



Original article

AI-Enhanced and Appraisal Analysis of Conservative Political Discourse: Exploring Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation in Trump, Kirk, and Boebert's Speeches

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines conservative political discourse themed on MAGA (Making American Great Again) in speeches of Donald Trump, Charlie Kirk and Lauren Boebert using Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). Using a dual methodology that includes an AI tools and manual coding, the study explores how Attitude, Engagement and Graduation are employed to form ideology, mobilize audiences and solidify collective identity. Results indicate Trump's focus on negative Judgment and monoglossic authority; Kirk's emphasis on grievance within an empowering message of heteroglossic engagement and metaphorical risks; and Boebert's actively encouraged a positive Appreciation to build group solidarity. AI-supported analysis offers a quick, measurable indications of polarity, intensity and stance; manual coding captures the rhetorical nuance, contextual meaning and metaphorical depth. The approaches show how conservative discourses use evaluative language to argue, legitimate, and construct ideological worlds and contributed to its theoretical and empirical limitations and the strengths of AI-supported as well as human-centred analysis.

Keywords: Appraisal Theory, Political Discourse, AI-assisted Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Engagement, Evaluation

تحليل الخطاب السياسي المحافظ باستخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي ونظرية التقييم: استكشاف المواقف والمشاركة والتدرج في خطابات ترامب وكيرك وبوبرت

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المستخلص

تبحث هذه المقالة الخطاب السياسي المحافظ المرتبط بشعار (لنجعل أمريكا عظيمة مجددًا) في ثلاثة خطابات سياسية وذلك باستخدام نظرية التقييم اللغوي وبالاعتماد منهجية مزدوجة تتضمن أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي بالإضافة إلى التحليل اليدوي، تستكشف الدراسة كيفية توظيف عناصر الموقف والمشاركة والتدرج في تشكيل الأيديولوجيا، وحشد الجمهور، وترسيخ الهوية الجماعية. تشير النتائج إلى أن خطاب ترامب يركز على الحكم السلبي والسلطة أحادية الصوت ويبرز خطاب كيرك سردا لمظلومية الجمهور أما بوبيرت فتشجع بشكل واضح على التقدير الإيجابي. يوفر التحليل المدعوم بالذكاء الاصطناعي مؤشرات سريعة وقابلة للقياس حول القطبية، وشدة التقييم، ومواقف الخطاب، في حين يتيح الترميز اليدوي النقاط الدقيقة البلاغية والمعنى السياقي والعمق المجازي. ويُظهر الجمع بين هذين النهجين كيف تستخدم الخطابات المحافظة اللغة التقييمية بصورة استراتيجية في الجدل، وإضفاء الشرعية، وبناء العوالم الأيديولوجية، كما يبين في الوقت نفسه حدودها النظرية والتجريبية، إضافةً إلى نقاط القوة في كلٍ من التحليل المدعوم بالذكاء الاصطناعي والتحليل القائم على الخبرة البشرية في التحليل النقدي للخطاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية التقييم - الخطاب السياسي - أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي - تحليل الخطاب النقدي - الارتباط -

التقييم

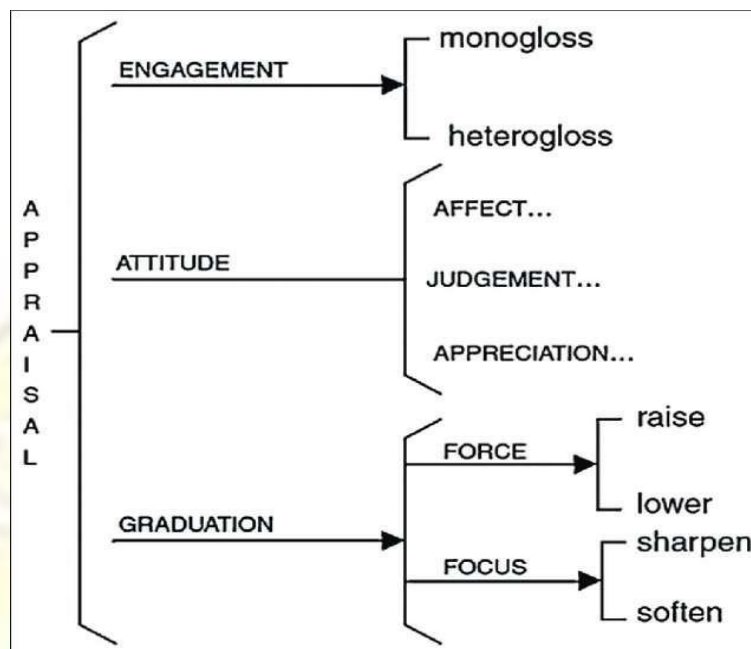
Introduction

"Make America Great Again" (MAGA) has come greatly influenced the political language that used to define modern conservative political discourse. Ideology, public opinion, and audience. This study examines evaluative language in political speeches using Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005).

In this study, we adopt a two-sided methodology comparing AI-assisted and (manual) appraisal analysis to investigate MAGA speeches. AI models like ChatGPT-4, ChatGPT-3. 5, DeepSeek AI and Voyant Tools are employed to classify polarity, intensity and usage pattern of evaluative language for mass analysis of evaluation (Curry, Baker & Brookes 2024). AI-supported analysis can highlight recurrent patterns in Affect, Judgment or Appreciation; it can even quantify 'types of engagement' (monoglossic vs. heteroglossic) or intensification (in Graduation), and thus increase empirical support and reproducibility to human interpretation.

AI is necessary to provide scalable and quantitative analysis, however manual analysis is also required for capturing subtle rhetorical strategies, metaphorical meanings, socio-political context which might be missed by AI (Lin, 2023). By integrating all these tools, we aim at providing a comprehensive analysis of conservative political discourse, including the common patterns and also focusing on specific linguistic strategies and techniques used by the speakers in order to influence the perception of their audience and to display their identity with ideological reference groups.

Figure 1. Outline of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005)



1- Literature Review

The employment of Appraisal Theory in investigating political discourse has gained a significant interest within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In this theory, Martin and White's (2005) offer a systematic approach to evaluate the influence of language on attitudes, social relationships, and ideological stances. Researchers can discern the basic strategies for persuasion and the balance of power in political speech by applying the main subsystems of the theory; Attitude in terms of Affect (emotional responses), Judgment (evaluation of people's behavior), Appreciation (evaluation of objects, events, or processes), Engagement (interactional positioning of voices), and Graduation (scaling of intensity). Consequently, a number of studies have drawn on Appraisal Theory to understand political rhetoric: Jones (2021) examined President Donald Trump's speech and showed how he used judgment and appreciation smartly to enhance the national values and morality. Jones indicated that Trump's gave power and political legitimacy "Our nation is falling apart, but I will bring it back to its former glory". His words sounded like he is the only one who could put an end to the problems caused by the United States's reduction. At the same time, he positioned himself as a representative of the nation's moral judgment and future potential. The interaction between Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation has been focused on by Turner (2023). Turner demonstrated that emphasis on common concerns, fears, and pride enhances group cohesion while remarkably portraying opponents as individuals who lack ethics and fail to meet social norms. Baker and Lee (2022) focused on Engagement strategies in political discourse to find out how speakers using the "us" and "them" contrast rhetorically confirms power. Dialogic positioning lets speakers to emphasize the consent of supporters while lessen the viewpoints of opponents. This demonstrates how language influences views of a group's dedication. Miller and Roberts (2023) observed that graduation categories emphasize superlatives,

intensifiers, and scaling tactics within political communications. These strategies reduce arguments compelling, emphasize the necessity for action, and intensify both promises and threats to persuade audiences. Continually, the analysis of political speech using AI-assisted tools is increasingly becoming more and more important. Recent studies by Curry, Baker, and Brookes (2024) confirmed that AI tools, particularly advanced natural processing tools (NLP) can do the same manual data analysis of Appraisal especially when dealing with large data but still human intervention needed for evaluation. Similarly, Lin (2023) and Crosthwaite and Baisa (2023), indicated strong capability of AI in priority coding, thematic clustering, and pattern recognition. However, it cannot adequately convey the nuanced evaluations, contextual details, or cultural connotations present in political speech.

Building on that, the main objective of this study is to gain a comprehensive and reliable rhetorical strategies by combining a manual analysis and AI supported analysis to the three speeches. It expands the new trend of research of using AI and manual analysis to examine the utilization of Affect, Judgment, Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation in three political speeches associated with *Make America Great Again (MAGA)* campaign. This indicates an increasing belief that AI serves as a helpful tool that enhances human knowledge, rather than replacing it (Curry, Baker, & Brookes, 2024; Lin, 2023).

Table 1: Appraisal Categories with Examples from MAGA Speeches

Appraisal Category	Definition	Examples from MAGA Speeches	Rhetorical Effect
Affect	Expressions of emotion or feeling (positive or negative)	“We are fighting for our families and our future” (positive Affect: pride, hope) “Our country is in serious trouble” (negative Affect: fear, anxiety)	Evokes emotional Responses in the audience; builds solidarity among supporters.
Judgment	Evaluation of people’s behavior or character based on social or moral norms	“The politicians in Washington have failed the American people” (negative Judgment: incompetence) “I will restore integrity and honor to our leadership” (positive Judgment: moral righteousness)	Positions the speaker as morally superior; delegitimizes opponents; constructs an in-group vs. out-group dynamic.

Appreciation	Evaluation of objects, events, or processes for their quality, impact, or significance	“Our economy has immense potential for growth” (positive Appreciation) “The failing system is hurting hardworking Americans” (negative Appreciation)	Frames issues in ways that highlight opportunity or threat; reinforces urgency for action.
Engagement	Ways the speaker acknowledges, negotiates, or challenges alternative viewpoints	“Some people say this is impossible, but we know America can succeed” (monoglossic + disapproval of alternative) “Critics claim we are exaggerating, yet the evidence shows otherwise” (heteroglossic + countering)	Creates an “us vs. them” mentality; manages credibility and positions the audience relative to alternatives.
Graduation	Scaling intensity of evaluation, either in force or focus	“This is the most important election of our lifetime” (force intensifier) “We must act immediately to prevent total disaster” (focus intensifier)	Amplifies urgency and importance; increases rhetorical impact; strengthens persuasion.

Notes:

- Examples are drawn from public MAGA speeches delivered by Donald Trump and key supporters.
- Each category demonstrates how language shapes perception, allegiance, and ideological framing.
- This table can be used in combination with both AI-assisted coding (for frequency and pattern detection) and manual analysis (for context-sensitive interpretation).

3. Methodology

The Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) is the main analytic tool in this study. It is used to examine the evaluative language in political speech. The model includes three subsystems (Affect, Engagement and Graduation) which serve as an organized means for studying how speakers deploy language in order to form attitudes and adjust the degree of intensity assigned by evaluative

words. As previous research has shown, the theory proved a useful tool for examining political language, which operated strategically to shape audience perceptions and establish authority and persuasiveness.

The Attitude subsystem tracks how words make people feel about things through Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. Affect deals with personal or emotions expressions, such as fear, pride, or hope. On the other hand, Judgment examines human behaviors through morality and social acceptability by emphasizing how people or social groups evaluated the expressions used in the speeches. Finally, appreciation measures how events, or processes and points are important, good, or powerful. This subsystem allows for the examination of how speakers construct positive or negative evaluations that are corresponding the values and beliefs of the audience. The Engagement subsystem focuses on the speakers' control over the discourse's dialogic area. It distinguishes between monoglossic where information expresses ideas as authoritatively and heteroglossic where different perspectives are expressed. Furthermore, the Engagement system is divided into two broad categories: contractive engagement, in which speakers restrict dialogic space by limiting alternative viewpoints, and expansive engagement, in which speakers open up the discourse to open up alternative views. Within heteroglossic resources, speakers may explicitly reject opposing positions through Denial, or assert their stance with confidence through Proclaiming, while still acknowledging other voices. This subsystem therefore explains how speakers position their viewpoints, manage ideological opposition, and construct distinctions between in-groups and out-groups in political discourse. Finally, by the Graduation subsystem meanings are amplified and lessened via Force and Focus categories. The use of force emphasizes the importance of a claim by amplifying its significance, whereas the use of focus draws attention to particular details by emphasizing their differences. Speakers can make their threats, promises, or moral imperatives more powerful by using graduation to emphasize them.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis through AI-assisted tools and manual coding.

3.2 Data Selection

The corpus consists of three speeches:

- Donald Trump (2015 Presidential Announcement)
- Charlie Kirk (Turning Point USA Address)
- Lauren Boebert (2024 Victory Speech)

Each speech was selected based on its relevance to MAGA discourse and ideological representation.

3.3 Data Analysis

The unit of analysis is the clause level, allowing precise identification of evaluative language.

3.3.1 AI-Assisted Analysis Procedure

AI tools including ChatGPT-4, ChatGPT-3.5, DeepSeek AI, and Voyant Tools were used. The speeches were processed using structured prompts such as: “Identify instances of Affect,

Judgment, and Appreciation in the following text. Classify each instance and provide polarity and intensity.” Outputs from different tools were compared, and inconsistencies were reviewed manually.

3.3.2 Manual Analysis

Manual analysis was conducted to capture contextual meanings, metaphors, and rhetorical nuances of the speeches that AI tools may overlook. The following table shows the distribution of evaluations across the different categories (Affect, Judgment, Appreciation) for the political speeches of Trump, Kirk, and Boebert:

Speaker	Affect	Judgment	Appreciation
Trump	15	40	10
Kirk	20	25	15
Boebert	10	15	35

This table reveals the differences in the use of evaluative language across the selected speeches. It is obvious that Trump dominating the Judgment category, while Boebert preferring Appreciation language. However, Kirk speech shows balanced in using the evaluative language. This reflects the distinct rhetorical strategies used by each speaker.

1. Donald Trump (2015 Presidential Candidacy Announcement)

Trump has an excessive Cognitiveness in his language, mostly Negative Attitude, particularly Judgment. towards other social schemes and politicians. This was an excellent plan, and two Kentucky. Trump would repeatedly claim that during the 2016 campaign season, standup comics would say. it is all, in essence, awful and he is the only one to remedy the situation. over the world and we have our country seriously in trouble? It is engagement of the sort that is pure monoglossic assertion, simply stating certain claims without acknowledging any opponent to them. Graduation tactics reinforce urgency and ideological focus by using Force and Focus.

Table (2) AI Analysis of Donald Trump speech

Subsystem	Type	Example	Function/Observation
Attitude	Judgment	“we are a laughing stock all over the world”	Critiques political leadership; highlights moral/social failings
Attitude	Judgment	“our country is in serious trouble”	Emphasizes governance failure

Attitude	Appreciation	“broader societal decline”	Highlights social/institutional deterioration
Engagement	Monoglossic	“I will be the greatest jobs president that God ever created”	Presents statements as uncontested truth
Graduation	Force	“tremendous,” “disaster”	Amplifies urgency and emotional impact
Graduation	Focus	“that God ever created”	Heightens ideological intensity

Table (3) Manual Analysis of Donald Trump speech

Subsystem	Type	Example	Manual Observation	Intensity (L/M/H)
Attitude	Judgment	“we are a laughing stock”	Human and leadership critique; emphasizes failure	H
Attitude	Appreciation	“societal decline”	Signals institutional decay	M
Engagement	Monoglossic	“greatest jobs president”	Asserts authority; no counterpoints	H
Graduation	Force	“tremendous,” “disaster”	Urgency & fear amplification	H
Graduation	Focus	“that God ever created”	Maximizes ideological emphasis	H

2. Charlie Kirk (Turning Point USA Address)

Kirk shifts around negative and positive Attitude, presenting conservatives at once as victims and victors. Negative Judgment casts opponents as menacing (“they want to erase our voices”), while positive Judgment counsel’s audience pride (“we believe in American greatness”). Engagement is mostly heteroglossic, in the sense of an acknowledgment of oppositions coupled with their rhetorical dismissal. Graduation captures high emotional temperatures and existential stakes

Table (4) AI Analysis of Charlie Kirk speech

Subsystem	Type	Example	Function/Effect
Attitude	Judgment (Negative)	“they want to erase our voices”	Frames left-wing oppressive
Attitude	Judgment (Positive)	“we believe in American greatness”	Motivates/supports audience
Engagement	Heteroglossic	“They call us extremists... But what is extreme about wanting secure borders?”	Acknowledges dismisses opposition
Graduation	Force	“indoctrinate”	Heightens emotional intensity
Graduation	Focus	“war for the soul of our country”	Emphasizes existential stakes

Table (5) Manual Analysis of Charlie Kirk speech

Subsystem	Type	Example	Manual Observation	Intensity (L/M/H)
Attitude	Judgment (Negative)	“they want to erase our voices”	Oppression framing; motivates vigilance	H
Attitude	Judgment (Positive)	“we believe in American greatness”	Encourages collective pride	M
Engagement	Heteroglossic	“They call us extremists... But what is extreme?”	Recognizes opposition; rhetorical dismissal	M
Graduation	Force	“indoctrinate”	Strong evaluative term	M
Graduation	Focus	“war for the soul”	Raises stakes, metaphorical	H

3. Lauren Boebert (2024 Victory Speech)

Boebert's speech emphasizes a positive attitude that socializes conservative principles, especially

appreciation. Enhancing Judgment's collective identity and using engagement tactics (denial, proclaim/inclusive) to reject opposition and promote group cohesion. Graduation strengthens ideological borders and intensifies celebration.

Table (6) AI Analysis of Lauren Boebert speech

Subsystem	Type	Example	Function/Effect
Attitude	Appreciation	“faith, family, liberty, and freedom are foundational”	Reinforces moral/cultural legitimacy
Attitude	Judgment	“This victory belongs to all of us”	Strengthens collective identity
Engagement	Denial	“We proved the fake news wrong again”	Rejects opposition; consolidates trust
Engagement	Proclaim/Inclusive	“This victory belongs to all of us”	Fosters group solidarity
Graduation	Force	“resounding win”	Amplifies emotional intensity
Graduation	Focus	In-group vs. out-group	Reinforces ideological boundaries

Table (7) Manual Analysis of Lauren Boebert speech

Subsystem	Type	Example	Manual Observation	Intensity (L/M/H)
Attitude	Appreciation	“faith, family, liberty, and freedom are foundational”	Cultural/moral legitimacy	H
Attitude	Judgment	“This victory belongs to all of us”	Inclusive recognition	M
Engagement	Denial	“We proved the fake news wrong”	Rhetorical rejection of opposition	M
Engagement	Proclaim/Inclusive	“This victory belongs to all of us”	Strengthens community	H

Graduation	Force	“resounding win”	Celebration; emotional emphasis	H
Graduation	Focus	In-group vs. out-group	Reinforces ideological boundary	M

4. Comparative Synthesis of Speakers

To provide a side-by-side overview, the following integrated table summarizes Appraisal subsystems, examples, functions, and intensity levels for all three speakers.

Speaker	Subsystem	Type / Example	Function / Observation	Intensity (L/M/H)
Donald Trump	Attitude	Negative Judgment – “we are a laughing stock”	Critiques leadership; emphasizes failure	H
		Appreciation – “broader societal decline”	Signals institutional decay	M
	Engagement	Monoglossic – “greatest jobs president”	Asserts authority; uncontested	H
	Graduation	Force – “tremendous,” “disaster”	Amplifies urgency	H
		Focus – “that God ever created”	Maximizes ideological emphasis	H
Charlie Kirk	Attitude	Negative Judgment – “they want to erase our voices”	Frames opposition as oppressive	H
		Positive Judgment – “we believe in American greatness”	Encourages collective pride	M
	Engagement	Heteroglossic – “They call us extremists... but what is extreme?”	Recognizes opposition; rhetorical dismissal	M

	Graduation	Force – “indoctrinate”	Heightens emotional intensity	M
		Focus – “war for the soul of our country”	Emphasizes existential stakes	H
Lauren Boebert	Attitude	Appreciation – “faith, family, liberty, and freedom are foundational”	Reinforces moral/cultural legitimacy	H
		Judgment – “This victory belongs to all of us”	Inclusive recognition; strengthens identity	M
	Engagement	Denial – “We proved the fake news wrong again”	Rejects opposition	M
		Proclaim/Inclusive – “This victory belongs to all of us”	Strengthens in-group solidarity	H
	Graduation	Force – “resounding win”	Amplifies celebration	H
		Focus – In-group vs. out-group	Reinforces ideological boundary	M

Observations from Comparative Analysis:

- 1- Attitude: Trump stresses negative Judgment, Kirk proclaimed Negative and Positive Judgment, and Boebert has promoted the positive Appreciation.
- 2- Engagement: Trump addresses monoglossically, Kirk replies heteroglossically, and Boebert denies and seeks to create solidarity through inclusive tactics.
- 3- Graduation: Trump, Boebert’s force strong, low for Kirk Trump and Kirk have high focus, Boebert moderate

Overall Rhetorical Strategy: Trump’s strategy is crisis-based authority, Kirk’s is mobilization-oriented balance and Boebert’s style is celebratory in-group consolidation.

- 1- Attitude: Trump sets stress on negative Judgment, Kirk declared Negative and Positive Judgment and Boebert has advanced Positive Appreciation.
- 2- Engagement Trump announced monglossically, Kirk replies heteroglossically and Boebert rejects and aims at establishing solidarity by incorporative measures.

3- Graduation: Trump and Bobet's force is strong, low of Kirk. Focus is high for Trump and Kirk. Moderate for Boebert.

In general Trump adopts crisis-based authority while Kirk and Boebert adopt similar style that focused on getting people work together and encouraged them in a celebratory tone aimed at energizing supporters.

4. Discussion

Applying Appraisal Theory to the three speeches will consider how each speaker wields evaluative language in order to construct ideology, shape perception and mobilize listeners. The combination of AI-assisted and manual analysis yields quantitative as well as qualitative results. Donald Trump monopolizes the discipline of negative Attitude and monoglossic Engagement, and plays stylishly with his superlative and lexical rampage message. The manner in which fear and crisis as a cohesive frame results in leadership. a concentration of power is obviously observed in such lines as our country is really in trouble and. "that God ever crated." The manual coding takes into consideration the contextual and moral overtones, adding depth to the AI-read intensity.

The application of the Appraisal Theory to the three speeches will take into account the employing of evaluative by each speaker so as to build ideology, define perception and mobilize the listeners. The combination of quantitative and qualitative results is produced by the analysis with AI-assistance and manual analysis. Donald Trump monopolizes the art of negative Attitude and monoglossic Engagement, and fashionably plays with his superlative and lexical stylish message. The way in which terror and emergency are framed cohesively, emphasizing that the country is really in trouble and invoking moral or even divine significance that a leadership will be achieved. The manual coding takes considering the contextual and moral undertones, which contribute to the intensity of AI-read.

Charlie Kicks decides to up, downs of Attitude in order to make Victimhood and empower occur simultaneously. His call-off and heteroglossic ENGAGEMENT, as one example, is, They call us. extremists...But what is extreme in the desire to have secure borders? it does admit opposition, and overlooks it. rhetorically. The metaphors make graduation more significant (war for the soul of our country, any and all those combats which that manual dissection would recognize as affective, ethical. important and could be more than AI polarity scoring.

Lauren Boebert emphasizes positive Attitude and inclusive Engagement. Phrases like "faith, family, liberty and freedom are foundational" and "This victory belongs to all of us who love freedom" cement group solidarity. Amplifiers of graduation, like "resounding win", contribute to the celebration. Through a manual analysis it is revealed how these evaluative devices serve as social practices realizing identity-formation and moral legitimation.

Comparatively, analysis corroborated by AI attests of main patterns across speakers to the detection of polarity, intensity and engagement type. But manual coding improves understanding by exposing the metaphorical nuance, rhetorical subtlety and sociopolitical context that are essential for comprehending persuasive political discourse.

Conclusion

To sum up, the use of AI and the evaluation of appraisal show how Trump, Kirk, and Boebert. possibly, instrumentally, as in Attitude, Engagement and Graduation change the perceptions among the audience, support group membership, ideology, and support group membership. AI is capable of delivering quick measurable data; manual coding offers elements of nuanced meaning. All these strategies combined provide a holistic paradigm on critical discourse analysis that explains the use of language of conservatism to create. social and ideological facts.

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