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**THE IDEOLOGEME AS A BASIC NUCLEAR STRUCTURE
OF POLITICAL MANIPULATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF AMERICAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

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This article argues that the ideologeme, a recurrent, evaluatively charged discursive unit, is the irreducible atomic structure from which all propaganda and disinformation are constituted. Every propaganda narrative can be decomposed into ideologemes; no political manipulation exists that is not ultimately composed of them. The article advances this claim through three moves: an ontological argument showing that the minimal conditions of propaganda are fulfilled precisely by the ideologeme's defining properties; a formal seven-criterion operational definition that distinguishes the ideologeme from adjacent concepts; and balanced comparative discourse analysis across Democratic and Republican media and rhetoric in the United States. The analysis introduces two conceptual extensions debated in the current literature: the "isotope" problem (identical words bearing opposite charges in different ideological camps) and the question of visual ideologemes (non-verbal symbols that perform identical functions without any linguistic unit). The article concludes with an inference about the underlying goals of each party as revealed by their characteristic ideologeme portfolios. Cases examined include "Fox News" and "MSNBC" prime-time programming, presidential and candidate rhetoric from Trump, Obama, Biden, and Clinton, and social media amplification patterns.

Keywords: ideologeme, propaganda, disinformation, critical discourse analysis, political framing, American media, comparative political communication, bipartisan discourse analysis.

ИДЕОЛОГЕМА КАК БАЗОВАЯ СТРУКТУРА ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ МАНИПУЛЯЦИИ: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ АМЕРИКАНСКОГО ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО ДИСКУРСА

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В статье утверждается, что идеологема – рекуррентная, оценочно нагруженная дискурсивная единица – является неделимой атомарной структурой, из которой строятся всякая пропаганда и дезинформация. Каждый пропагандистский нарратив разложим на идеологемы; не существует политической манипуляции, которая, в конечном счете, не была бы составлена из них. Статья обосновывает этот тезис тремя ходами: онтологическим аргументом, показывающим, что минимальные условия пропаганды реализуются именно свойствами идеологемы; формальным операциональным определением, отличающим идеологему от смежных понятий; и сравнительным дискурс-анализом демократических и республиканских медиа и риторики в США. В работе вводятся два концептуальных расширения, обсуждаемых в современной литературе: проблема «изотопа» (одни и те же слова несут противоположный заряд в разных идеологических лагерях) и вопрос о визуальных идеологемах (невербальные символы, выполняющие те же функции без какой-либо языковой единицы). Статья завершается выводом о стратегических целях каждой партии, проявляющихся в характерных портфелях идеологем. Исследуются прайм-таймовые передачи «Fox News» и «MSNBC», риторика президентов и кандидатов – Трампа, Обамы, Байдена и Клинтон, а также паттерны усиления в социальных сетях.

Ключевые слова: идеологема, пропаганда, дезинформация, критический дискурс-анализ, политическое фреймирование, американские медиа, сравнительная политическая коммуникация, двухпартийный дискурс-анализ.

Introduction: what is missing in propaganda studies?

Propaganda is ubiquitous; its mechanism is poorly understood. Scholars have documented the institutions that produce it [q.v.: 5; 15; 11], the psychological

processes through which it achieves its effects [22] and the digital infrastructures through which it circulates [4]. What has not been adequately theorised is the irreducible unit from which all propaganda is built: the elementary linguistic particle that, through its evaluative charge, institutional repetition, and suppression of alternative meanings, performs the fundamental work of ideological persuasion at the level of discourse itself.

This paper proposes that unit – the ideologeme. The argument is not merely that it is a useful analytical category, but that it is the foundational, atomic structure of propaganda. Propaganda does not use ideologemes the way a carpenter uses tools; propaganda is composed of ideologemes the way matter is composed of atoms. A political narrative is an arrangement of ideologemes. A disinformation campaign is a strategy for inserting ideologemes into a target epistemic environment. To understand propaganda at the level of mechanism is to understand the ideologeme.

Alongside the core theoretical claim, this article confronts two unresolved problems. First, the isotope problem: the same word (“democracy”, “freedom”, “patriot”) can function as an ideologeme simultaneously in opposing camps, with the same form carrying opposite or incommensurable evaluative charges. This suggests the ideologeme is not fully defined at the level of the lexical unit but requires a specification of the evaluative schema in which it operates. Second, the visual ideologeme problem: a wordless poster, a red cap, a raised fist, or a flag draped in a certain way can perform every function attributed to verbal ideologemes – legitimization, identity activation, alternative suppression – without containing any linguistic unit. If the ideologeme is defined purely linguistically, these phenomena escape the theory; if it is extended to cover them, the definition requires reformulation.

The article addresses both problems and concludes with a novel inference: by reading the characteristic ideologeme portfolios of each major American political tradition, it is possible to reconstruct, with reasonable confidence, the underlying strategic goals that each tradition pursues through discourse.

State of the art: the constitutive gap

The academic study of propaganda emerged from the observation that mass persuasion had been deployed as a systematic instrument of state policy in the First World War. H.D. Lasswell's (1927) foundational analysis identified the social functions of wartime propaganda [16]. E.S. Herman and N. Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model specified the structural conditions under which news media systematically serve elite interests [11, p. 111-113]. Both traditions leave underspecified the discursive unit through which manufactured consent is achieved in any particular instance.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) made an essential advance by establishing that ideology is constituted in and through specific linguistic choices [q.v.: 6; 7; 24; 10; 29]. Framing theory demonstrated that media construct the meaning of events through selective emphasis and definitional choices [9, p. 52; 19, p. 176]. Cognitive linguistics showed that political concepts activate unconscious evaluative schemas [14]. These approaches made crucial contributions but did not converge on a single, operationally precise concept for the key linguistic unit through which ideological work is performed. Keywords [28], conceptual metaphors [14; 21], frames [9, p. 52] and semantic prosodies [17, p. 22] are related concepts, each capturing one dimension of the phenomenon.

The ideologeme integrates and supersedes these concepts by specifying the unit that performs all these functions simultaneously through its recurrence, evaluative charge, institutional embedding, and alternative-suppressing collocational behaviour. It names the constitutive gap that prior scholarship has left open.

To establish the ideologeme as propaganda's foundational unit, it is necessary first to specify what any propaganda must do at a minimum. Drawing on J. Ellul [8], T.A. van Dijk [24], G.S. Jowett and V. O'Donnell [12, p. 7] four minimal conditions can be specified. Propaganda must:

- 1) Construct a desired interpretation of events as natural or necessary rather than as one among others;

2) Attach that interpretation to an evaluative charge triggering identity-based responses;

3) Suppress or disqualify alternative interpretations without engaging them on evidentiary grounds;

4) Achieve these effects through language appearing unremarkable language that users adopt without awareness of its evaluative loading.

These four conditions describe precisely the functions of the ideologeme. The ideologeme is not a component that propaganda may or may not employ; it is the discursive form through which the minimal conditions of propaganda are realised. Propaganda without ideologemes is not merely less effective propaganda, it is not propaganda at all.

In chemistry the atom is the smallest unit of matter that retains the chemical properties of an element. The analogy is instructive and precise. The ideologeme is the smallest discursive unit that retains the essential properties of propaganda: evaluative charge, alternative-suppression, identity activation and naturalisation through repetition. A single additional word on either side a qualification, a contextualising clause, an explicit statement of alternatives, may remove these properties entirely. “Invasion” is an ideologeme when applied to asylum seekers; ‘large-scale irregular migration that some describe as an invasion’ is not, because the alternative framing is retained explicitly.

Adjacent concepts are reducible to the ideologeme or occupy a different analytical level. A narrative is a sequence of ideologemes arranged in temporal or causal order. A frame is a compound ideologeme elevated to the level of organising principle for a text. A slogan is an institutionally circulated ideologeme or tight cluster. A keyword becomes an ideologeme when one evaluative loading achieves institutional dominance. The ideologeme is the foundational unit: narratives, frames, slogans, and dominant keyword readings are all constituted by, and reducible to, arrangements of ideologemes.

Ideologeme: operational definition

The concept of the ideologeme has a complex genealogy. M.M. Bakhtin [2, p. 333] introduced it to designate the semantic bearer of social ideology in novelistic discourse, the point at which a word carries the evaluative accent of a social group. J. Kristeva developed a related concept in the semiotics of intertextuality [14]. G. Guseinov offered the most operationally precise political application, studying ideologemes as established formulas of political power in post-Soviet Russian public discourse [q.v.: 1]. The present operationalisation extends Guseinov's framework to comparative cross-national application.

An ideologeme is defined as a linguistic or discursive unit (a word, phrase, or formulaic expression) that satisfies at least three of the following seven criteria:

Legitimizing function: it serves to legitimate or delegitimize the actions, identity, or claims of a political actor [3; 27, p. 215-216].

Frequency and institutional embedding: it occurs with above-average frequency in institutional political discourse and is amplified through media repetition.

Identity or sacral charge: it activates a group identity frame, an in-group/out-group distinction, or a quasi-sacral evaluative schema.

Persuasive intent: in the communicator's design, it functions to induce a particular attitude, evaluation, or disposition rather than to convey neutral information.

Alternative-suppressing collocational pattern: it appears in stable collocational combinations that systematically foreclose synonymous alternatives carrying different evaluative connotations.

Semantic vagueness: its referential boundaries are deliberately indeterminate, enabling broad application while resisting factual verification. The vagueness is functional, not accidental: each audience member supplies content from their own frame while sharing the evaluative structure with all others.

Contest between groups: different ideological camps compete for the right to define the term, each loading it with opposite or incommensurable content. This is

what distinguishes ideologemes from mere propaganda slogans: slogans are deployed unidirectionally; ideologemes are fought over.

The threshold of three criteria preserves empirical tractability while acknowledging that no single criterion is either necessary or sufficient. Ideologemes are empirically identifiable through corpus-linguistic methods: frequency analysis, keyword-in-context (KWIC) analysis, collocation statistics, and diachronic tracking.

The addition of criteria 6 (semantic vagueness) and 7 (contentedness) raises a theoretical difficulty that can be called the isotope problem. In chemistry, isotopes are atoms of the same element—identical in their chemical properties—but differing in nuclear mass and therefore in their behaviour under certain conditions. The ideologeme presents an analogous phenomenon: “democracy”, “freedom”, “patriot”, and “extremist” function as ideologemes in both Republican and Democratic discourse simultaneously, with formally identical units bearing opposite or incommensurable evaluative charges depending on which camp deploys them.

This means the ideologeme cannot be fully defined at the level of the lexical unit alone. It requires specification of the evaluative schema in which it operates. The same word is not the same ideologeme across opposing camps: “democracy under threat” in Democratic discourse activates a frame in which Republican electoral challenges threaten democratic norms; in Republican discourse the same phrase activates a frame in which Democratic administrative overreach and media censorship are the threat. The form is identical; the compound ideologemic structure in which it operates is not.

The isotope metaphor is theoretically productive because it preserves the insight that the same formal unit can be deployed across the spectrum while acknowledging that the ideological work it performs is frame-dependent. It also explains why ideologeme identification cannot proceed by lexical inventory alone: the analyst must specify the collocational and institutional context in which the unit operates.

A crucial feature of advanced propaganda systems is the compound ideologemic structure: a network of mutually reinforcing ideologemes in which each

unit amplifies the evaluative charge of the others, creating a closed alternative epistemic reality that pre-emptively assimilates counter-evidence as further confirmation of the frame [23]. The compound structure explains why individual fact-checking of disinformation claims has limited effectiveness: addressing a single ideologeme does not dismantle the compound of which it is a part.

Ideologemes across the American politic

The following analysis examines ideologemic production across both Republican and Democratic media and political rhetoric, organised by functional domain. The comparative design demonstrates the structural universality of ideologemic production while illuminating the specific functional configurations through which ideologemes are deployed by different political actors. The analysis draws on “Fox News” and “MSNBC” prime-time programming, presidential and candidate rhetoric from Trump, Obama, Biden and Clinton, and social media amplification patterns. Sources are not selected to suggest symmetry of effect – frequency, institutional coordination, and epistemic consequences differ significantly, but to demonstrate the shared structural mechanism.

Domain 1: Construction of existential threat

Republican cases. The application of the term ‘invasion’ to irregular migration constitutes a paradigmatic threat ideologeme. In standard legal and geopolitical discourse, ‘invasion’ denotes a military incursion by a foreign state actor, triggering constitutional provisions and international legal consequences. Its application to asylum seekers constitutes a semantic displacement: the phenomenon is unchanged, but the interpretive frame is radically altered. A Media Matters analysis [20] identified “invasion” or “invaders” applied to migrants in over 400 Tucker Carlson Tonight episodes, consistently collocated with “our country”, “replace”, “deliberate”, and “they are doing this on purpose” fulfilling criteria 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Tucker Carlson: “*This is an invasion of the United States. And our leaders are welcoming it. They are encouraging it. They are facilitating it. Why would they do that?*”(Fox News, 15 September 2021).

The rhetorical question performs a secondary ideologemic function: it presupposes a deliberate plan while maintaining plausible deniability about which plan is implied. The audience supplies the answer, thereby internalising the frame as their own conclusion rather than receiving it as an assertion.

Democratic cases. The phrase “existential threat to democracy” deployed with high frequency by Democratic politicians and MSNBC commentators from 2016 onwards, constitutes a threat ideologeme fulfilling all seven criteria. It legitimates extraordinary political measures; appears with very high frequency in MSNBC prime-time and Democratic fundraising communications; activates a frame in which Democrats are defenders of democratic civilisation; is designed to induce maximum political urgency; forecloses the framing of opposition as legitimate disagreement; is semantically vague (which specific institution or norm is threatened?), and is intensely contested, with Republicans deploying the same phrase about Democratic overreach.

President Joe Biden: *“I want to be clear: democracy is literally on the ballot this November”* (campaign address, October 2022); *“What we’re facing is not a normal political moment. This is a fight for the soul of America”* (campaign launch address, April 2019).

“Fight for the soul of America” is a sacralisation-threat compound ideologeme: it frames the political contest as a struggle for the nation’s transcendent essence, investing Democratic objectives with quasi-sacral urgency while implicitly positioning the opponent as soul-less or corrupting. This structure satisfies all seven criteria and is functionally isomorphic with the threat ideologemes of Republican discourse, despite its very different referential content.

Domain 2: dehumanisation and delegitimation of opponents

Republican cases. At a Veterans’ Day address on 11 November 2023, Trump stated: *“We pledge to you that we will root out the communists, Marxists, fascists, and the radical left thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country”*.

The lexeme “vermin” is not merely an insult; it is a dehumanisation ideologeme with specific discursive consequences [13, p. 88]. It satisfies criteria 1, 3,

4 and 5 it delegitimises political opponents by placing them outside the civic community; activates an identity frame contrasting “true Americans” with parasitic others; induces moral disengagement from the targets; and forecloses the alternative framing of opponents as fellow citizens with different preferences. The listing of mutually incompatible ideological labels (communists, Marxists, fascists) in one breath illustrates criterion 6: semantic vagueness deployed as deliberate indeterminacy, enabling the label to be applied to any target.

Democratic cases. The term “deplorables” Hillary Clinton’s characterisation at a fundraiser on 9 September 2016 of half of Trump’s supporters constitutes a delegitimation ideologue that, unusually, was immediately recognised and contested as such, and subsequently appropriated by Trump supporters as a positive identity marker: “*You could put half of Trump’s supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. They’re racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic you name it*”.

“Deplorables” satisfies all seven criteria. Its rapid appropriation as a self-designation by Trump supporters demonstrates a crucial feature of ideologues under conditions of democratic contestation: they can be “flipped” with the evaluative charge reversed by the target community (criterion 7 in operation). The term “MAGA extremists” deployed by Biden in his Philadelphia speech of 1 September 2022 constitutes a delegitimation ideologue directed at the Trump-aligned faction, fulfilling criteria 1, 2, 4 and 5.

President Joe Biden: “*Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans represent an extremism that threatens the very foundations of our republic*” (Independence Hall, Philadelphia, 1 September 2022).

Domain 3: Sacralisation of national identity and political mission

Republican cases. “Make America great again” is an ideologue of sacral recovery: it presupposes a lost greatness, implies current degradation caused by identifiable agents, and positions the speaker as the instrument of restoration. Its evaluative structure does not depend on specifying what “great” means or when “again” refers to the vagueness is functional (criterion 6), allowing each hearer to

supply content from their own nostalgic frame while sharing the evaluative structure with all others. It satisfies all seven criteria and constitutes the primary organising ideologeme of the Trump political movement.

Democratic cases. Obama's "Yes we can" the organising ideologeme of his 2008 campaign is a sacralisation ideologeme of collective agency. Its structural properties are instructive: the 'we' constructs an inclusive collective identity; the "can" asserts transformative capacity as a presupposition and "yes" performs affirmation as a speech act. The semantic vagueness (criterion 6) is maximal "can" without an object allows every hearer to project their own aspiration onto the formula.

Barack Obama: *"It was a creed written into the founding documents that declared the destiny of a nation: Yes We Can"* (New Hampshire, 8 January 2008).

The phrase "arc of the moral universe" repeatedly invoked by Obama in presidential addresses functions as a sacralisation ideologeme of historical teleology, positioning Democratic objectives as aligned with the inevitable trajectory of moral progress and thereby investing them with quasi-sacral authority that transcends ordinary political contestation.

Domain 4: Epistemic suppression

Republican cases. "Fake news" appropriated by Trump to describe critical coverage by mainstream media constitutes an ideologeme of epistemic delegitimation. A CNN tally identified over 2,000 uses in Trump's public communications between January 2017 and December 2020, consistently collocated with specific outlets ("fake news CNN", "failing New York Times"), forming a compound ideologemic network that associated the evaluative charge with specific institutional targets and constructed the speaker as the sole reliable narrator. "Stolen election" systematically advanced from 7 November 2020 illustrates the self-sealing character of compound ideologemic structures: counter-evidence is assimilated as further proof of the conspiracy, making the ideologeme empirically irrefutable within its own frame.

Donald Trump: “*The Deep State and the Left, and their allies in the Fake News Media...*” (Twitter, 21 November 2018).

Democratic cases. Democratic and progressive discourse produces epistemic ideologemes performing equivalent structural functions [18, p. 88; 25, p. 1146; 26, p. 92-93]. The application of “science denier” or “climate denier” to opponents of specific policy positions constitutes an epistemic delegitimation ideologeme that forecloses policy disagreement by categorising it as intellectual pathology. The term “both-sidesism” directed at mainstream journalism’s practice of presenting opposing views functions as an epistemic ideologeme that delegitimizes the standard journalistic norm of balance by reframing it as moral equivalence between truth and falsehood. This structure is functionally isomorphic with the Republican “fake news” ideologeme, though its institutional embedding and societal consequences differ.

Structural universality and functional asymmetries

The comparative analysis demonstrates two propositions simultaneously. First, structural universality: ideologemic production is a feature of political communication across the partisan spectrum. Republican and Democratic media alike employ ideologemes of threat construction, dehumanisation, sacralisation, and epistemic suppression. The structural mechanism is identical across all cases.

Second, functional differentiation: while the structure is universal, specific functional configurations, institutional contexts, and societal consequences differ significantly. Several asymmetries require acknowledgement. Frequency and saturation differ: research consistently documents higher frequencies of ideologemic production particularly of compound ideologemic structures in right-wing media ecosystems [4, p. 333]. Institutional coordination differs: Republican ideologemes in the Trump era were systematically coordinated across “Fox News”, “Breitbart”, “Twitter” and campaign communications in ways that constitute a deliberately engineered compound ideologemic architecture; Democratic ideologemes were more independently produced. Epistemic consequences differ: Republican epistemic ideologemes targeted the foundational mechanisms of factual adjudication courts, electoral administration and independent journalism. Democratic epistemic

ideologemes targeted specific claims or actors rather than institutional epistemics as such.

These asymmetries are empirically important. They do not, however, undermine the theoretical argument for the ideologeme as propaganda's foundational unit. The chemistry of propaganda is the same; the dose, delivery, and target vary.

What ideologemes reveal

One of the most productive and largely unexploited applications of ideologeme analysis is the inference it permits about the underlying strategic goals of a political actor. Actors do not typically announce their goals directly; they embed them in the evaluative structures of their characteristic discursive units. Reading those structures systematically allows an inference from the surface of political language to the strategic logic operating beneath it. The comparative corpus makes this inference possible for both major American political traditions.

Republicans: the logic of purification

The characteristic Republican ideologeme portfolio, as evidenced across the corpus, is organised around what can be called a purification logic. The organising triad is:

- (a) a once-great nation has been corrupted or invaded by internal and external enemies;
- (b) those enemies are not legitimate political opponents but existential threats to national survival (vermin, invaders, enemies from within);
- (c) the appropriate response is not negotiation but expulsion or elimination ('root out', 'drain the swamp', 'lock her up').

The sacralisation ideologemes ('Make America Great Again', 'America First') function as the positive pole of this structure: they specify what is to be recovered and who is authorised to recover it. The dehumanisation ideologemes specify who must be expelled. The epistemic ideologemes ('fake news', 'deep state', 'stolen election') serve a third function specific to this logic: they pre-emptively discredit any institutional check on the purification programme by positioning it as complicit in the

corruption. The entire compound structure is self-sealing: every counter-argument becomes evidence of how deep the corruption goes.

The strategic goal that this portfolio implies is not primarily policy-oriented. It is about the reconstitution of a collective identity from which a perceived contaminating element has been removed. This is why fact-checking individual ideologemes has limited effect: the goal is not truth but purification, and the ideologemes serve that goal regardless of their factual accuracy.

Democrats: the logic of civilisational defence

The characteristic Democratic ideologeme portfolio is organised around a civilisational defence logic. The organising structure is:

- 1) Democratic institutions and values represent a universal achievement under threat from authoritarian tendencies;
- 2) The current political moment is therefore exceptional and existential, not merely a normal policy disagreement;
- 3) Democratic political objectives are not partisan interests but the defence of democracy, science, and moral progress itself.

The sacralisation ideologemes (“soul of America”, “arc of the moral universe”, “Yes we can”) establish the transcendent value to be defended. The threat ideologemes (“existential threat to democracy”, “MAGA extremists”, “authoritarian playbook”) specify the threat. The epistemic ideologemes (“misinformation”, “science denial”, “both-sidesism”) serve a structurally distinct function from their Republican counterparts: rather than attacking institutions, they invoke institutional authority (science, courts, journalism) as arbiters of legitimate knowledge.

The strategic goal this portfolio implies is institutional and normative: to defend the existing order of democratic norms, epistemic standards, and liberal institutions against disruption. This explains why Democratic ideologemes tend to be more explicitly defensive in structure, they frame the party as guardian rather than transformer and why they more frequently invoke existing authorities (founding documents, scientific consensus, precedent) as sources of legitimacy.

The structural difference

The deepest asymmetry revealed by ideologeme analysis is not quantitative but structural. Republican ideologemes under Trump systematically target the institutions of factual adjudication themselves courts, electoral administration, independent media as complicit in the corruption to be purged. Democratic ideologemes invoke those same institutions as arbiters. The former strategy, if successful, dissolves the shared epistemic infrastructure on which democratic deliberation depends. The latter presupposes and reinforces it. This is a difference not merely of political content but of the relationship to democratic epistemics and it is readable directly from the characteristic ideologeme portfolios of each tradition, without any prior normative commitment.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the ideologeme is the irreducible foundational unit from which all propaganda is constituted. The argument proceeded through an ontological demonstration that the minimal conditions of any propaganda are fulfilled precisely by the ideologeme's defining properties; a differential analysis showing that adjacent concepts are all reducible to or constituted by ideologemes; and empirical demonstration through balanced comparative discourse analysis showing that ideologemic production is structurally universal across the American partisan spectrum.

Two conceptual extensions were introduced. The isotope problem that identical words bear opposite charges in different ideological camps requires that ideologeme identification specify the evaluative schema and collocational environment in which the unit operates, not merely the lexical form. The visual ideologeme problem that wordless symbols perform every function attributed to verbal ideologemes points toward a deeper theoretical reformulation in which the pre-semiotic frame-node is the true foundational unit, of which verbal and visual ideologemes are both surface realisations.

The most practically consequential contribution is the inference about strategic goals. Republican discourse, read through its characteristic ideologeme portfolio,

reveals purification logic: expel the internal enemy, restore the lost greatness, destroy the institutions that would obstruct the purification. Democratic discourse reveals civilizational defence logic: protect democratic institutions, claim epistemic authority through science and norms, frame the political moment as existential to maximise mobilisation. These are not symmetrical strategies, and the asymmetry particularly in their different relationships to institutional epistemics is legible directly from the ideologeme portfolios, without prior normative commitment.

The stakes of the argument extend beyond academic debate. A political culture in which ideologemes are recognised named, identified, traced to their strategic origins and subjected to critical scrutiny is a political culture with greater resources for self-governance against manipulation. What propaganda most requires is that its atomic structure remain invisible. Naming it is, therefore, not only a theoretical achievement but a democratic one.

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