply approach answering aspects of RQ1 and RQ2 from different dimensions. Once group discussion had ended and the facilitator had finished with any follow up questions, he ended the session by informing the participants that they were free to participate in one-on-one interviews after the session had ended if they wished to express anything further about questions, comments, ideas, or information shared during the session. These one-on-one interviews were purely optional and presented participants with the opportunity to express anything that they may have felt restrained to say for one reason or another. However, after all three focus group sessions had ended, not a single participant opted to utilize the interviews.

#### Summary

To attempt to answer the questions posed as a result of the analysis of the scholarly literature, focus groups were employed using 21 volunteer-participants gathered from a large South-Eastern university. Participants were divided evenly into three groups based on their political party and spent an hour discussing various aspects of the participants' responses to presidential campaign slogans. Focus group sessions were divided into three phases, with the first phase assessing their baseline knowledge on slogans, the second discussing their thoughts on real campaign slogans, and the third having them respond to a list of 15 fabricated slogans created specifically for this study. Participants were asked to discuss their favorite and least favorite slogans and why they were chosen. The focus groups concluded with a brief set of questions gauging their final thoughts on presidential campaign slogans. Chapter 4 will expand upon their responses.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In the following chapter the results of the three focus group sessions will be discussed. Focus group participants provided enlightening responses and reactions to issues pertaining to presidential campaign slogans and political slogans in general. Through fruitful and in-depth discussion, participants revealed opinions and beliefs that reflect a strong dislike, and affinity for, presidential campaign slogans containing or exhibiting specific qualities and characteristics. These responses allowed for the organization of specific sets of undesirable and desirable qualities of slogans. Each set illustrates various ways in which presidential candidates can either hinder or advance their “sloganeering” efforts. A “sweet spot” could be identified from an analysis of the sets of qualities expressed by the participants. Although this sweet spot can roughly be considered a guideline to slogan optimization, the adherence to the apparent formula does not guarantee that a candidate’s slogan will be effective.

The results of the three focus group sessions produced numerous repeated patterns of thought with identifiable themes emerging throughout each. Most notably, participants indicated and illustrated qualities of presidential campaign slogans that they found to be negative or undesirable, in addition to qualities of presidential campaign slogans that they found to be positive or desirable. The discussion of the results will be separated accordingly. The specific themes that emerged as a result of participant discussion of these qualities will also be discussed individually in their respective sub-sections. However, there are some general observations that were made throughout the three focus

group sessions that provide an important preface to the proceeding discussion of presidential campaign slogans.

#### 4.1. The ugly perception of slogans

In line with scholarly and expert thinking, the voters participating in the three focus group sessions did not think very highly of campaign slogans in general. Each group unanimously expressed cynicism and dislike for political slogans. When asked about their general or immediate thoughts about political slogans, Independent 1 expressed, “They’re usually stupid and they don’t mean anything.” Democrat 7 similarly posited, “I suppose they’re useful for grabbing your attention, if they’re able to, but other than that they’re all usually really terrible and like I don’t know about everyone else, but I never pay attention to them.” Republican 6 bluntly asserted, “Politicians just waste their time with them. I feel like they just throw something against a wall to see if they stick, because they’re like always just so dull and umm pretty damn stupid.” Clearly, there appears to be a uniform feeling across the general voting population that slogans simply do not matter.

Nor do voters appear to believe that politicians care too deeply about campaign slogans either. While this study asserts that slogans do indeed matter, the participants in the focus groups essentially presented politicians in general with a compelling question: If you do not appear to care about your own slogans, why should we? As demonstrated by the participants, many voters have simply become numb to the message that campaign slogans try to convey. Republican 2 argued, “I don’t even see the point anymore. Why do slogans even exist? Alright, like I guess that some have been good. But, like, I mean, they’re just so nauseating most of the time.” Similarly, Independent 4 lamented, “When I

see them, I just see nothingness. It's just words now. I just see verbiage. Like come up with something meaningful or don't even bother us with it." Democrat 5 agreed: "I usually roll my eyes at them. If anything, I guess it provides me with some entertainment in that I laugh at them. Like oh man the ones in the Democratic primary were just a joke [laughs]. What was that one by the guy who wanted us to switch to the metric system? [Pauses] The Chaffee guy, ah I don't know. I don't know why we bother."

Paradoxically, these sentiments that reject campaign slogans as "nauseating," illustrate the importance of studying slogans more fully and carefully. Campaigns pay millions of dollars for campaign consulting and the advertising in which slogans are developed and appear. If politicians and campaigns are going to put the time, money, and effort into creating and deploying their slogans, should they not make sure they have an effective product to show for it? The focus group participants would strongly agree.

Although the trajectory of campaign slogan perception appears to have been continually declining in recent decades with no clear end in sight, the focus group participants nonetheless offered some hope for those who would wish to reverse the current trajectory. Throughout their discussions, participants clearly reported the sets of qualities that they did not like about presidential campaign slogans, as well as sets of qualities they did like about presidential campaign slogans. While participants were harsh and often unrelenting in their criticism of slogans, their discussions nevertheless implicitly indicated that there may still be hope for "sloganeering." The following sections will focus on the specific qualities that focus group participants considered to comprise "good" and "bad" slogans.

## 4.2. Undesirable qualities of presidential campaign slogans

### 4.2.1. Too specific/isolated

Focus group results indicated that a presidential campaign slogan should not be too specific or narrow in its focus. In general, slogans that focus on one specific issue or type of policy were viewed heavily unfavorably. Slogans the participants rejected from the list of fabricated slogans included, “Getting America Back to Work,” “Secure Borders, For a Secure America,” “A New Economy for A New Century,” and “Our Vets Deserve Better.” All of these slogans communicated a single, specific policy platform, whether it was jobs, border security, economics, or veteran affairs, respectively. If slogans such as these were selected by participants as being their favorite or mentioned as being attractive to them, it might have indicated that voters gravitate to one slogan or another based on issues or policies that are most important or salient to them. However, this was not the case. Indeed, most participants appeared to be repelled by the slogans' specificity. For example, Independent 1 expressed:

No offense. I'm all about veterans and stuff, but it just seems like a very isolated grouping. “Our Vets Deserve Better,” it's just like you're honing in on one area of the population. And I do agree that our vets do deserve better, especially when they come home.

Participants in the Republican group expressed similar sentiments, with Republican 5 saying:

I just didn't like how specific it is. It just really cuts out everyone else. Our vets are very important, and they do deserve better, but I think that basing your entire campaign on something so specific is such a bold move, and not that smart.

Republican 6, although a military veteran, also believed it is unwise to isolate a slogan:

Yeah it's horrible. It's horrible. This is a group that I'm a part of, but your target is way too specific. I mean yeah, going to the VA sucks, and it's horrible there,

and they treat you like crap, so we do need some improvements, but don't base an entire slogan on it.

Democrat 5 similarly commented their dislike with "Our Vets Deserve Better":

It was one of my least favorites too because it does not appeal to a broad audience. I definitely agree with it, but it's super isolated and is unable to appeal to a wide range of people. I don't think a slogan such as this could ever be that successful.

Significantly, participants did not seem attracted to these slogans because they perceived that the slogan carried a potential to alienate voters and to isolate groups of people from each other. Participants particularly expressed the fear that by focusing on a single policy, a candidate further divides the polity, implying that any voter who did not support the candidate must also be opposed to the policy or group that the candidate's slogan promoted. Independent 2 articulated this concern by saying:

I was thinking, the ones that are really umm like "A Stronger, Safer America" and "Secure Borders, For a Secure America," and I can see some guy saying that and he says it with such conviction, and it's kind of like saying, "Well that's what I believe, and if you don't vote for me, you must believe the opposite." It's like putting you in a certain box, like isolating you, and so if that's your slogan, that's what you're all about, just that one thing, and it's way too specific for me.

Although "A Stronger, Safer America" was not created with one specific issue or policy in mind, the participant still interpreted it as being too specific in that sense. Independent 2 further expressed their concern with this type of slogan by using Hillary Clinton's "I'm With Her" slogan from the 2016 election as an example:

Well just also, the "I'm with Her" thing, that annoyed me too because that goes back to what I was saying before. I'm not saying that I don't want a woman president, but that's kind of what it sounds like when you're saying, "Oh I'm with her." So like, "Oh you're not voting for me, so you must not want a woman president." But no, that's not what I'm saying. It's like it's trying to sort people out and politically isolate them.

As previously mentioned, the opportunity for candidates to “play to the crowd” may be an enticing strategy to garner support from a much needed group. However, as illustrated by the focus group participants, this may be a counterproductive move, inadvertently repelling voters rather than attracting them. Campaign professionals and politicians may want to be wary then of basing their slogans around a single issue that cannot appeal to a more diverse audience, regardless of whether the issue is of a partisan nature or not.

#### 4.2.2. Too broad/vague/void of substance

Participants also expressed a strong general dislike for presidential campaign slogans that they interpreted as being too broad or vague, as well as slogans that were perceived as being void of any true substance or meaning. As Independent 7 briefly said at the very beginning of the first focus group when asked about their overall thoughts on slogans, “They’re always general. A lot of them just go for the big overarching ideas, but they’re way too vague.” While a handful of participants did choose slogans such as “A Brighter Tomorrow” or “Paving a Path to Prosperity,” as their favorites because of the positivity that they exuded, most participants did not appreciate that there was no discernable meaning communicated by slogans such as these. Many participants related these types of slogans to the generic slogans that they were tired of hearing and seeing in actual local, state, and national campaigns. Although participants rejected some slogans as being too specific, these slogans were also rejected, but now because they were perceived as not containing any specificity at all. Democrat 5 conveyed some of these concerns:

Umm least favorite... Well I really don't like “Ending Business As Usual.” I just...it just sounds so ridiculous...like first of all, what business are they talking about? What are they talking about? I just...I don't know, it's vague and kind of pointless.

Articulating a similar sentiment, Independent 2 stressed the importance of having meaning:

When people use slogans like “Ending Business as Usual,” it doesn’t make sense. Like what exactly does that even mean? It doesn’t make sense because just using those words together doesn’t mean anything, you have to expand on what you mean.

Also taking issue with “Ending Business as Usual,” Republican 5 stated:

My least favorite one was probably “Ending Business as Usual,” just because I was like hmmm what are we talking about here? What exactly needs to end? I’m not sure where they’re going with this. And “ending” is also just such a negative word as well. So none of it really works.

Responding to Republican 5’s statement, Republican 4 followed up by saying:

Yeah. I know right? I was thinking the same kind of thing with number 13. I just umm, I don’t really like the whole “Let’s Shake up Washington” for the same reason. I mean, what needs to be shaken up? Why? What part of it? There’s so many different ways this could be interpreted.

Participants were additionally troubled by these type of slogans because of their potential to be so vague that they sounded overly generic or “cheesy,” an adjective Independent 3 used for such slogans. The problem for these participants was not that they could not elicit a specific meaning from the slogan, but rather that the participants could not take the slogan seriously because of how “ridiculous” the slogan sounded. If a slogan sounded “fluffy” or “frilly” as a result of its vagueness, the participant’s disdain increased markedly. When first examining the list of slogans in the third phase of the focus group session, Independent 1 stated:

“Let’s Shake Up Washington”...what is that? Just, God that’s terrible. “A Brighter Tomorrow” is alright, but it just kind of seems like a generic one, so it doesn’t really do anything for me. But “Let’s Shake up Washington” is my least favorite, it’s just so empty and bad.

During the same focus group, when the facilitator asked if any participants chose one of their favorite slogans based on the way it sounded, Independent 3 noted that their least favorites were chosen because of how generic they sounded:

I didn't choose my favorite one by how it sounded, but I definitely chose my least favorites by how they sounded. Like all the glitzy and like bubbly generic language, and they're all like eeh and woo, they're so empty of substance that they're just like fairy dust. For the ones like "Let's Shake up Washington," you know all that type of language, I just don't really like it.

Although Independent 7 had chosen "A Brighter Tomorrow" as their favorite slogan, Independent 5 did not refrain from criticizing it shortly after, asserting:

Like I get why you like "A Brighter Tomorrow," but it's just so...like, like I want to gag when I hear it, like c'mon. Like yeah it sounds all frilly and nice, but yeah it's actually just nothing. So yeah.

When referencing both "Paving a Path to Prosperity" and "A Brighter Tomorrow,"

Democrat 1 expressed similar concerns about the slogan's sleek vacuity:

I guess I get why whoever came up with these thought it would be a good idea. I mean they sound nice and warm and fluffy, but let's be real here. These literally mean nothing on their own. To the extent that these just sound like something out of a political satire book. Like, umm, I don't know. [Shakes head] These are just bad.

As indicated by some of these blunt and poignant statements, campaign professionals may want to consider being more wary of falling into the trap of the generic, simple sounding campaign slogan. The perceptions surrounding slogans such as these may account for criticisms of previous slogans such as Mitt Romney's 2012 slogan of "Believe in America." In general, very broad or generic sounding slogans have the ability to be perceived as safe or all-encompassing. However, actual voters do not feel as if these types of slogans add anything beneficial to a campaign or improve their appeal. On the contrary, a broad, vague, or generic sounding slogan may hurt or damage the credibility

of a presidential candidate, as the "nothingness," "glitzy" and "nauseating" qualities of the slogan come to be associated with the candidate him or herself.

#### 4.2.3. Divisive/negative

A third theme that emerged from participants' discussion about why they did not like certain presidential campaign slogans was the possibility or potential of a slogan being perceived as divisive or negative. Even if a slogan is not intended to be divisive in any manner, it may still have potential undertones of negativity that could be deleterious. None of the slogans created for this study were purposefully crafted with any divisive interpretations or undertones in mind. However, throughout the course of the focus group sessions it became clear that if a slogan is not carefully vetted or examined, it could inadvertently be interpreted as divisive or negative by voters.

There was also an important distinction that existed between slogans that were perceived as divisive and slogans perceived as negative. A slogan could be perceived as simply having negative connotations or dark undertones, but not necessarily be explicitly noted as divisive. Democrats 4 and 2 illustrated this distinction when discussing their perceptions of Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan as being problematic because of its potential negative undertones, and contrasted it with other slogans throughout history:

I liked "Yes We Can!" because it was overwhelming positive. Unlike "Make America Great Again," I feel like there is an undertone that America is not as great as it used to be, whereas "Yes We Can!" is saying like, "we can do this!" It's positive, there's nothing negative, there's no possible negative undertone.

Democrat 2 agreed, asserting:

With "Make American Great Again" that's sort of, well I don't want to say fear, but kind of uneasiness, you know? It's a lot different than Reagan's "It's Morning

Again in America” because it also had a feeling of hope and optimism that Obama also captured.

Whereas Democrats 4 and 2 were more concerned with “Make America Great Again” because of its negative undertones, other participants explicitly noted how a slogan’s negativity can cause it to be offensive or divisive to some. Republican 3, though believing it was an effective slogan, thought that the slogan’s ability to offend or divide was problematic:

I think “Make America Great Again” was effective overall because it conveyed a lot of people’s hopes, but at the same time, it was kind of really flawed. Like, there were a lot of really bad ways that could have been interpreted. Like hasn’t America always been great, even in the Obama era? I thought so. But, I don’t know, I guess that’s just me.

Facilitator: Did that not have any impact on you?

Republican 3: Well not me personally, because I got what it was trying to say. But, like I said, that’s just me. I can see how it could easily offend someone that believed America has always been great.

Also interpreting a slogan as being divisive, Republican 1 took issue with “Getting America Back to Work” because of its perceived ability to insult voters:

I just didn’t like “Getting America Back to Work,” because of at least how I interpreted it. It could be seen as saying that some people are lazy or that some people don’t have a working mentality, and I’m not sure if it was trying to say something else, but it could seem pretty negative.

Regarding their feelings towards potentially divisive slogans, multiple members of the Democratic focus group discussed the detrimental possibilities of slogans such as these in one particularly important interchange:

Democrat 1: “With Builders, Not Bankers,” it’s easy to remember, but I don’t quite like the message it’s sending. I think it’s something easy to remember, and it’s saying like yeah you know we’re the middle class, we’re the little guy, and you know, the big guys are just running us down, blah blah blah, and it’s like well, it’s just, it’s just, to me personally it’s sending a really bad divisive message. When you think of that, when someone sees that, they think middle class and rich. But, to me, it’s trying to say “Don’t you work hard, don’t you better yourself, because once you pass that tier, once you reach that plateau, you become the

enemy, and that's what's bringing us down is you making too much money." It just pits two groups of people against each other.

Democrat 3: Yeah, for me I remembered over time Mitt Romney's 47% comment or Jeb Bush talking about psychology majors. It's just kind of the things you remember as being really divisive. To me, I don't like messages that pit two people against each other.

Democrat 5: Yeah, I agree. Everyone's vote counts just the same. Their issues matter just as much as anyone else's so it really needs to appeal a larger groups, and this slogan just says that bankers are always wrong.

Democrat 4: Yeah, it creates an Us vs. Them mentality.

Republican 7 expressed similar feelings, noting:

Umm the one I didn't like, well there was a lot I didn't like, but the one I didn't like the most was "Builders, Not Bankers" just because it kind of puts people into groups and there's going to be some people that like that, but there's going to be a lot that are going to be against it. You need something not so alienating.

Potentially, a negative or divisive presidential campaign slogan appears to be one of the most detrimental slogan errors a candidate can make because of the negativity it may inadvertently reflect on the candidate as well. Republican 1 iterated the potential consequences for presidential candidates who may make this error:

Just any type of negative connotation used in some of these is just not something that you want to put out there. People may be like "Oh my gosh some dude with a negative slogan is going to be our next president. Like are they a negative person or what?" I just don't think it's too smart.

In addition to creating negative perceptions of the campaign, it can possibly offend some voters at the same time. This could lead to unnecessary campaign controversies. As illustrated by some of the participant discussion, these undesirable qualities of negativity and divisiveness are not always clearly evident. When created for this study, slogans such as "Getting America Back to Work" and "Builders, Not Bankers" were crafted for the sole intention of appealing to specific policy preferences and ideologies. They were not intended to offend anyone or be perceived negatively. However, these slogans often unintentionally had this effect. Therefore, slogans need to be carefully examined from

multiple viewpoints and tested for possible interpretations. Because campaign slogans will never exist in a vacuum, numerous interpretations are always a possibility. A good slogan, however, will be one that manages to limit the possibility of negative interpretation as much as possible.

#### 4.3. Desirable qualities of presidential campaign slogans

##### 4.3.1. Adaptability/universal application

One of the traits explicitly noted by focus group participants as being beneficial to presidential campaign slogans is the ability of a slogan to be adaptable across all or most of a candidate's platform. This references the ability of a slogan to be relatable to multiple facets of a candidate's campaign, such as their positions on the economy, national defense, social issues, or foreign relations. In contrast to the undesirable quality of too much specificity or isolation in regards to a slogan's focus, participants believed that a slogan should be broad enough to be applicable to a variety of campaign talking points, as opposed to being relatable to just one single issue. Democrat 1 and Democrat 2 conveyed this idea when noting some issues regarding Hillary Clinton and Tim Kaine's slogan of "Stronger Together":

Democrat 1: With "Stronger Together," it just addressed just one issue. I mean "Stronger Together" was a broad statement, but it was mostly just targeting Donald Trump as a candidate and the idea of division and divisiveness, which I get, but still. Trump's "Make America Great Again" as much as I did not like it, was in everything single aspect of his platform. Whether it was the economy, you know "Make America Prosper Again." It was in his foreign policy, "Make America Strong Again." So like, it had [pauses], it had ummm—

Democrat 2: Adaptability.

Democrat 1: Yeah, exactly. There we go.

Republican 3 expressed similar ideas when asserting why the slogan "Faith, Family, Freedom" was their favorite:

The one I don't like is "Builders, Not Bankers." Like I understand their idea, but you can't apply that to many policies. I like "Faith, Family, Freedom" because it matches with my values, but also I like how it can be interpreted differently by different people, and even more it can be applied throughout a candidate's platform. Like, it can apply to many different policies. I can see that as being really useful.

When discussing campaign slogans throughout history, Democrat 7 shared their thoughts on why President Obama's "Yes We Can!" was a memorable slogan that continually stuck with them:

I think it was also adaptable to all parts of a policy. Like economically, Yes we can. Socially, yes we can. Domestically, Yes we can. He literally could've applied that to any part of his platform. Like, his campaign was largely about this change mentality, and breaking barriers and breaking glass ceilings, so to say. So the idea of "Yes We Can!" fit with everything he wanted to do. Because, it was like, bold stuff, so if people doubted his bold policies, his slogan "Yes We Can!" was kind of useful and able to universally applied in that way.

This aspect of adaptability, or universal application, is an important quality that focus group participants recognized. What the participants were implicitly referencing was a slogan's rhetorical function as synecdoche. As mentioned earlier, some scholarly literature has implicitly referenced how slogans can act as synecdochic tools, condensing larger ideas and messages into smaller phrases. Slogans such as "Make America Great Again" and "Yes We Can!" were successfully utilized in a synecdochic manner, standing in, or taking the place of, various larger themes or messages throughout their campaigns. Unlike, as Democrat 1 conveyed, slogans such as "Stronger Together," failed to be applicable to numerous larger messages. "Stronger Together" may have still acted as synecdoche for one single larger idea, that we are stronger as a nation when we are not divided, however, as Democrat 1 implied, this was not living up to the full synecdochic potential of slogans. Although participants did not know precisely what they were

referring to, they nevertheless exhibited a fondness for slogans that demonstrate these abilities.

Conversely, participants also expressed how a slogan's adaptability can be beneficial when utilizing social media. In addition to being adaptable across multiple campaign platforms, a slogan is benefited by its ability to be what some participants loosely considered "social media friendly." If a slogan is able to be adapted as a useful social media tool, namely a memorable hashtag, the greater success that slogan may have. Independent 5 and Independent 6 pondered this idea when discussing their thoughts on "Make America Great Again" and "I'm With Her":

Independent 5: The one thing I can say for Trump's slogan was that it was really stinkin' useful as a hashtag. I mean, how convenient was that #MAGA for them? It allowed their supporters to easily reference it, spread it, hashtag it in everything. I mean it spread like wildfire.

Independent 6: Dude, yeah, it was everywhere. I think that was probably one of, like, the best things with it. God, it was annoying, but still, you gotta give them props for that. I think Clinton's was OK in that sense too.

Independent 5: Yeah, "I'm With Her" was pretty good as a social media hashtag. It couldn't be condensed like #MAGA could, but not many can. I can't think of any others that were pretty good for like Twitter and whatnot. [Pauses] Oh, what was his name? Ron Paul. No, Rand Paul. Yeah, that guy had a decent one too. I remember seeing it a while back. It was #StandWithRand or something like that. I think that one was pretty good too. It didn't really say much about him or his campaign, but it was pretty good for Twitter and all that.

Republican 4 similarly articulated the value that lay in a slogan's adaptability for social media:

I honestly only remembered "I'm With Her" and "Make America Great Again" so much because of social media. Those slogans were so easy to convert into effective hashtags. I think "Stronger Together" had a hashtag. So did Ted Cruz's [Pauses] or no, [pauses] it was Marco Rubio's "A New American Century." I think his was a good hashtag, but they didn't try to condense it any more. I remember #StandWithRand too. But I only probably remember those because I followed the primaries fairly closely. Either way, I think people need to think about social media when coming up with their slogans. That doesn't mean it can

be cheesy. But, just come up with something good that can be transferred or whatever.

Social media has been an integral aspect of presidential campaigning since 2004, although it is still a developing and ever-changing field within presidential politics. However, from the perspective of voters, and especially the younger generation of American voters, it is imperative that candidates are able to adapt their campaign slogans to social media in the form of effective hashtags. If a candidate is able to come up with a slogan that can be adapted to multiple campaign platforms, even in addition to social media tools, they may find greater success in their campaigns.

#### 4.3.2. Relevancy/time appropriate

Presidential campaign slogans were found to potentially benefit from being relevant to the current era or political time period. As conveyed by some of the focus group participants, a slogan is only as good as its applicability to the current political mood or time period. A slogan can have all of the right qualities, but if it is not appropriate to current events or the current era, then it may not be effective at all.

Democrat 3 expressed this sentiment when discussing presidential campaign slogans throughout history:

And I think too, like when I think about slogans, and not just for the time that I've been alive, like Bill Clinton's slogans were so much about getting to the millennium and let's be ahead of everyone else coming into the 21st century, and I think that kind of, like, aspirational message was good for that time. I think it fit for that point in time really. The slogans should be relevant to the time I guess. Like it shouldn't feel out of place. Like if Reagan had run with something other than "It's Morning Again in America," it may not have had the same effect because I believe, at least I do, that his slogan matched the year.

In the same session, Democrat 2 followed up Democrat 3's statement shortly after:

I'd just like to add on to what he was talking about with relevancy. I think having a slogan that's relevant to the time period, it helps, not only because the people

who not only support that candidate are going to approve of that slogan, but people who are affected by whatever is going on in the era is going to have that experience to connect, regardless of whether they agree politically, that connection is still there.

Democrat 3 responded:

I would agree with that. I mean Barack Obama, his speech really suited well to that time and that slogan was very reminiscent of that time. Like I don't think Hillary Clinton could've gone with something like that last year and had the same kind of success. It didn't fit the time.

Facilitator: Could you clarify which slogan was very reminiscent of that time?

Democrat 3: Oh umm, "Change We Can Believe in." That was very reminiscent of that time during his campaign. Hillary couldn't have pulled that one off.

Independent 1 explicitly connected his attraction to "Fighting for 99%" and "Justice and Equality for All" because of their applicability to the current time period as well:

Umm, I would say something similar to that, but I guess, when it comes to the sound of the slogans, it didn't really have any impact, like when I read my favorite it wasn't something that flowed that well. It was just how important that issue is right now. Like "Fighting for 99%" and "Justice and Equality for All," I mean we all need that right, like especially right now, so I feel like that's something we can all get behind.

Participants also mentioned that some slogans they characterized as "unattractive" or "terrible" earlier in the focus group session might actually be successful if the current events were different. Republican 2 noted:

I would say if the issue of our veterans became one of the most prominent issues, like, I don't know, if the entire system broke down and veterans were in grave peril, then I could see how "Our Vets Deserve Better" would work for that specific time. Maybe that would be more effective then. I mean, I could see getting behind that slogan if things were different, but definitely not now.

Republican 3 followed up Republican 2's statement, adding:

Yeah, I can see how the time period could play a part in this. Like, I don't think any of us really liked "Getting America Back to Work" at all. In fact, I think someone had mentioned something bad about it. But like, if we're having a national jobs crisis with like 17 percent unemployment and people wrapped around the street corners looking for work and what not, yeah, I could see that being a more effective slogan.

That these focus group participants could envision a "terrible" slogan as potentially attractive if it spoke to important events of the day, suggests that voters value a slogan that is somewhat relevant. That participants seem to value a slogan that is relevant suggests that there may be a general desire for campaign slogans to be issue oriented, to a degree. Simply speaking, presidential candidates campaign around issues. Issues and policy discussion are a staple of campaign discourse regardless of whether or not the "issues" are truly important to the candidate or voters. This reflects the apparent belief by focus group participants that a slogan should summarize a stance or attitude towards some sort of campaign issue or policy.

#### 4.3.3. Sounds good/catchy

Focus group participants indicated that there is some validity to the assumption that slogans need to sound good, or in other words be "catchy." In addition to the other qualities mentioned as being beneficial to a presidential campaign slogan, participants were not ashamed to admit that one cannot deny or escape the appeal of a catchy slogan. While participants stressed that a slogan sounding catchy was not the "end-all-be-all" for a slogan's success, they nonetheless conveyed an affinity towards slogans that they found to be audibly pleasing. When describing their favorite slogan, Independent 6 mentioned:

Actually my favorite is "People, Not Politics." I feel like it is catchy enough that like, you would remember it. I feel, like, that's something that can be used as a slogan and people would remember that one. It's just like catchy, like "People, Not Politics," like it's so simple and short and sweet.

Facilitator: Why do you believe that is important to you?

Independent 6: I think when you're in the primaries and you're trying to stick out, you have to have something that's going to stick with people, you have to have something that's catchy, and if you don't, you're just another one.

During the Democratic group, participants also expressed their attraction to catchy sounding slogans:

Democrat 6: To be perfectly honest, I really like the “Faith, Family, Freedom” slogan. I think there’s a great message there with a lot of potential, but if I’m being honest, it’s also because it just sounds good. It’s like “I like Ike” has always just stuck in my head. I can’t really recall any other historical campaign slogans, except for that one for some reason. I just remember it for some reason, I just think it always sounded good. It was catchy I guess. And the same with “Faith, Family, Freedom.”

Democrat 4: My favorite was also “Faith, Family, Freedom” because I actually really liked how it sounded. I was drawn to it because of the alliteration.

Democrat 3: Similarly in “People, Not Politics,” I enjoyed the commas. There’s something about being forced to pause in the middle of it that makes it sound really effective somehow.

Democrat 6: Yeah I can actually see this being used as a call and response type thing where someone says “people,” and then the crowd says “not politics,” and so on.

When asked if anyone in the Republican group chose their favorite slogan based on how it sounded, Republican 3 agreed:

“Yeah that’s part of it for mine. I loved how it sounded. F-F-F. It sounds good, catchy. Something you can remember. Like, if you put that on a sticker or something or use it in an advertisement and say it like “Faith, Family, Freedom,” it’s going to be pretty memorable and stick with people.

Focus group participants appeared to indicate that a slogan “sounding good” or being “catchy” was more of a bonus than an essential and necessary quality. As Independent 6 later expressed, “It’s just kind of like the icing on the cake.” As a result, presidential candidates and their respective campaigns may want to consider this potentially beneficial quality when creating their slogans, but should not make it their main focus. As demonstrated by the undesirable qualities of “fluffy” and “frilly” sounding slogans, it appears that it may be easy to focus too much on how a slogan sounds and take it too far. Regardless, the attraction and memorability of audibly pleasing slogans should not be ignored.

#### 4.4. The “sweet spot” for presidential campaign slogans

After analyzing all of the undesirable and desirable qualities of presidential campaign slogans mentioned by the focus group participants, there appeared to be a very specific, but recognizable “sweet spot” that exists for slogans. Participants indicated very general “bad” and “good” qualities, such as slogans should not be too specific, too broad, or divisive, and they should be adaptable, relevant, and catchy. Although these can be considered broad, sweeping generalizations that do not easily delineate the specific combination of elements that would make for the perfect slogan, by reading those qualities in combination with each other, a “formula” does begin to emerge. To better elucidate this formula it is beneficial to review the specifics of the undesirable and desirable qualities mentioned.

Participants did not like slogans that were too specific or narrow in their focus, as it isolated people and restrained candidates. However, participants also did not like slogans that were so broad and all-encompassing that the slogans became too vague and their meaning indiscernible. Slogans also should not be divisive, or more importantly, have the potential to inadvertently be perceived negatively. From here, one can start to fill in the blanks with the desirable qualities mentioned. Therefore, a good slogan will be broad, but only to the extent that it is adaptable across the many platforms of their campaign. For it to be successfully adaptable, it requires a small degree of specificity so that the slogan is not so broad that it becomes indiscernible, such as “Ending Business as Usual.” If the slogan is successfully adaptable to all major aspects of one’s campaign, then it can be inferred that it is indeed relevant or time appropriate in some manner. In addition to this, an appropriate amount of specificity should make sure that the slogan is

not too open for interpretation such that it could inadvertently be perceived as being negative or divisive. Lastly, as “icing on the cake,” if the slogan can be made to sound catchy or audibly pleasing, it may have an even greater chance of being memorable.

Significantly, some focus group participants explicitly worked towards and, at times, enunciated this formulation during the course of the discussion. In each focus group session, some participants, started to put the “pieces” together. During the discussion of their favorite slogans, Democrat 4 articulated a quality of “strategic vagueness”:

I also liked the uhh, “Faith, Family, Freedom” because those are things I can get behind, and I didn’t really see it as faith in a religious sense, but more so faith, as in like, faith in America. So you can have that cool kind of strategic vagueness to aid in that.

Thus, although “faith, family, and freedom” may be issues that are popularly perceived as being “owned” by the Republicans, a registered Democrat discerned an ambiguity that allowed adherence from multiple perspectives. Republican 2 also expressed the ambiguity and “strategic vagueness” of “Faith, Family, Freedom” by describing the different ways it can be interpreted:

Faith doesn’t just have to be about your religion, but it can be about you having hope, about believing in something, just believing in something, believing in our country. I think there’s some really good wiggle room with this slogan in that way.

Republican 3 and Republican 5 responded to Republican 2 noting its simultaneous qualities of allowing multiple meanings and in a positive way. Although they understood the very broad meaning of the slogan, they still contrasted it positively with the too vague quality of another slogan:

Yeah I agree. I think “Faith, Family, Freedom” can be interpreted differently by different people, but still remain positive. Yeah [pauses], like there’s something special there with that slogan. I can’t quite describe it. But yeah.

Republican 5: Yeah, and I think “A Brighter Tomorrow” is almost there. It’s vague, and it can’t really be interpreted negatively, so that’s good, but this one is just still way too vague that it doesn’t have enough meaning, but still, it’s kind of close to that.

Republican 7 responded to this line of thought later in the focus group session, again voicing approval for a slogan that was broad enough to be inclusive of issues and people, specific enough to suggest some policy implications, and also convey a positive message:

To go back to what they said earlier, I think it’s good to be kind of vague with the slogans, like to a degree I guess, like even if you kind of want to go in a direction such as “Hope” or “Change.” So being kind of vague is good, but I don’t think it’s good when it’s too open for interpretation. So like with “Let’s Shake up Washington” it’s vague and also too open for interpretation. But like with “Change We Can Believe In” you can’t really take that too negatively.

Facilitator: So what you’re saying is that you believe there’s a sort of strategy there with a good slogan?

Republican 7: I don’t know, I was just thinking that if you make a slogan vague, like make it to where it’s open to interpretation, but only in a positive way.

Instead of making it to where it could be possibly interpreted as negative. Like there wasn’t really any negative space for “Yes We Can!”

Democrat 3 reversed the directionality in order to make a very similar point, dismissing “Make America Great Again” because it allowed others the opportunity to apply it as a pessimistic slogan:

I was going to say too, kind of referencing back to the “Make America Great Again” thing, with those really generalizable slogans, it’s incredibly easy to counter generalize, or turn it around into something negatively. Like if you said “Make America Great Again,” someone could have turned it around and said, they’re trying to take us back, and do you really want to lose everything that we gained? So I can see its appeal, but it was also way too easy to turn it around.

Although these participants did not also mention the other qualities that would increase a slogan's appeal, they were moving towards the core of the idea that a “sweet spot” exists in which the successful slogan must operate. While some, including Democrat 3, noted

that Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan was a generally successful slogan, they correctly identified the main flaw with the slogan: its ability to be negatively interpreted. Contrasting that slogan with Ronald Reagan's "It's Morning Again in America," a slogan that may be outwardly perceived as similar in some aspects, it becomes clearer why both scholars and focus group participants universally find Reagan's slogan more appealing. As mentioned earlier, Democrat 2 stated:

With "Make American Great Again" that's sort of, well I don't want to say fear, but kind of uneasiness, you know? It's a lot different than Reagan's "It's Morning Again in America" because it also had a feeling of hope and optimism that Obama also captured.

In analyzing "It's Morning Again in America," one can see that it is broad, but not too broad to where its meaning is indiscernible. There is a degree of specificity that narrows the slogan's focus on the idea of a refreshed, rejuvenated feeling in America. Although the slogan's operative quality was not simply its balance between broadness and narrowness, the slogan's effect increased because of its strategic wording. Using the upbeat metaphor of "morning" conveys a positive message that does not lend itself to easily being interpreted negatively in a divisive manner. Instead, it points the voter towards an optimistic and positive interpretation. As Jamieson (1996) observed, the wording of "It's Morning Again in America" in Reagan's ads allowed his campaign to focus voters' attention on the current success of the administration as compared to the perceived failures of the Carter administration. It was thus able to present a very specific and positive view of America in 1984, while still allowing a broadness that gave Reagan's campaign the ability to apply the theme of "It's Morning Again in America" to inflation, employment, peace and strong defense (Jamieson, 1996). Barack Obama's slogans of "Change We Can Believe In" and "Yes We Can!" arguably utilized this same

kind of strategy in 2008 when applying his slogans to various aspects of his campaign platform. It should be no surprise that, as indicated earlier, these have been deemed some of the most successful presidential campaign slogans in American history. Although working between the margins of the undesirable and desirable aspects of slogans proved successful in the cases of these slogans, and others that share similar qualities, there is no guarantee that this “formula” will always lead to a perfect presidential campaign slogan. However, there appears to be compelling evidence that by utilizing the aforementioned strategies during the creation of a slogan, presidential campaigns may achieve a higher level of success in their “sloganeering” efforts.

#### Summary

Although voters appear to have developed a strong general dislike of political slogans, focus group participants indicated that specific undesirable and desirable qualities may exist that can benefit or hinder a slogan’s appeal. Participants expressed that campaign slogans should not be too specific or focused on one issue or isolated set of issues, and should not divide groups of voters from each other. Slogans that are too broad, too vague, or void of a definitive meaning or substance are likely to be unappealing to voters and potentially repel them, particularly if they deem a slogan as so vague that it becomes generic. According to participants, divisive or negative slogans, or slogans capable of being interpreted as such, should be avoided. Slogans can inadvertently carry divisive or negative undertones, thus campaigns should carefully vet and examine slogans for this possibility. Focus group participants indicated that slogans are more likely to be appealing if they are adaptable to a candidate’s platform or a broad spectrum of the campaign’s messages. Additionally, slogans that are issue oriented to a

modest degree, or relevant to the current political era, may be able to better speak to voters than slogans that feel out of place or irrelevant. The assumption that slogans should be “catchy” or audibly pleasing was shown to carry some validity, as participants expressed an affinity for slogans that articulated alliteration or some form that made a slogan sound more memorable. As a result of the expressed undesirable and desirable slogans, a “sweet spot” for which slogans could be crafted emerged that combined aspects that existed between the margins of expressed “good” and “bad” slogan qualities. These results indicate various implications and potential conclusions that may exist for presidential campaign slogans, and political slogans in general. These implications will be enumerated and detailed in Chapter 3, in addition to the limitations of this study and the future research opportunities presented for scholars going forward.

## CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, & FUTURE RESEARCH

In this final chapter the implications and apparent takeaways from the results of this provisional study are discussed and expanded upon. Although focus group results illustrated a set of characteristics and traits that may lead to some slogans being more appealing than others, answering RQ1 posed by this study, data gathered from the focus groups revealed an array of further implications that carry more significance than the answers to the questions this study originally sought to answer. The true implications of the focus group data go beyond what the scope of this study was initially thought to be. Focus group data illustrated apparent functions of effective slogans, or in other words, what effective slogans do. A slogan's synecdochic function appears to play a major role in the work a slogan does and acts as a vital foundational aspect for effective campaign slogans. Additionally, participants discussed a slogan's potential to function as constitutive rhetoric, whereby a slogan is able to establish a political identity and a call to action. Slogans also appeared to carry greater appeal when being non-partisan in nature. Campaign slogans that attempt to "play to the crowd" by focusing on partisan issues appear to have little appeal, even among partisan audiences, thus indicating that candidates may want to avoid attempting to use partisan slogans to attract a specific constituency.

### 5.1. Implications

#### 5.1.1. Functions of an effective slogan

The findings of this study suggest that there may be specific, definable qualities that will make a presidential campaign slogan more attractive or desirable to American

voters. The qualities that are infused in the aforementioned “formula” should not be ignored by campaign professionals. These are characteristics and traits that participants indicated help make a slogan more attractive to them than others. Therefore, to answer RQ1 posed by this study, slogans that strike the right balance between broadness and specificity, limit potential negativity, exude positivity, connect with relevant issues, adapt to campaign messages, and are audibly pleasing appear to have significant advantages over slogans that do not. This is important information to keep in mind, no doubt.

However, the true implications of this study significantly exceed a simple question of what traits or qualities are more attractive than others. The findings from this study go beyond any “formula” that one could create as a result of a study such as this. The most important findings from this study revolve around a question not originally posed, that is, what is the function of an effective slogan? Broadly, an effective slogan seems to be a tool that enhances a political campaign, or in some way adds value to the campaign's larger rhetorical message. Specifically, focus group participants reported that an effective slogan operates in two ways with voters: (1) It draws voters into a campaign, and (2) it provides voters with a summarizing message that evokes the larger discourse of the campaign itself.

Focus group participants illustrated this first function when they were asked in the closing moments of their sessions whether the slogans they chose as their favorite(s) would cause them to be more likely to vote for a candidate using that slogan. Participants overwhelmingly rejected this idea. In the Independent group, 2 out of 7 participants said yes. In the Democratic group, 0 out of 7 participants said yes. In the Republican group, 1 out of 7 participants said yes. Regardless of whether a participant liked their favorite

slogan(s), the vast majority of participants said that it was still not enough to make them want to vote for a candidate. This illustrates that, generally speaking, no slogan will ever be good enough to garner votes on its own. As expressed by these participants, voters do not seem to vote for slogans themselves. Independent 6 explained their answer by arguing that a candidate's platform is always going to be more important than their slogan:

It's just like, that, well, I don't know, like, the best slogan in the world couldn't make me vote for it just by itself. I'm still going to have to take the time to do research and investigate a candidate's platform before deciding if I'm going to vote for them or not. So, again, I couldn't justify voting for someone simply because of their slogan.

Intrigued by their answer, Independent 5 also argued why they could not vote for a candidate based on a slogan, but would still research a candidate based on a good slogan:

I like that [points next to Independent 6] because you touched on what I was going to in how you look into what their platform was. I think if I heard or saw someone with my favorite slogan, it would make me want to invest more time and effort into researching them. But I don't think the slogan itself would have any impact on my vote. Like, if I heard a really good slogan or whatever, I would want to know more about that candidate.

Inspired by this exchange, the facilitator of the focus group session decided to follow up with a question for the entire group asking whether they would be more likely to research or investigate a candidate if they used their favorite slogan(s). All 7 of the Independent focus group participants said yes. The facilitator asked this same question in the next two focus group sessions as well. When asked, 7 out of 7 participants in the Democratic group said yes. And in the Republican group, 7 out of 7 participants said yes. All 21 participants in the focus group sessions indicated that their favorite slogan, or a good slogan in general, would cause them to be more likely to research or investigate a candidate. This could consequently draw or bring them into a candidate's campaign. This is where the pragmatic effects of a slogan's desirable and undesirable qualities become

evident as well. Because focus group participants indicated that they would be drawn to a slogan exhibiting the qualities they implicitly and explicitly praised, these qualities can be seen as carrying the potential to draw voters into a campaign and the respective messaging.

Once voters are drawn to the campaign's messaging, then the second function of an effective slogan seems to emerge. Participants were impressed by campaign slogans that functioned effectively as synecdoche. When reviewing all of the slogans that participants mentioned as being their favorites, or as being “really great,” “attractive,” or “effective,” the slogans’ synecdochic ability was a common quality throughout. It was this quality that tied all of the “good” slogans together. Participants referred to “People, Not Politics” and “Faith, Family, Freedom” as having potential to be “very adaptable,” “capable of being used across a whole platform,” and “very versatile for a candidate,” essentially referring to a slogan’s capability of standing in for a larger message. Participants also drew synecdochic meaning from these slogans as well. For example, a handful of participants referred to the “faith” in “Faith, Family, Freedom” as a religious faith that represents “the importance of God in America” as Republican 3 conveyed. Other participants, such as Independent 1, expressed “politics” in “People, Not Politics” as “Washington politics” or “the political establishment.” Although none of the slogans were defined by the facilitator or the prompt, participants nonetheless invested the slogan with synecdochic meaning. Even these slogans, however, were not praised as often throughout the focus group sessions as the actual campaign slogans mentioned in each focus group. When critiquing slogans or discussing their undesirable qualities, the fabricated slogans were generally used as examples. But when praising slogans or

discussing their desirable qualities, the real campaign slogans were referred to most often. Although every participant was asked to choose at least one favorite slogan from the list of 15, it did not mean that they were overly enthusiastic about that slogan. This should make sense considering the fact that the participants did not have any real candidates or platforms that provided meaning for which the slogan could stand synecdochically. Without being associated with any actual known campaign, participants had no larger campaign message that the fabricated slogan could represent. “Make America Great Again,” “Yes We Can!” “Change We Can Believe In,” and “It’s Morning Again in America” were all slogans that participants were able to consider within the context of larger campaign messaging, and therefore comprehensibly judge their evaluation of the slogans' attraction. All of these slogans were subsequently praised for their synecdochic abilities in one way or another. While “Make America Great Again” was criticized for its potential negativity and divisiveness, all groups, even the Democratic group, explicitly noted its effectiveness in standing in for the larger campaign message. Democrat 3 had admitted that it functioned better than those of the Clinton/Kaine campaign, noting that it was “effective as a campaign message on its own,” while Democrat 1 noted that it could be “applied throughout his entire platform.” Although participants believed the Clinton/Kaine campaign’s slogan of “Stronger Together” did not function as well as “Make America Great Again,” they nevertheless identified its synecdochic function of standing in for the larger message of we are stronger as a nation when we are not divided. However, the slogan was simply believed to not be as potentially expansive as Trump’s. Further, participants mentioned how “Make America Great Again” could also be applied

across media platforms in the form of #MAGA, arguably another important aspect of synecdoche.

Because these slogans' operated effectively as synecdoche, they were also perceived as effectively conveying the "key" message. If a slogan is able to effectively connect with the campaign's essential message, it may find more success in drawing voters into the candidate's campaign while simultaneously informing them. The other characteristics and traits of good slogans can then play an additional role in boosting the appeal of the slogan, and conversely the campaign. But those ancillary traits seem to be ineffective on their own without the synecdochic function being present to provide the slogan with a fuller meaning. For example, if a slogan does not summarize or effectively communicate a message, it does not matter how audibly pleasing it is, no amount of "glitz" or "frill" will help. If it does, however, effectively communicate a message, the catchy "glitz" may become the "icing on the cake."

#### 5.1.2. Slogans as constitutive rhetoric

Effective slogans thus appear to function synecdochically—summarizing the campaign's discourse while highlighting a central message. Through this process of summarizing and highlighting, effective slogans seem to perform a constitutive role in a campaign. As White (1985) and Charland (1987) both argue in their foundational studies on constitutive rhetoric, discourse can provide an audience with a vocabulary for talking about issues, subsequently channeling the audience's interpretation of the issues and thereby constituting community through a given text. In this case, the text is the political slogan. White (1985) also believed constitutive rhetoric is the activity and art of constituting character, community, and culture in language. Scholars such as Farr (1988)

have also suggested that discourse functions constitutively when it makes something possible or creates conditions of possibility (e.g., the way a political speech can create conditions for identification with campaign themes). Similarly, Charland (1987) explains that in the act of addressing audiences, an advocate's message awakens (or energizes) certain possibilities or a specific identity (or subject position) for that audience. In his essay, Jasinski (1998) notes that rhetoric can additionally act constitutively by shaping and reshaping our perception of political and social reality. He states that texts can invite an audience to experience the world in specific ways through concrete textual forms, leading audiences to appropriate, articulate, circulate, and/or subvert these textual forms in ways that release and alter their potential constitutive energy (Jasinski, 1998).

In this same way, presidential campaign slogans seem to function as rhetorical tools that can assist in the establishment of a political identity, call to action, political possibility, and formation of political reality. Slogans such as “Hope” and “Change,” “Yes We Can!,” and “Make America Great Again” provided voters with an easily accessible vocabulary by which to think about their respective campaigns. These slogans also assisted in the creation of political identity, reminding voters of the issues and ideals around which they could then rally discursively as a community of campaign supporters. Voters could associate themselves with a campaign by explicitly expressing the ideals communicated via the campaign slogan. When expressing their affinity for Obama’s “Yes We Can!” slogan, Democrat 7 demonstrated how the slogan provided them with vocabulary for what the campaign was trying to accomplish, saying, “Like economically, Yes we can. Socially, yes we can. Domestically, Yes we can.” The slogan seemed to provide them with a lens through which to view and talk about the campaign. Among

other instances in the focus group sessions, Republican 4 conveyed how Trump's "Make America Great Again" gave voters an easy way to communicate the ideas of his campaign:

In spite of a lot of things I did not like about him or his campaign, the slogan really gave us something simple and tangible to grasp to think about. You know, like, he just wanted to make us great again. I know many others, including myself, were just not happy, like we were feeling like the last 8 years had really deteriorated some of our financial and international standings and whatnot. I mean Obama was a great guy and all, don't get me wrong, but I don't know, I just wanted us to be really great, and strong again, and successful again. We need that again.

Republican 4's use of the word "again," arguably the single most important word in Trump's slogan, was quite notable. Trump's slogan had seemingly constituted or crystallized a desire to achieve a status or sense of time that the participant had perceived as existing before. Trump's rhetoric had appeared to transfer to the participant. One could argue the same for many of Trump's other voters across the country as well.

Additionally, "Make America Great Again" appeared to infuse Republican 4 with a distinct sense of political reality; the reality being that America is not great *now*, but can be *again*. The same could similarly be inferred for how voters talked about ideas of "hope" and "change" during the 2008 presidential election. For example, some voters were instilled with a sense of actual hope, or in other words, the conditions of possibility and the creation of political perception was achieved through the slogans' dissemination.

While actual presidential campaign slogans appeared to provide focus group participants with language and meaning to associate with various campaigns, participants also hypothesized potential meanings from the list of fabricated slogans, thus constituting a form of political reality. Although the fabricated slogans had not been defined to represent a larger campaign message, focus group participants nonetheless demonstrated

the constitutive potential of the slogans. For example, many of the participants were drawn to “Faith, Family, Freedom” because of the “values it represented” or “the message it was sending” as some participants explained. Some participants perceived the slogan as exuding “traditional” Americana values, whereas others perceived the message as a general “faith in America.” However, the values that these participants expressed as being represented by the slogan were purely their own inferences. Regardless, the slogan seemed to create a sense of political identity among various participants as they used the slogans to cooperatively articulate possible meanings with which the slogans could be associated. This was true not only for those slogans perceived positively, but for those the participants rejected. Slogans such as “Getting America Back to Work” and “Builders, Not Bankers” constituted negative meaning among most participants, and in some cases led to the creation of a collective identity against the slogan’s perceived meaning and the hypothetical campaign that participants believed it could be associated with.

The apparent function of a presidential campaign slogan as constitutive rhetoric is a powerful one, functioning in the same way that many political speeches or advertisements using constitutive rhetoric would. A slogan’s potential for functioning as synecdoche only improves the constitutive power of a slogan by effectively condensing a coherent campaign message while simultaneously reminding voters of the campaign’s larger discourse.

In light of these conclusions, RQ2 asking whether a slogan viewed favorably reflects already held beliefs or catalyzes new opinions and attitudes, this study does not yield a definitive answer. Some participants indicated an affinity towards slogans such as

“Faith, Family, Freedom,” “Justice and Equality for All,” or “Make America Great Again” because the perceived ideals represented by the slogans seemed to match their own. However, because of the rhetorical power of some slogans, other participants appeared to indicate that they were inspired by slogans such as “People, Not Politics” or “Fighting for the 99%,” noting how they thought about the issues being projected “in a new light” or “in a creatively compelling way” as indicated by Independent 6 and Independent 4, respectively. While it seems clear that successful slogans function synecdochically and constitutively, the power of any particular slogan to serve as a common vocabulary may reflect nascent attitudes the community already possesses, or may reflect attitudes that are generated primarily through the discourse of the campaign itself. Truly successful campaign discourse, including slogans, may well draw on both, as a vocabulary of community evolves and emerges between a candidate and the candidate's supporters.

#### 5.1.3. Good slogans are not partisan

A final significant observation throughout the focus group sessions was the generally non-partisan nature of the group's discussion. Although the three groups were divided by political party affiliation, the type of answers and responses given within each group were not particularly partisan nor noticeably skewed based on political party. Patterns and ideas expressed in each group were fairly uniform across all three groups. This homogeneity in responses suggests two significant possibilities about presidential campaign slogans and even political slogans in general.

First, the qualities that make for a successful or effective campaign slogan may not be dependent upon one's political party affiliation. What may be found to be an

undesirable slogan to a member of one political party may be just as undesirable to a member of another political party. This is not to assume, for example, that a slogan with desirable qualities used by a Republican candidate is automatically going to be attractive to a Democratic voter. Partisanship will often still come into play when judging candidates themselves, and that partisanship may extend to the voter's reading of the synecdochic slogan as well. However, in the initial phase of attracting voter attention to the campaign, the slogan may be able to act as a non-partisan tool, capable of garnering broad and somewhat favorable attention.

Second, slogans created for partisan purposes may not enjoy any special advantage over other non-partisan slogans among partisan audiences. As many skilled communicators in politics know, creating identification with the audience by crafting/altering the message for maximum appeal is often a successful tactic. However, in the case of presidential campaign slogans, this may not be similarly applicable. As previously indicated, many of the slogans crafted for this study were purposefully created to appeal to varying political ideologies. Yet these slogans were surprisingly often ignored or passed over by those who would seem to naturally be more inclined to agree with the ideological sentiment expressed because of their political affiliation. Moreover, the participants' strongly stated aversion to divisive and negative sounding slogans signals even further cautions against designing campaign slogans that are identifiably partisan. "Playing to the crowd" may not always be an advantageous strategy when creating a campaign slogan, especially for presidential campaign purposes. This may provide some evidence as to why slogans such as Senator Ted Cruz's use of "Courageous Conservatism" in the 2016 Republican primary was not electorally successful.

## 5.2. Limitations

While this study's focus groups provided some very interesting discursive data, there are important limitations to the generalizability of the results that stem from the study's provisional nature. The participants for this study were drawn from a college university, with all of them being current students. Although there was some apparent diversity among the students' age, it was nonetheless a very uniform grouping of people from one specific location. Most of the participants had probably participated in just one presidential election, while some few may have participated in two presidential elections. A larger, more diverse group of participants with varying ages, educational background, income level, and greater first-hand experience of voting in presidential elections may yield different results. Participants with more first-hand knowledge and opinions from past presidential campaigns may also be able to provide a more diverse repertoire of examples and experiences to bases their responses on.

The focus groups for this study were also held only 4 months after the conclusion of the 2016 presidential election. This election was still fresh in the minds of many of the participants, and although the election gave many of them some valuable political experience and knowledge to form their opinions around, it could also arguably be the sole basis for many of their opinions as well. This, again, highlights the need for a larger, more diverse grouping of voters.

Lastly, although the focus group results provided some insight into the thought processes of voters regarding presidential campaign slogans, they do not measure actual behavior. For instance, there is no way to verify from participant discussion whether or not voters truly do look further into a presidential candidate's campaign and potentially

identify with their campaign message based on a good slogan. Similarly, there is also no way to verify if they truly would not vote for a negative or divisive slogan, but instead support a candidate with slogan that includes all of the desirable qualities mentioned. While the results of the focus groups are indeed conditional, they nonetheless illustrate the profound potential that exist in campaign slogans, and more importantly, the need for comprehensive and coherent future research.

### 5.3. Future Research

The present study provides a starting point for further study of presidential campaign slogans, and to a larger extent, campaign slogans in general within communication studies. It opens the door for scholars within numerous disciplines to significantly improve and build upon many of the conclusions and results gathered from this study. Campaign slogans are much more than a political formality, and as demonstrated by the data provided by the focus group participants, when effectively constructed they seem to have significant and serious potential for the enhancement of presidential candidates and their campaigns. Specifically, scholars should further examine the relationship between presidential campaign slogans and synecdoche. Although a slogan's function as synecdoche was inferred from conclusions made by Hodges (2014), his study did not explicitly mention synecdoche as a rhetorical function of slogans, nor has any additional study concerning presidential campaign slogans. To what degree do slogans serve as the summarizing function, reminding voters of the candidate's message? To what degree do slogans serve to focus voters' attention towards the campaign's key message? As voters think about and discuss a candidate's campaign,

to what extent does the campaign slogan provide them with the vocabulary for doing so? These are all questions that arise from this study and are worth additional study.

Scholars can additionally employ comprehensive analyses regarding presidential campaign slogans throughout American history. Seidman (2013) analyzed presidential campaign slogans in terms of their various political functions. Slogans such as “It’s Morning Again in America,” “Yes We Can!,” “I Like Ike,” and “He Kept Us Out of War,” were mentioned in this study as slogans deemed successful because of the effective ways they were implemented throughout their respective campaigns. However, there have not been any comprehensive analyses of the various rhetorical functions employed by presidential campaign slogans to compare the ways in which different slogans attempted to communicate certain messages.

Future research should also look into researching if and how effective and non-effective slogans affect actual voting behavior. How much of a role does a slogan actually have in directing voters to one candidate or another, or repelling voters away from one candidate or another? Do voters ever base their vote, especially in primaries, on a slogan if many candidates are unknown? Studies can employ further focus groups with more diverse participants, surveys, experiments and critical analyses/ethnographies of on-going and future campaigns as methods by which exploring important questions such as these.

### Summary

Exceeding the original scope and assumed significance of this provisional study, focus group results conveyed implications that went beyond the initial questions posed. While the apparent “formula” that emerged as a result of the focus group responses

provided an answer for RQ1, the larger implications of this study revolved around what the function of an effective slogan is. Thus, rather than solely identifying traits and qualities that can enhance a slogan, this study appeared to reveal the ways in which effective slogans may function and operate, or in other words, what effective slogans do. An effective slogan was found to potentially draw voters into a campaign as well as provide them with a summarizing message that evokes the larger discourse of the campaign itself. A slogan accomplishes this through its synecdochic function that condenses large campaign messages into short, but informative phrases. The ability of a slogan to operate in this manner, enhanced by the addition of desirable slogan qualities, can draw voters in and attract them to a campaign. Through data analysis, a second rhetorical function of slogans emerged: the ability of campaign slogans to act as constitutive rhetoric. A slogan's potential to establish political identity and give voters vocabulary through which to view and talk about a respective campaign. This allows for a slogan to act in the same way as a political speech or advertisement would, constituting a political community through condensed shared ideals that can address some sort of call to action. In light of these results, the RQ2 posed by this study did not yield a definitive answer. Focus group results also indicated that presidential candidates should be wary of "playing to the crowd" and employing the use of partisan slogans. Slogans created for this study that would normally appeal to specific political ideologies, or those concerned with partisan issues, were largely ignored and criticized for their narrowness and potential divisive nature. The responses and types of answers given by participants throughout all three focus groups revealed that the appeal of "good" slogans are not necessarily dependent upon political party affiliation.

While this study provided informative and interesting discursive data, there are important limitations that prevent the generalizability of the results. Participants were gathered from a single college university in a centralized location, in addition to a lack of diversity in age and experience in the political process. Similarly, although the data provided insights into what voters may believe or perceive about presidential campaign slogans, it is unable to definitively measure their political behavior. However, there is ample room and opportunity for future research to build upon the results gathered from this study and address many of the limitations of the present study as well. Researchers should consider employing further focus groups with more diverse participants, surveys, experiments and critical analyses/ethnographies of on-going and future campaigns as means to examine the many questions left unanswered by this study.

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## APPENDIX A: PHASE 1 QUESTIONS

1. What are some general thoughts you have on political campaign slogans?
2. How often do you notice political campaign slogans?
3. What do you think of when you see or hear a candidate's campaign slogan?
4. How important is a candidate's campaign slogan to you?

## APPENDIX B: PHASE 2 QUESTIONS

1. What have been a few of your favorite presidential campaign slogans throughout American history if you can recall any?
2. What are your thoughts on President Eisenhower's slogan of "I Like Ike!"?
3. What are your thoughts on President Reagan's slogan of "It's morning again in America"?
4. What are your thoughts on President Kennedy's slogans "A Time for Greatness 1960," and "Leadership for the 60's"?
5. What are your thoughts on President Obama's slogans of "Change we can believe in," and "Yes we can!"?

## APPENDIX C: PHASE 3 LIST OF FABRICATED SLOGANS

1. “A Stronger, Safer America”
2. “Taking Back America”
3. “Getting America Back to Work”
4. “Secure Borders, For a Secure America”
5. “Fighting for the 99%”
6. “Faith, Family, Freedom”
7. “Justice and Equality For All”
8. “Paving a Path to Prosperity”
9. “Builders, Not Bankers”
10. “A Brighter Tomorrow”
11. “A New Economy for A New Century”
12. “Our Vets Deserve Better”
13. “Let’s Shake Up Washington”
14. “Ending Business As Usual”
15. “People, Not Politics”

## APPENDIX D: CONCLUDING QUESTIONS IN PHASE 3

1. Does anyone have a new favorite or least favorite slogan from the list after this group discussion?
2. As a voter, would any of you be more likely to vote for a candidate using your favorite slogan? If so, why?
3. Did anyone choose a favorite or least favorite slogan for how it sounded?