

Abstract

This thesis investigates the indicators of a conservative backlash in presidential campaign discourse by contrasting the conservative rhetoric of 1960-1980 with that of 2011-2020. Grounded in a theoretical framework of Backlash Politics, the thesis examines the rise of conservatism in the 1960s and 1970s and its resurgence in the twenty-first century through the lens of a Critical Discourse Analysis. Through an analysis of conservative presidential candidates' public statements in the periods 1960-1980 and 2011-2020, the thesis explores the resurgence of American conservatism by identifying enduring themes in conservative discourse. The dominant themes in conservative discourse, such as individual liberties, limited government, free market principles, traditional family values, and national security concerns, are scrutinized to identify similarities as well as differences between the 20th and the 21st-century discourse. By examining campaign press releases and statements issued during the presidential campaign by five conservative presidential candidates from each period, the thesis reveals the employed factors of Backlash Politics. The conservative political discourse in 1960-1980 grieved for the return to the founding principles and calls for institutional reshaping to prevent an authoritative government. The conservative presidential candidates in 2011-2020 placed a significant emphasis on issues such as abortion, limited government, and the threat of "the other," while instilling a sense of nostalgia for the 1960s and 1970s and using a "take back America" narrative. Additionally, the rhetoric employed in the 21st century tends to be dramatic language, escalating the intensity of emotions and urgency, aimed to mobilize against an "oppressive" government showcasing the criteria for evidence of a conservative backlash. The analysis delves into the impact of the 1960-1980 discourse on the 21st century discourse of conservative presidential candidates offering findings and insights into the cyclical nature of conservative waves in American politics.