It's the Way you Tell It: Conflicting Narratives

in the 2015 Canadian Federal Election and 2016 US Presidential Election

by

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Abstract

This article develops a narrative-based model for political communication in election campaigns. Political parties develop a heroic fable about the relationship between their leader and the electorate and an ironic fable about the relationship between the leader(s) of their opponent(s) and the electorate. This model was applied to English-language political advertisements posted online by the three major parties in the 2015 Canadian federal election and advertisements by the two major party candidates in the 2016 US presidential election. The narrative characteristics of the ads (fable employed, narrating voice, background music, visual tonality) demonstrated significant differences among the five parties' narrative strategies. YouTube viewcounts were used to determine the effectiveness of individual ads as well as the overall campaigns. The article demonstrates how narrative analysis enhances our understanding of the essential role of the party leader in election campaigns.

Introduction

By the end of the 2015 Canadian federal election campaign, the three major parties had posted 135 English-language advertisements on their YouTube channels. These ads were seen a total of 14 million times, a number close to the 16 million votes the parties received. By Election Day, Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign posted 226 ads on YouTube, receiving 17.5 million views, and Donald Trump's campaign posted 96 ads, receiving 20 million. Clearly attention is now being paid to online political advertising. Attention already has been paid to televised election advertising within mainstream political science research. Scholars have undertaken quantitative analysis exploring the issues ads raise (for review articles see Lau and Rovner (2009) and Johnston (2016)). Discourse scholars have considered political ads in the context of candidates' and parties' linguistic strategies, examining the use of anecdotes, framing, and other rhetorical devices (Lakoff 2008; Westen 2007).

Political advertisements are not only linguistic artifacts, however. They are also miniature films and, therefore, visual and aural narratives. These dimensions – the sensory and the narrative – have received less scholarly attention. Film theorists pursuing a "neurocinematic" approach are increasingly focusing on the interplay between film's "direct appeal to sight and hearing," its narrative structures, and its elicitation of response (Plantinga 2009, 112). Party political advertisements are not feature films. But they undoubtedly draw upon some of the same primary representational resources, including music, lighting, visual design, cinematography and editing, and, most fundamental of all, human figures speaking and moving. They also invoke familiar narrative structures to frame their specific issue, policy, or "message" content. Parsing the sensory/perceptual and the narrative dimensions of the ads, and the interactions between the two, can enlarge our understanding of this distinct mode of political communication. And that can enlarge our understanding of political culture in the twenty-first century. The ubiquity of social media means political advertisements and associated forms of filmed "messaging" now find many more avenues to reach voters, more often, and with fewer restrictions on length, tone, format, or content.

This article grew out of the intersection of research on public sector narratives and two highly contested election campaigns. The campaigns offered an opportunity to test the typology

defined in my book *Governing Fables: Learning from Public Sector Narratives* (Borins 2011a) against the narrative data the parties were abundantly supplying. The premise in *Governing Fables* was simple: representations of politics and governance circulating within popular culture often serve as templates for the ways in which we perceive and interpret public sector actors and institutions. *Governing Fables* proposed that we often import those structures consciously or unconsciously from popular culture forms like movies and television series. It defined an analytic matrix to categorize recurring constructs or fables within sets of public sector narratives. This article explores the implications of this matrix for the narratives circulating within the two federal election campaigns through the parties' online advertisements. It also considers the matrix's relation to some of the most basic medium-specific resources those advertisements draw upon.

Narrative Theory

The analysis presented here draws inspiration and elements of methodology from classic narratology and more recent trends within film theory. It can trace a very distant lineage to the Russian folklore scholar Vladimir Propp and his pioneering study *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. Published in Russian in 1928, and translated into English 40 years later, Propp's work analyzed 100 Russian folk tales to identify inductively a set of 31 fundamental and recurring structural elements or functions. Propp's study proved enormously influential as scholars in a variety of disciplines adapted both Propp's structuralist model and his findings, applying them to studies of a wide range of cultural phenomena and productions, including the identification and analysis of film genres with their characteristic plot elements, narrative functions, and character types (Bordwell and Thompson 2013, 328-49). *Governing Fables* distinguished between informing narrative structures, which it termed *fables*, and specific narrative instantiations of story, plot, characters and actions. It then defined a four-quadrant analytic matrix for public sector fables, identifying their characteristic formal components and themes. The present analysis draws on that matrix.

Governing Fables analyzed sets of professionally authored narrative texts (both print and film) representing different spheres of public sector activity in the US and UK. These included political leadership, electoral politics, crisis management, the public service, and the judicial system. Working inductively, I identified recurring or dominant fables within each set, a shared structure of narrative functions, positions, assumptions, values, and preferred meanings that informed individual configurations of characters, actions, and plot events. While each text had a unique story, emplotment, and set of characters, many could – and did – share a common structuring fable. I proposed a typology for these fables that took as its point of departure the fact that public sector narratives necessarily involve both an individual or group protagonist and an explicitly defined institutional or societal context. A text's plot would activate a series of challenges to, or crises deriving from, that context. The protagonist's responses would affect both her/their personal story and the larger context in which it is embedded.

These assumptions yielded a basic matrix of four distinct fables: the heroic, the ironic, the sacrificial, and the tragic. In the heroic fable, both the protagonist and the institution/society triumph. In the ironic, the protagonist prevails by exploiting the institution/society. The sacrificial fable sees the institution/society triumphing at the expense of the individual, while the tragic fable results in detrimental outcomes for both. To cite two key examples from *Governing*

Fables: the popular American television series *The West Wing* instantiated the political heroic fable in episode after episode as President Josiah "Jed" Bartlett overcame personal and national challenges to preserve his principles, his administration, and the safety and prosperity of the nation (Borins 2011a, 161-72). In contrast, the landmark British comedies *Yes Minister* and *Yes Prime Minister* (and their successors *House of Cards* and *The Thick of It*) offered weekly iterations of the ironic fable, showcasing venal politicians and obstructive bureaucrats scheming, maneuvering, and engaging in outrageous hypocrisy to advance their personal agendas at the expense of good governance, the national interest, and occasionally even common decency (Borins 2011a, 75-86). *Governing Fables* analyzed a range of contemporary political and bureaucratic narratives from the US and UK, both fiction and non-fiction. All fit readily within the matrix.

The Conflicting Fables

Before discussing online advertisements, it is useful to outline the set of narrative propositions each campaign repeatedly activated about its leader, its party, and its opponents. Again, I used a recursive process of observation and induction to define these, including in the analysis not just advertisements but also official party platforms, campaign literature, party websites, candidates' speeches, and televised debate performances. The goal here was to identify the core fables informing specific narrative instances.

Each party attempted to instantiate both a heroic fable about itself and an ironic fable about its opponent(s).[2] The protagonists of the fables were the party leaders and the context nation at large, or at least key subsets of it, such as "the middle class" or "the economy." The time frame of the fables extends from the past to the future, focusing on the past behavior of the protagonist as a predictor of how (s)he would behave if in office, with either benign or deleterious consequences for society at large.

First, the Canadian campaign. The Conservative Party of Canada's (CPC) heroic fable positioned Prime Minister Stephen Harper as an experienced economic manager who had successfully steered Canada through the Great Recession, balanced the budget, and cut taxes. Harper was portrayed as a mature, careful steward of the nation's prosperity, and *therefore* as a serious leader, a statesman, and a bulwark of Canada's internal and external security. Marland (2016) describes the evolution of the CPC's messages from its accession to power in 2006 to the 2015 campaign, by which time "The master brand of strong conservative leadership, supported by a core message of economic security, came through in all manner of government and party communications" (Marland 2016, 43). The implicit structuring equation of economic prosperity and national security was encapsulated in the party's slogan: "Protect our economy."

The CPC's main ironic fable clearly defined the threat to be defended against. Justin Trudeau was inexperienced, immature, and temperamentally unsuited to lead a nation. A Liberal government under Trudeau would produce economic disaster, social chaos, and decreased national security. Specific instantiations of this fable would often take very personal forms: Trudeau's past marijuana use, his privileged childhood, and his dilettantish catalogue of jobs. In

[2] The sacrificial and tragic fables were not used by any of the parties and thus do not figure in the analysis.

contrast, the CPC's ironic fable concerning the New Democratic Party's (NDP) Thomas Mulcair was more ideological, though still treating the economy as a self-evident synecdoche for the condition of the nation as a whole, and economic policy as an index of temperamental fitness for office. Mulcair thus figured as an unregenerate, doctrinaire socialist, anti-trade, pro-carbon tax, in thrall to outmoded political philosophies (socialism) and economic models (tax-and-spend), a different form of threat to national (economic) security.

The Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) chose to centre its heroic fable on Justin Trudeau as a different kind of political actor: contemporary, concerned, and positive, an agent of "real change" as the party's platform slogan promised. Positioning Trudeau as a leader for the twenty-first century, this fable capitalized on Trudeau's youthfulness and energy, his rather unconventional route to political life, and his obvious comfort with popular cultural forms and idioms. The "real change" being offered operated on multiple levels. Trudeau was a new kind of politician with a twenty-first century vision, unlike either Harper or Mulcair, positioned here as unimaginative and hide-bound practitioners of politics as usual. Trudeau's athleticism effectively underlined this generational message, reinforcing his difference from the graying and slightly doughy Harper and the equally graying and decidedly portly Mulcair. His government would represent a real change from the corrupt, cynical Conservatives, would serve the interests of the vast majority of Canadians (that is, the middle class), and would not be afraid to adopt bold policies of raising taxes for the wealthy and running a deficit to invest in public infrastructure. The latter were a direct rebuke to both Harper's insistence on conservative economic orthodoxy and Mulcair's hedging promises to balance the budget throughout his entire mandate while still pursuing socially progressive policies.

Despite entering the campaign as the Official Opposition, the New Democratic Party still struggled to frame a heroic fable that could transcend the dichotomy of being neither Conservative nor Liberal, neither the corrupt and heartless Harper, nor the jejune and fiscally reckless Trudeau. It seized on Mulcair's thirty-year history of social commitment and public service as a lawyer and provincial cabinet minister, framing him as first and foremost "an experienced public administrator," both pragmatic and socially progressive, capable of providing affordable change (such as expanded childcare) without raising taxes or running a deficit. In its ironic fable, the NDP positioned Harper and the CPC as corrupt and in thrall to corporate Canada, while also challenging the effectiveness of the Prime Minister's economic stewardship. As leader of the Official Opposition, Mulcair's parliamentary attacks on Harper had been both tenacious and stinging. Negative campaigning could therefore be seen as in some sense a continuation of Mulcair's, and the party's, newly defined "brand" as the Official Opposition.

Now consider the US campaign. The Democratic Party framed Hillary Clinton as an experienced, dedicated, and competent public servant. She had a long history of public service including working as a public interest lawyer immediately after finishing law school, tirelessly advocating on behalf of children and families, serving as First Lady in Arkansas and in the White House, and holding office as senator and Secretary of State. The campaign predicted that she would be a capable President, a steady set of hands in a crisis, and that she would continue to deliver policies to further the interests of groups large and small, including families, women, the elderly, blacks, Hispanics, LGBTQ communities, students, and people with disabilities. The Clinton campaign portrayed Donald Trump as racist, sexist, xenophobic, financially corrupt (refusing to release his income tax returns and stiffing his contractors), ignorant, narcissistic, and

temperamentally unfit to be President. The campaign predicted that Trump would use the presidency for personal gain, initiate policies detrimental to the interests of those he disparaged, and blunder when confronting crises.

The Republicans framed Donald Trump as a successful business leader who had achieved significant results. He had built a great business empire, involving the construction and operation of hotels, office buildings, and golf courses, creating well-paying jobs for thousands. Trump's years of gadfly political commentary were portrayed as the mark of a clear-eyed outsider established him as a truthteller who contradicted received wisdom on matters such as President Obama's birthplace and the unemployment rate.[3] Based on his backstory, he would "make American great again" by bringing back jobs which been moved overseas due to unfair competition, stimulating the economy by means of tax cuts and deregulation, and protecting the US from overseas threats to its security, in particular Mexican drug lords, immigrants who turned to crime, and radical Islamic terrorists. In the Trump campaign's ironic fable, Hillary Clinton had a history of personal corruption, including using the Clinton Foundation for personal advantage, mishandling state secrets by using a personal email server while Secretary of State, and enriching herself by giving compromising speeches, the content of which she was unwilling to disclose, to major donors. She was also portrayed as ineffectual, failing to protect US diplomats stationed in Benghazi while she was Secretary of State, and lacking in physical stamina. The implicit prediction was that she would be an ineffectual and corrupt President, unable to provide economic growth or national security.

Research Questions and Methodology

This paper represents exploratory research, as it is applying a new conceptual framework to political advertising, particularly in its online manifestation. This section outlines the research questions of interest, and then describes how data were gathered to provide relevant evidence.

I have three research questions to consider. First, given that each election campaign had specified a heroic fable about its candidate and (an) ironic fable(s) about its opponents, how did it balance the two? In the Canadian context in which each party had two opponents, the choice might be to emphasize one opponent and ignore the other. Another choice involves whether to create separate ads for the heroic and ironic fables, or whether to combine them in the same ad.

The second research question involves the use of representational techniques, such as music, lighting, and visual design. How do patterns of music, lighting, and visual design activate a particular fable?

[3] This raises the fascinating question of whether effective political fables need to be true, in the sense of not contradicting facts or matters of public record. Up until the Trump campaign, I would argue that campaign fables incorporate conflicting interpretations of widely recognized facts. The Trump campaign appears to have freed itself of that constraint. Indeed, for Trump's base, his flagrant falsehoods and misrepresentations appear to have consolidated his self-proclaimed status as the only real "truth-teller."

The third question concerns the effectiveness of the different online ads. Can it be measured reliably? Also, can social media data such as these be used to project likely election outcomes?

The research methodology used YouTube to find political advertising because it is the most prominent online repository for posting and watching digital moving image content. All political parties have YouTube channels for posting ads that they broadcast and want to make available to the public. In addition, ads posted on YouTube are also accessible from links on party websites. In the US, official campaigns and PACs are not allowed to communicate with one another, so YouTube enables each to see the other's content (Issenberg 2017).[4]

The first wave of research involved coding the entire set of 135 English language ads posted on YouTube by the three major Canadian political parties during the 2015 federal election campaign. The coding was done by a research assistant and me between the start of the campaign on August 1, 2015 and the election itself (October 19, 2015). This research was supported by seed money from the university, a constraint that precluded coding French-language ads. Even if funding had been available, the configuration of the campaign in Quebec, where four major parties were fighting for francophone votes, placed it beyond the scope of this trial project. The research assistant and I coded the ads using a set of inductively derived categories, with 90 percent inter-coder reliability.

We first coded the ads for their activation of the heroic or ironic fable, and we further refined the fable variants into seven possible configurations. We discuss this in more detail below. To explore whether Canadian politics has become "presidential" in the sense that voters pay increasing attention to leaders rather than party affiliation or policy positions, we coded whether one or more party leaders were mentioned in each ad. We also isolated the form of reference used for the party leaders, distinguishing between respectful ("Mr. Trudeau") and disrespectful ("Justin") forms. We coded when the ad was posted and its total viewcount to October 19, 2015. Finally, as a first modest attempt to address the sensory nature of the advertisements' chosen medium, we coded a small number of visual and aural features: the voice or voices delivering the verbal content as distinct from visual text, the presence and type of music, and the overall colour palette.

The second wave of research involved coding the online ads posted on YouTube for the Democratic and Republican nominees in the 2016 US Presidential election. The coding was done by a research assistant and me, again with 90 percent inter-coder reliability. Coding the US election was much more complicated than the Canadian, and benefited from SSHRC funding received in the interim. We began coding on May 1, 2016, when it was clear that Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were the presumptive nominees, and continued coding until Election Day. We coded both the official campaigns (Hillary Clinton, Donald J.Trump for President) and their major political action committees (Clinton's Priorities USA and Trump's Future 45) and

[4] The Trump campaign is an outlier because it spent a greater portion of its media budget than the other campaigns on creating digital content sent directly to known or likely supporters on other social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Much of this content was precisely targeted and the campaign did not want it seen by the general public (Green and Issenberg 2016, Issenberg 2017).

ultimately gathered all 226 ads posted online by the Clinton campaign between June 24, 2015 and Election Day and all 96 posted by the Trump campaign between Oct. 28, 2015 and Election Day.

The set of visual markers coded was much larger than for the Canadian campaign, including whether an ad used facial closeups, whether the candidates and other parties depicted were static or in motion, whether there was significant use of cuts or extended shots, whether the location was interior or exterior, whether the lighting contrast was strong or dim, whether the setting was bright or dark, and whether the candidate sponsoring the ad wore bright or dark colours, and formal or informal clothing. As in the analysis of the Canadian ads, the presidential election ads were arrayed by the date they were released, and viewcounts were tracked up to Election Day. Finally, likes and dislikes were totaled for ads where that feedback was permitted by the sponsor.

Because of the space constraint of this paper, it is not possible to present and comment on all the data gathered. I will focus on the three research questions presented above: the different candidates' balance among fables; the use of sound, colour, and motion to activate the chosen fable; and measures of the effectiveness of the online ads.

Results

We begin with the fables that were coded and the frequency with which the parties deployed them. *Hero* denotes a fable focusing solely on the party's leader and his relation to the electorate. It might involve an encapsulation of his personal or political biography, an encounter with or testimony from a representative citizen, family, or social group, or sequences of interaction with an enthusiastic crowd, accompanied by either a recapitulation of past, or a promise of future, benefits for individuals, communities, or the nation. We recognized three variants of the ironic fable. *Knave* positions an opposing candidate as in some measure tainted or corrupt, perhaps motivated by personal ambition and/or personal gain, implicated in scandals, or in thrall to special interests. In contrast, *fool* characterizes its target as well-meaning but naïve, inexperienced, or misguided (or all three) and therefore likely to make bad decisions and enact harmful policies, albeit with the best intentions. *Mistaken policy* refers to a version of the ironic fable which presents a past or promised policy as harmful. The association may be less with specific politicians than with the opposing party and/or ideology more broadly, with the policy presented as a symbol of larger failings.

Though the results are usually presented for all five parties together, we recognize that the two countries have distinctive political and media cultures and therefore the most meaningful comparisons are within each country rather than between the two countries.

[Table 1 about here]

Looking at the Canadian election, the CPC put most emphasis by far on the ironic fable. Forty percent of the CPC's ads employed the fool version, directed at Justin Trudeau's inexperience and naivete. These ads repeatedly recycled a soundbite of Trudeau's assertion that

under a Liberal government's proposed economic policies the budget will "balance itself," framing this as proof of Trudeau's incompetence in financial management and therefore unfitness for office. Only 30 percent of the Conservative Party's ads employed the heroic fable, either featuring Stephen Harper alone, or contrasting him with his opponents and their parties. Both the LPC and the NDP deployed the heroic fable more often, and the ironic variants less often in total. Neither attempted to position the leaders of the other parties as fools, but there are clear differences in approach between the two. The Liberals employed the heroic fable significantly more often (33 percent of their total ads compared to the NDP's 20 percent) and used the knave variant of the ironic fable, with or without a heroic contrast, less often (25 percent compared to 43). The LPC also used a compound "hero and mistaken policy" fable more often (39 percent compared to 30). In other words, the Liberals were focusing on Justin Trudeau as leader, featuring him respectfully critiquing mistaken policies. The NDP were more often attacking other party leaders as knaves.

In the US campaign, both Clinton and Trump used the knave version of the ironic fable in about half their ads, more often than any other fable, and more often than any of the Canadian parties. Clinton used the heroic fable somewhat more often than Trump, but he used a "hero and knave" compound fable more often than she, especially after Labour Day, when it figured in 27 percent of his ads. The overall symmetry between Clinton and Trump is consistent with Lau and Pomper's (2004) finding that in US Senate elections the rhetorical tone of both major parties is almost always similar. Canada's multi-party system, however, seems to have encouraged more diverse narrative strategies.

Canadian political scientists have frequently observed the growing power of the Prime Minister since the government of Pierre Trudeau, a phenomenon often referred to as "presidentialization" (Savoie 1999, Marland 2016). An implication of this trend is that campaigning would focus more on the party leaders than their platforms. Furthermore, individual protagonists, a role inevitably filled by party leaders, are essential to the structure of our fables. Consistent with both these hypotheses, we found that one or more party leaders were mentioned by name in all 52 Liberal ads, all 40 Conservative ads, and 42 of 43 NDP ads (see Table 2).

[Table 2 about here]

Digging more deeply into the manner in which the ads invoked the leaders, a very significant difference emerged, one that is entirely consistent with the extensive use the CPC made of the fool variant of the ironic fable. Coding the use of either a leader's full name or an honorific as a marker of a respectful form of reference, and the use of given name alone as a marker of disrespectful reference, the Conservatives employed the disrespectful mode two-thirds of the time, with the Liberals and the NDP exactly reversing this, using the respectful modes just as often. All three parties featured one or both of the leaders of the opposing parties in approximately 80 percent of their ads, another measure of the extent to which leaders are clearly the protagonists in political advertising narratives (as opposed to their parties, or their platforms).

Having demonstrated diversity among the Canadian parties and symmetry between the two US parties in deploying the fables, we turn to their sensory (visual and aural) dimensions and the ways in which they align with the fables. We begin with the differences among the parties in terms of the ads' narrating voice (see Table 3). LPC ads used Trudeau himself as narrator approximately two-thirds of the time, almost always in some form of direct address to

the camera and frequently in close-up. The implication of the choice seems clear. The LPC identified in Trudeau its best asset, the face of the brand. It was only natural to establish him as the voice of that brand too. In sharp contrast, Stephen Harper supplied the narrating voice for only 23 percent of the PCP's ads, the same frequency with which citizen narrators were used. A full 48 percent of the Conservatives' ads employed anonymous voice-over narration. In three-quarters of these instances, the voice was male (35 percent of total ads). This may have been in deference to the party's traditional strength among male voters. Once again, the NDP falls somewhere in the middle. Its ads used Tom Mulcair as narrating voice 38 percent of the time. Only 17 percent of NDP ads used voice-over narration and here the gender choice reversed that of the Conservatives. Had the NDP used Tom Mulcair as the narrating voice of its many attack ads, it would have undermined party strategists' efforts to soften a persona often characterized as angry.

[Table 3 about here]

In the US campaign, the ads used several narrating voices more often than the Canadian campaign.[5] In Clinton's campaign it is telling that Clinton's voice is heard in only 23 percent of the ads, less than half as often as Trump's. Ads using the knave fable often attacked Trump by using clips or soundbites of his many controversial and embarrassing statements. Citizens were employed in 27 percent of Clinton's ads, also to attack Trump. It is interesting that her campaign used anonymous male voice-over more frequently than anonymous female voice-over – a ratio comparable to that of the CPC, rather than LPC or NDP. The Trump campaign had Trump speaking – often directly to the camera in close-up – in 39 percent of its ads. While it, too, used its opponent's controversial or embarrassing statements in attack ads, it did this only 29 percent of the time. When it used anonymous voice-over, it employed males seven times as often as females, a higher ratio than any other campaign.

Narrating voice is, of course, not the only possible aural component of the ads. Music can play a very significant role. It is important to note that the physiological response known as "auditory entrainment" in which a listener's heartbeat, brain waves and other physiological functions synchronize with the rhythmic patterns of the sounds she is hearing can be activated by quite simple sound elements (Plantinga 2009, 131). And these unconscious and spontaneous physiological responses, in turn, can trigger emotional and cognitive responses. A 2005 study utilizing psychological testing methodology demonstrated that the manipulation of musical and visual cues accompanying political ads had a measurable effect on the emotional states of voters (Brader 2005).

All three Canadian parties made extensive use of music in their election advertising. All of the music used would fall in the category of program music, that is to say, music composed or selected to interact with the ads' visual and verbal elements. Such music may closely and obviously underscore content, provide ironic counterpoint, or work more subliminally to evoke consonant mood, atmosphere, or feeling. It is when we consider the types of music chosen that strong differences emerge. For coding purposes, we proposed four very broadly defined categories. We defined *upbeat* music as characterized by a major key and quick tempo, increasing in volume or pace throughout the ad. *Ominous* music was slow-paced and in minor keys. *Humorous* music employed devices like plucked violins, bassoons, and musical

[5] The coding did not include the standard closing line "I'm ___ and I approve this ad."

suggestions of laughter, while *calm* music created a low-key, meditative or "new age" effect with little variation in tempo.

The Liberals made the strongest and most consistent musical statement, with 68 percent of their ads using upbeat music, most often in ads showcasing Justin Trudeau (see Table 4). The NDP was considerably less upbeat (47 percent), and had a higher percentage of ads using the ominous mode (12 percent versus the Liberals' 4). Upbeat music was heard in only 7 percent of Conservative ads. Given the high proportion of negative ads instantiating the knave fable aired by the CPC, it is not surprising to find that roughly one-third (32 percent) used ominous music, while a further 15 percent employed humorous music to underscore satirical attacks. Calm music was consistently used to accompany ads featuring Stephen Harper and these amounted to 29 percent. This presumably was felt to be the appropriate soundtrack for the message of stolid, dependable competence the party was seeking to convey.

[Table 4 about here]

Given the dominance of attack ads in the Clinton and Trump campaigns, it is no surprise that both used upbeat music infrequently (18 and 14 percent, respectively) and ominous or humorous music much more frequently (43 and 32 percent, respectively). The Trump campaign had the highest frequency of ads without music at all, because many ads involved only Trump speaking directly to the camera.

The extensive coding of visual markers for the US campaign also shows great similarity between the Clinton and Trump campaigns, both for characteristics where both campaigns' choices were influenced by the fable being presented and for characteristics that were invariant with respect to the different fables. For knave fable ads, both used cuts more often (96 percent of Clinton's and 69 percent of Trump's) than extended shots, stitching them together from assorted damaging clips of their opponent. In contrast, 48 percent of Trump's heroic fable ads and 25 percent of Clinton's used single shots. Both used bright lighting for heroic fable ads (69 percent for Clinton and 74 percent for Trump) and dark lighting for knave fable ads (71 percent for Clinton and 58 percent for Trump). Both used a dark setting for knave ads (70 percent for Clinton and 78 percent for Trump).

For both Clinton's and Trump's ads, regardless of the fable, most of the people depicted were shot in closeup. Thirty-six percent of Clinton's ads had closeups of her, 55 percent had closeups of Trump, and 75 percent had closeups of other people. Fifty-one percent of Trump's ads had closeups of him, 72 percent closeups of Clinton, and 53 percent closeups of other people. When Clinton appeared in her own ads, she wore bright colours (25 percent) more often than dark colours (8 percent) and was almost always dressed formally (jacket, pantsuit, scarf or jewellery). Trump appeared in half his ads, also always formally: dark suit and white shirt and usually wearing a tie.

We also coded whether the candidates displayed figural motion, namely moving to the extent that the camera had to move to follow them, or whether they were primarily static. Clinton was static in 28 percent of her ads and in motion in 8 percent, and showed Trump in motion in 2 percent of her ads and static in 56 percent. Similarly, Trump was in motion in 2 percent of his own ads and static in 49 percent, and showed Clinton in motion in 1 percent and static in 70 percent. While we had not initially coded figural motion for the Canadian ads, I coded Justin

Trudeau's motion for those ads still available online in March 2017. It turned out that, in sharp contrast to the Trump and Clinton ads, he was in motion in 26 ads and static in 10. Trudeau is relatively young, fit, and energetic, and his campaign developed ads that emphasized those characteristics. Both Clinton and Trump are relatively sedentary older adults, and the contrast with Trudeau was striking. Also, in contrast to Clinton's and Trump's formal attire, Trudeau dressed formally in some ads (suit, shirt, and tie), semi-formally in others (dress shirt, with sleeves unrolled or rolled, collar buttoned or open, with or without a tie), and completely informally in still others (t-shirt and jeans).

We turn to the third research question, the effectiveness of the various parties' online campaigns. Table 5 shows total views for all ads posted online by the five campaigns as well as total views for their top 5 ads. Table 6 provides more information about the top 5 ads for each Canadian party and Tables 7 and 8 provide comparable information for Trump's and Clinton's top 5 ads. These tables provide the basis for some observations about the dynamics of the Canadian and US election campaigns as expressed in their narrative representations.

[Tables 4 and 5 about here]

The Liberal ads' total viewcount of almost 10 million on the eve of the election was far larger than both the Conservatives (1.8 million) and NDP (2.5 million) and predicted a big Liberal victory the next day.[6] Similarly, Hutchison (2015) found that Justin Trudeau was leading Harper and Mulcair in Twitter mentions just before the election. Social media activity might well be a supplement to polling for predicting election outcomes.

Table 5 shows that four of the Conservatives' five most viewed ads were posted in 2013 and 2014, long before the election, all using the fool variant of the ironic fable to attack Justin Trudeau. The Liberals, rather than ignoring these attacks, as was the case with Trudeau's predecessor Michael Ignatieff, counter-attacked. Their ads ("Channel Change," "Focused on You," and "Real Priorities") all drew viewcounts much larger than the original Conservative attacks. While the Conservative attack ads were delivered by anonymous voice-over, Trudeau delivered the replies himself, in each case using a compound fable.

The Conservatives' most-watched (502,000 views) ad appeared on May 25, 2015, a full two months before the start of the campaign. "The Interview" featured a group of actors portraying an HR team evaluating Justin Trudeau's "resume" and noting the many disqualifications for the job he was seeking. A companion heroic ad, released the same day, showed Stephen Harper working late in his office, with calm music in the background, talking, in the second person, about the difficult decisions he has had to make, and concluding that "on a good day, you get to feel you've lived up to the job." While the intended message was presumably a variation on the CPC's theme of Harper's gravitas in contrast to the lightweight Trudeau's recklessness, the carefully measured cadences, the dimness of the lighting, and that final deprecatory exit line, could equally be received as an illustration of Harper's, and the party's, narrowness of vision and failure of imagination: governance as overtime. The ad achieved only 42,000 views. This early failure to find a heroic narrative form for Harper would be repeated throughout the campaign. The CPC had made Prime Minister Harper's financial

[6] Had I totaled the viewcounts that evening, I would have posted a blog on Election Day predicting a strong Liberal majority government.

management the cornerstone of his heroic persona. There were certainly unseized opportunities here for positive, "heroic" or compound "heroic/ironic" narratives that would have modulated the heavily negative overall tone they chose.[7]

The most viewed Liberal ad during the campaign itself was "The Escalator," which was posted on September 1, 2015 and garnered over three million views. The ad employs an effectively simple visual and kinetic metaphor for ten years of economic stagnation under the Harper government. It encapsulates many of the LPC's signature advertising elements: bright tonality, positive message, critique of policy but not individuals, motion, upbeat music, and the personable and enthusiastic young leader front and centre, sharing his vision with the camera.

NDP advertising narrative never succeeded in finding a consistent form or tenor. Its five most-watched ads each employed a different fable structure. Only one of the ads featured Tom Mulcair alone as the narrating voice. The dominant tonality of the ads was unequivocally dark and three of the five ads used ominous music. What the ads failed to find were effective ways to register the more positive socially progressive vision and values traditionally claimed by the NDP. The most viewed ad ("Enough") focused on the Harper Government's corruption, "Performance Review" riffed on the Justin Trudeau job interview to build a case for firing Stephen Harper, and "Not Working" critiqued the Harper Government's economic policies. All provided strong arguments for voting against Stephen Harper, but no convincing arguments for voting for Tom Mulcair. The real beneficiaries of the NDP's most-viewed ads were the Liberals. While the NDP and Tom Mulcair were providing the negative commentary, the LPC could maintain its "sunny ways."

Moving to the US context, the total viewcount for Trump's 96 ads was almost 20 million, 53 percent of the total for the two major parties, and significantly more than the total viewcount of 17.8 million for Clinton's 226 ads (see table 5). We also totaled likes and dislikes, when the candidates did not disable that function. Trump had 89,000 likes and 52,000 dislikes, for a ratio of 1.7 to 1. Clinton had 100,000 likes, but 170,000 dislikes, for an inverse ratio of .6 to 1. There were many more of Clinton's critics watching her ads and disliking them than was the case with Trump's critics.

Table 7 shows Clinton's top five ads: "Role Models" replayed Trump's objectionable speeches to a group of children (1.7 million views); "Captain Khan" was narrated by the father of a Muslim American soldier killed in Iraq (1.3 million views); "Grace" was narrated by the parents of a disabled child (970,000 views); "I Love War," used Trump's own ill-chosen words about foreign policy (827,000 views); and "Equal," supported gay and lesbian marriage (731,000 views). The top four were attack ads and Clinton did not appear in any of them.

[Table 7 about here]

[7] The Conservative's advertising in the 2011 election campaign was much more effective, presenting a stronger vision of Stephen Harper as economic manager and international statesman as well as a more damaging version of the ironic fable depicting Michael Ignatieff as a knave for returning to Canada only to satify his ambition (Borins 2011b, 2011c).

Trump's top five are shown in Table 8. "Crook" compared Hilary Clinton to Richard Nixon and had 2.6 million views; a short 15-second ad introducing Mike Pence after the Republican convention came second with 2.3 million views; an attack on the "biased" moderators of the second presidential debate had 1.9 million views; "Bad News," which referenced the FBI's reopening of the Clinton email investigation in the last week of the campaign, had 1.5 million views; and "Hilary has Failed Every Single Time," an attack on her record as Secretary of State, had 1.1 million views. Like the Clinton ads, the common denominator is negativity and the use of voices other than Trump's. But his most viewed ads had higher viewcounts despite being launched later in the campaign.

In the last week of the campaign Clinton posted 16 ads with a total viewcount of 1,038,000, while Trump posted 11 ads with a total viewcount of 4,100,000. Trump thus took an 80 percent share of all views of new ads. The extent to which Trump had seized the momentum is startling. Clinton's most popular ad during that week dealt with Trump's sexism and misogyny and had a viewcount of only 363,000, while two of Trump's ads, "Bad News" and "Hilary has Failed Every Single Time" made the top five for the entire campaign. Many observers considered an important factor in Trump's victory to be FBI Director James Comey's announcement of the FBI reopening the investigation in Clinton's emails. The online evidence suggests a huge leap in Trump's momentum in the last week and the topics of the ads that went viral suggests this was the issue that made the difference.

Conclusion

Though I regard this research as exploratory, it has produced some findings that are intrinsically interesting and relevant to future research. My two initial conclusions are methodological.

Narrative analysis provides a way of integrating what have hitherto been disparate components of election appeals. Political scientists usually tend to think about political campaigns as putting forward to the electorate a set of policies and a party leader, who has various qualifications and personal qualities. The narrative-based approach argues that parties attempt to draw connections between a party leader's experience and character and its policies. They also treat character as a predictor of how the leader will deal with the inevitable unpleasant surprises, wicked problems, and unforeseen crises she encounters when in office. These connections are chronological, flowing from past to future. Traditional election analysis has not yet unpacked political leadership, as it is offered on the hustings, and shown its relationship to policy. For example, the 2011 Canadian Election Study showed *that* Jack Layton's leadership contributed enormously to the NDP's success but it was silent about *how* (Fournier et al 2013).

The second conclusion concerns one measure of social media activity – YouTube viewcounts – as a predictor of election outcomes, where a party that captures the most viewer interest is most likely to win. The data presented in this paper were publicly available before the Canadian and US elections and would have supported accurate predictions. The LPC's wide lead in YouTube activity before the election pointed to a decisive victory. The presidential election was very close, as were the overall YouTube viewcounts for both candidates. But Trump's

strong lead in YouTube activity in the week leading up to the election indicated that he had gained momentum that could carry him to a clear victory in the Electoral College. The significant implication of this finding is that analysts should be looking to YouTube activity and other indicators of social media activity when predicting electoral outcomes.[8]

The paper also suggests one path to achieving political success in contemporary Canada and the US. The most successful by far of the five election campaigns discussed here was Justin Trudeau's, which was also the most heroic. His campaign was able to take advantage of public dissatisfaction with attack politics, as practiced for almost a decade by the Harper Conservatives – a sense that it was inconsistent with our national culture. The LPC was able to meld a variety of narrative elements into a coherent whole: frequent use of the heroic fable, either by itself or together with respectful critiques of mistaken public policy on the part of the Harper Government; emphasis on Trudeau's youth and energy; and ads that combined closeups of a leader in motion, enthusiastic crowds, brightly-lit indoor or outdoor settings, and upbeat music. The confrontation between Trudeau and Harper (and to a lesser extent Mulcair) can be seen as an instance of a political contest between a young, enthusiastic, even charismatic, challenger, and an aging and weary incumbent. The 1972 movie *The Candidate*, starring a young Robert Redford, is the classic fictional version of such a contest. At the federal level, Canadian instantiations would include Pierre Trudeau vs. Robert Stanfield (1968), Brian Mulroney vs. John Turner (1994), Stephen Harper vs. Paul Martin (2004, 2006), and finally Justin Trudeau vs. Stephen Harper (2015). US instantiations would include John Kennedy vs. Richard Nixon (1960), Jimmy Carter vs. Gerald Ford (1976), Bill Clinton vs. George H.W. Bush (1992), and Barack Obama vs. John McCain (2008). As compelling as this model is, its absence from many recent elections, indicates that it is not the only path to victory. Federal politics in the US is currently much more polarized than in Canada, and the most effective path to victory might well be the most negative.

The paper also draws our attention to compound fables, or contrast advertising, used by the LPC and NDP in almost half of their ads, the Trump campaign in about a quarter, the CPC fifteen percent, and the Clinton campaign hardly at all. Contrast ads have received little attention in the literature; Geer (2006), the foremost student of attack advertising, makes individual messages, rather than the ads themselves, his unit of analysis. For the electorate, ads with compound fables avoid the "too good to be true" aura of many heroic ads and the "too bad to be credible" message of many ironic ads. They encapsulate, in thirty second sound bites, the conflicting voices that characterize a democratic polity. Compound fables are thus worthy of more scholarly attention.

I hope that this article, through its application of a new conceptual framework to five parties in two different election campaigns, has made the case both for refinement of that framework and its application to future campaigns.

[8] A graduate student in my seminar on Narrative and Politics performed a similar exercise for YouTube viewcounts for the two elections held in Greece in 2015 and found that Syriza, the winner in both, led its main rival, New Democracy, by 70 percent to 30 percent of the total for the two largest parties (Poulakidas 2017).

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Table 1. Structuring Fables

Fable	CPC	LIB	NDP	Clinton	Trump
Hero	15 %	33 %	20 %	34 %	24 %
Knave	11	17	25	49	52
Fool	40	0	0	10	1
Mistaken policy	19	4	7	0	0
Hero and knave	0	8	18	5	20
Hero and fool	4	0	0	1	1
Hero and mistaken policy	11	39	30	1	0
Total	100	101	100	100	100
N	40	52	43	226	26

Source: Ads posted on YouTube channels coded by author and research assistant.

Table 2. Leader Mention and Tone

	CPC	LIB	NDP
Leader(s) Mentioned	100 %	100 %	98 %
Leader(s) not Mentioned	0	0	2
Tone			
Disrespectful	66	7	7
Respectful	10	63	75
N	40	52	43

Source: Ads posted on YouTube channels coded by author and research assistant.

Table 3. Narrating Voices

Narrating Voice	CPC	LIB	NDP	Clinton	Trump
Anonymous male voice-over	35 %	4 %	4 %	14 %	22 %
Anonymous female voice-over	13	6	13	4	3
Graphic	0	19	18	40	20
Own party leader	23	62	38	23	39
Other party leader	3	2	0	48	29
Other politician	3	6	20	12	6
Citizen(s)	23	0	7	27	3
Total	100	99	100	190	157
N	40	52	43	226	96

Source: Ads posted on YouTube channels coded by author and research assistant.

Table 4. Use of Music

Type of Music	CPC	LIB	NDP	Clinton	Trump
Upbeat	7 %	68 %	47 %	18 %	14 %
Ominous	32	4	12	31	23
Humorous	15	15	16	12	9
Calm	29	8	9	20	4
No music used	17	6	16	7	32
Total	100	101	100	103	106
N	40	52	43	226	96

Source: Ads posted on YouTube channels coded by author and research assistant.

Table 5. Viewcounts

Party	**Total Party Ad Views (000)**	**Total Party Ad Views as Percentage Total Ad Views**	**Top 5 Party Ads as Percentage of Total Ad Views**
CPC	1851	13%	9%
LPC	9666	69%	43%
NDP	2468	18%	15%
Total Canada	13985		
Clinton	17758	47 %	15 %
Trump	19950	53 %	25 %
Total US	37708		

Source: Ads posted on YouTube channels coded by author and research assistant.

Table 6. Five Most Viewed Ads by Canadian Parties

Party	Ad	Date	Views (000)	Fable	Narrating Voice	Music	Colour
CPC	The Interview	5/25/15	502	Ironic (Fool)	Actors (Citizens)	None	Bright
	Justin Judgment	4/15/13	318	Ironic (Fool)	Anonymous (Male)	Humorous	Bright
	Justin Budget	5/5/14	192	Ironic (Fool)	Anonymous (Female)	Ominous	Bright
	Justin Experience	04/15/13	141	Ironic (Fool)	Anonymous (Male)	Humorous	Dark
	Justin Marijuana	05/05/14	122	Ironic (Fool)	Anonymous (Female)	Humorous	Dark
LPC	Escalator	9/1/15	3030	Contrast (H/MP)	Trudeau	Upbeat	Bright
	Real Priorities	11/1/13	1235	Contrast (H/MP)	Trudeau	None	Dark
	Focused on You	6/7/13	618	Contrast (H/K)	Trudeau	Upbeat	Bright
	You are the Economy	10/13/15	559	Contrast (H/MP)	Anonymous (Female)	Upbeat	Bright
	Channel Change	4/28/13	555	Contrast (H/K)	Trudeau	None	Bright
NDP	Enough	7/14/15	638	Ironic (K)	Anonymous (Female)	Ominous	Dark
	I'm Ready	9/4/15	567	Heroic	Mulcair	Humorous	Dark
	Performance Review	9/11/15	479	Contrast (H/K)	Anonymous (Male)/Mulcair	None	Bright
	Not Working	8/7/15	246	Ironic (MP)	Anonymous (Female)	Ominous	Dark
	Stop TPP	10/11/15	220	Ironic (K/MP)	Anonymous (Male)	Ominous	Dark

Note: H = heroic fable; K = knave; MP = misguided policy

Source: Ads posted on YouTube channels coded by author and research assistant.

Table 7. Trump's Five Most Viewed Ads

Ad	Date	Views (000)	Fable	Narrating Voice	Music	Colour
"Crook"	23/9/16	2611	Ironic (Knave)	Anonymous (Male)	Ominous	Dark
Trump/Pence ticket	15/7/16	2341	Heroic	Pence	None	Dark
Moderators Fail	9/10/16	1946	Contrast (H/K)	Trump/debate moderators	None	Dark
Bad News	2/11/16	1467	Ironic (Knave)	Anonymous (Male)	Ominous	Dark
Hillary has Failed Every Single Time	1/11/16	1135	Ironic (Knave)	Anonymous (Male)	Ominous	Dark

Note: H = heroic fable; K = knave

Source: Ads posted on YouTube channels coded by author and research assistant.

Table 8. Clinton's Five Most Viewed Ads

Ad	Date	Views (000)	Fable	Narrating Voice	Music	Colour
Role Models	14/7/16	1685	Contrast (H/K)	Trump/Clinton	Calm	Dark
Captain Khan	21/10/16	1313	Ironic (Knave)	Citizen	Calm	Dark
Grace	6/6/16	971	Ironic (Knave)	Citizens	Calm	Dark
I Love War	6/9/16	827	Ironic (Knave)	Trump	Ominous	Dark
Equal	24/6/15	731	Heroic	Clinton	Upbeat	Light

Note: H = heroic fable; K = knave

Source: Ads posted on YouTube channels coded by author and research assistant.