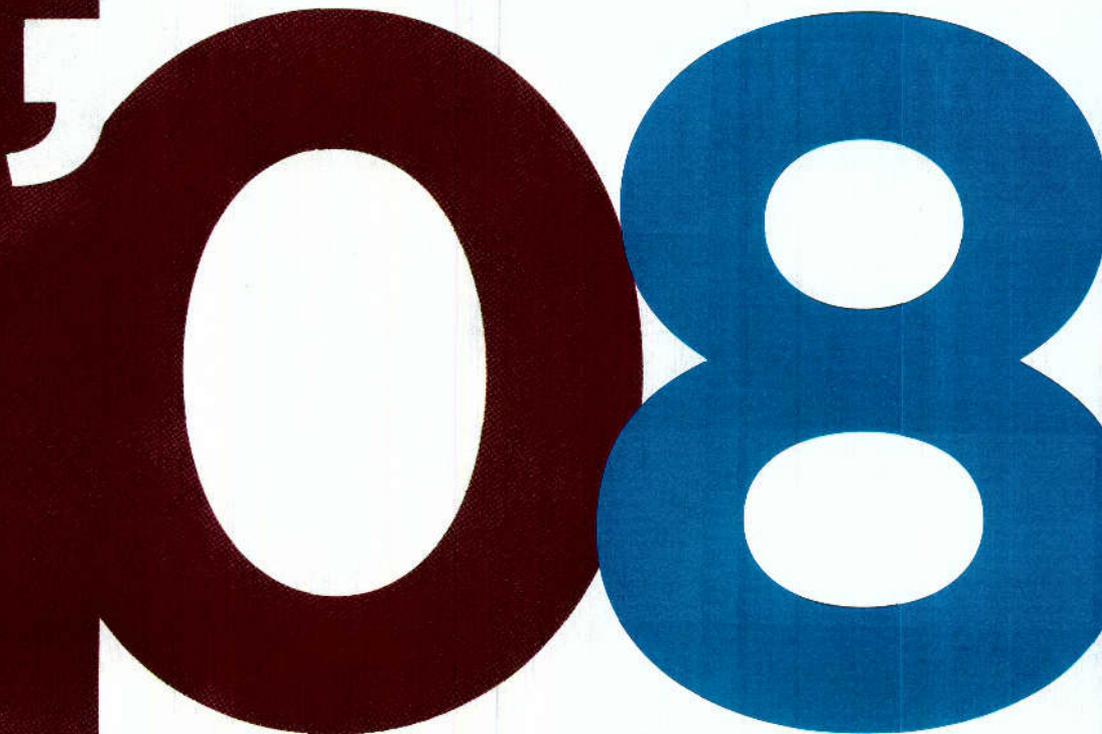


★ ★ ★ DECISION ★ ★ ★



## READING BETWEEN THE LINES

WORD FOR WORD, THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES REVEALED

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEVE BRODNER

YOU CAN LEARN A LOT ABOUT A POLITICIAN BY HOW THEY HOLD THEIR HANDS—OR how much they talk about the future, or their feelings, or themselves. We live in an age of relentless focus-grouping, but a candidate's unvarnished attitudes and values still peek through in every microexpression and personal pronoun. Content analysis can ferret out aspects of a person's political agenda and personality based on word and gesture alone. *Psychology Today* asked a range of experts to scrutinize the 2008 front-runners. They uncovered a great deal, from the messages candidates want voters to know—Giuliani won't let you forget that he's a crisis manager, Hillary wants to seem middle-American—to the traits they'd rather hide: a negative worldview, a meandering message, an inability to connect with voters emotionally.

Content analysis has real predictive power. Optimism, for instance, is assessed by examining how people attribute cause and effect in the world, or by tallying their use of positive and negative words. In the 20th century, the most optimistic candidate won 18 out of the first 22 presidential elections, says Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania. Recent elections have been trickier, but in 1996, the sunniest candidate by far was Bill Clinton. This time around, says Seligman, it's Hillary Clinton who emerges as the most optimistic candidate. (Giuliani is the least.) Hillary also exhibits the emotional tone voters tend to like the most. While it's still far too early to predict which of the candidates will win, it's high time we pegged their style. —Jay Dixit

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**FOR A COMPLETE  
EXPLANATION OF  
THE CATEGORIES,  
SEE "HOW THEY  
DID IT" ON P. 79**  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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## Barack Obama

**RHETORICAL STYLE:** Obama uses more familiar words than any other candidate. He roams the political landscape and talks about a lot of different things rather than staying on a very narrow track. He's not picking one particular argument, or one particular language pattern. It could be that he's seeking, trying to define himself, and hasn't quite gotten there yet.

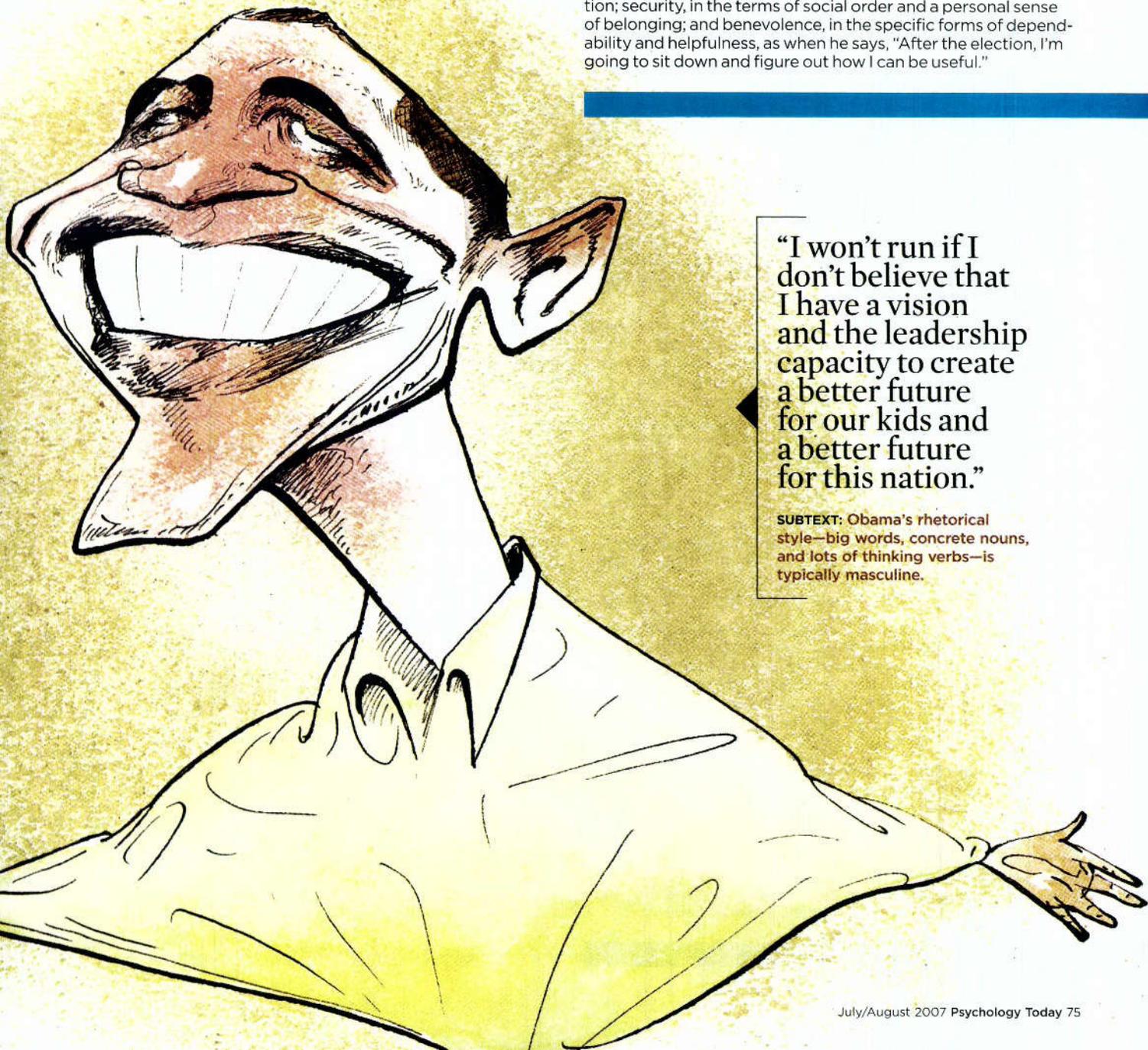
**BODY LANGUAGE:** Obama uses a very extensive range of readily readable gestures that make him easy to watch. "He keeps himself physically open and rarely shows any tension in his hands, indicating flexibility," says body language expert Allan Pease. And when Obama stops to talk to someone in a crowd, he focuses on them with all the telltale signs of charisma, says body language expert Patti Ann Wood. "Like Bill Clinton, he gives them significant extended eye contact, leans forward, and stays in their intimate zone of space," says Wood.

**SELF-DEFINITION:** The outsider Democrat. "I don't expect that simply because I can move people in speeches that automatically qualifies me...I have to earn this job." He also uses the word "humble" more than the others. Obama is acknowledging that everyone thinks he's a great speechmaker, but that the downside is that people may worry that's all he can do.

**EMOTIONAL TONE:** Obama's language style signals machismo: He uses big words, concrete nouns, and language that focuses on the past and future more than on the present moment. Emotionally, he's neither too positive nor too negative.

**POLITICAL VALUES:** Obama does not show a young challenger's audacity so much as a fortunate man's caution. In fact, Obama's nonideological keyword profile is close to Clinton's.

**UNIVERSAL VALUES:** Obama values universalism, in the form of social justice; achievement, in the forms of success and ambition; security, in the terms of social order and a personal sense of belonging; and benevolence, in the specific forms of dependability and helpfulness, as when he says, "After the election, I'm going to sit down and figure out how I can be useful."

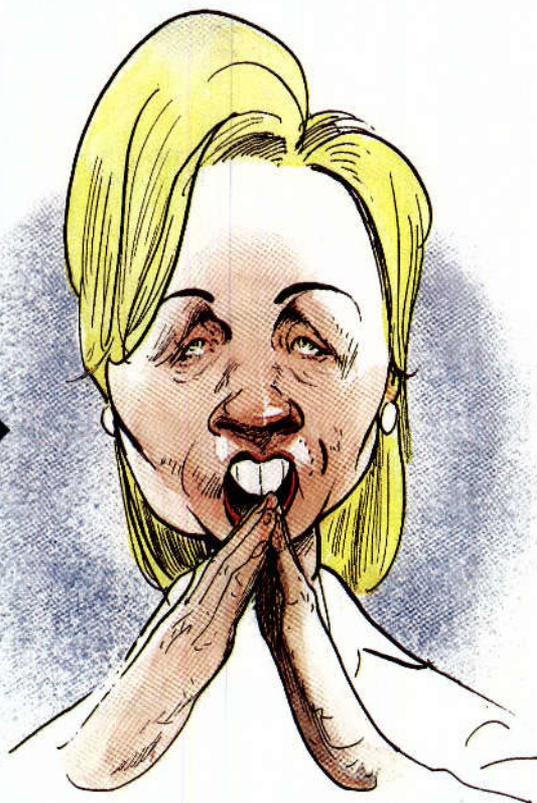


"I won't run if I don't believe that I have a vision and the leadership capacity to create a better future for our kids and a better future for this nation."

**SUBTEXT:** Obama's rhetorical style—big words, concrete nouns, and lots of thinking verbs—is typically masculine.

“I have loved the opportunity the last seven years in New York for people to get to know me.”

**SUBTEXT:** Hillary's “love” fest makes her the most optimistic candidate.



★★★★★

## Hillary Clinton

**RHETORICAL STYLE:** Rhetorically as politically, Hillary Clinton is middle of the road. She's in the middle of the group on almost all 40 variables of language style—she employs a cautious, not very distinctive style. In general, she's very low profile, rarely referring to herself and avoiding overstatements.

**BODY LANGUAGE:** Clinton has been practicing the Christlike “double opened palms” position for years, presumably in an effort to appear open and sincere, but it still looks forced, says Pease. “She frequently uses finger-pointing, which is aggressive, and karate chop type movements, which sometimes contradict what she says,” he explains. Clinton also uses the “steeping” gesture, in which the fingertips touch—unusual for women. “This gesture is often used by people of power,” says body language expert Janine Driver. “Donald Trump does it on *The Apprentice* all the time—as does Mr. Burns on *The Simpsons*.”

**SELF-DEFINITION:** Identification with middle-class values. Clinton talks often about the middle-class family in the middle of America. She's not identifying herself as a first lady or as a senator. Rather, she's telegraphing back to her roots as a child.

**EMOTIONAL TONE:** Clinton's linguistic style stands out as the most positive and personal of all the candidates. While positive-emotion words flow from her lips at a high rate, she rarely utters anything negative. Her style is also “immediate,” meaning she appeals to people in the here and now, which helps her connect with voters. She uses simple language, short words, and present-tense verbs.

**POLITICAL VALUES:** Clinton's speeches reveal the cautious strategy of a party's frontrunner. She makes scant reference to freedom, order, or equality. The nonideological tint of her speeches thwarts attempts to paint her as an extreme liberal.

**UNIVERSAL VALUES:** Her value hierarchy is similar to that of other Democrats—she values universalism and social justice. She also stresses protecting the environment more than the others do, and shows respect for parents and elders.

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## John Edwards

**RHETORICAL STYLE:** Edwards is off the charts on realism (concrete language), insistence (the tendency to stay on script), and certainty. It's, “We can do these specific things together, and we can do it with great assurance.” It's a good style for a Democrat, because it's a language of the people, feel-good kind of style.

**BODY LANGUAGE:** Passionate and animated, Edwards' gestures mirror and match his message. But he's also a “measurer”—he uses the distance between his hands to show the relevance of things to one another. “This creates interesting contradictions,” says Pease, “as when he talks about the large amount he gave to a charity while holding his hands 12 inches apart and then speaks about how frugal he was with campaign funds while holding his hands three feet apart.” Edwards seems to be at his most animated when he's on his planned talking points.

**SELF-DEFINITION:** “I want this to be a country where everyone has the same chances I had...where you can go from having nothing to having everything.” This encapsulates his focus on poverty and the fact that he grew up poor in a small town in the South. His life was transformed by America, and he wants to transform others' lives.

**EMOTIONAL TONE:** Edwards, who used the most positive words in the last election, is using the fewest in this one. His high use of first-person plural pronouns (*we, us, our*) and concrete nouns (*world, country, plate*) are signs of a masculine speech style.

“If we actually want to change this country and we want to move America the way it needs to move, we're going to have to do it, all of us, together. Instead of staying home and complaining, we're asking people to help.”

**SUBTEXT:** John Edwards has the highest use of “commonality”—kumbaya, pulling together, “we can do it” type language.



**POLITICAL VALUES:** Compared to those of his fellow Democrats, Edwards' speeches are boldly ideological. He uses equality keywords five times more frequently than any other candidate. His two signature talking points are health care and, especially, poverty, which he mentions ten times more than all the other candidates combined.

**UNIVERSAL VALUES:** Edwards places an emphasis on his public image, as when he says, "I didn't run the war." He also places more emphasis on spirituality than do the other candidates, making comments like, "I think I as a Christian—and we as a nation—have a moral responsibility to do something about this."



“Where I stand on abortion is, I oppose it. I don't like it. I hate it. I think abortion is something that, as a personal matter, I would advise somebody against...”

**SUBTEXT:** Giuliani wins the prize for negativity—spewing words like “hate,” which many politicians view as anathema.

★★★★★

## Rudy Giuliani

**RHETORICAL STYLE:** Rudy Giuliani has the most distinctive verbal repertoire—his language is active, assured, and full of references to himself. His message is that he's going to personally lead you (high activity) and he's going in this direction and no other direction (high certainty). It adds up to a take-charge kind of guy.

**BODY LANGUAGE:** “Giuliani uses over-the-top gestures to excellent effect and always seems to enjoy being a politician,” says Pease. “Whereas McCain uses mainly one solitary gesture at a time, Rudy uses four or five expressions to do the same. He could be in showbiz.” Patti Ann Wood adds that Giuliani often does a tongue thrust, where the tongue comes out briefly from the mouth. “He does this when he talks about the presidential administration, which shows disrespect,” she explains.

**SELF-DEFINITION:** The crisis manager. Giuliani wants you to know he was mayor during 9/11, he wants you to know he was a prosecutor, and he wants you to know he's “a kid from Brooklyn”—in other words, not a person born of privilege.

**EMOTIONAL TONE:** Though Giuliani refers to himself more than the other candidates, he also frequently mentions other people. His language is the most feminine of all the candidates—meaning he uses relatively few concrete examples and considers other people's perspectives. This may reflect his treatment for prostate cancer, which can block testosterone production and feminize people's language and cause them to make more references to others (e.g., more pronouns, references to friends, social communication). He rarely uses concrete nouns, instead working to make connections with others.

**POLITICAL VALUES:** Giuliani's speeches emphasize conservative values, praising freedom and order but neglecting equality. Giuliani dwells on crime, as in, “We inflicted the kind of damage on organized crime that had never been inflicted before.”

**UNIVERSAL VALUES:** Giuliani values universalism and social justice, and places the highest value on true friendship, talking often about “very good, worthy men” and “very good friends.” He's the only candidate to place emphasis on hedonism, as when he talks about “the right to be able to enjoy our city.” Giuliani's value hierarchy is striking in that it resembles those of the Democratic candidates much more than those of his Republican rivals.



“Chaos will ensue, genocide will take place, and unlike after we lost the Vietnam War, these people want to follow us home. I think that what’s at stake here is this entire struggle we’re in... against radical Islamic extremism.”

**SUBTEXT:** John McCain’s angry, highly negative style could alienate voters.



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## John McCain

**RHETORICAL STYLE:** Compared to the other candidates, McCain rarely mentions his own life experience during policy discussions. He has a restrained, formal, less folksy style. There’s not a lot there for people to find out who he is. McCain also has the highest space/time ratio—the extent to which a person refers to geographical matters (*Iraq, the region, home*) compared to references to time (*this morning, the future, the ‘50s*). For him, this campaign is about Iraq and the United States. This stands to reason since he’s focusing on issues of the homeland.

**BODY LANGUAGE:** McCain is the least emotive of the candidates, lacking full body movement, variation of voice and gestures, and overall energy, says Wood. Of course, he has health problems that may circumscribe his movements—or perhaps it’s his attempt at gravitas. His facial and mouth gestures, say Pease, range from teeth baring (attack) to bottom-lip pouting (disdain) and smiling only on one side of his face (skepticism). “He typically holds onto the podium,” says Driver, “as if he is saying, ‘I need some more support here!’”

**SELF-DEFINITION:** “I’m not the youngest candidate, but I am the most experienced.” This is McCain’s way of blunting the

charge that he’s too old. It also highlights his wartime service without mentioning it directly, which could seem like bragging.

**EMOTIONAL TONE:** McCain expresses a lot of positive, high-energy emotions (using words such as exciting, wonderful, hopeful, great), and people are drawn to his dynamic personality. But he also expresses many negative emotions, using lots of anger words (*upset, angry, frustrated*)—which may catch up with him if he isn’t careful. His words are low in immediacy, which means they tend not to focus as much on the present, instead focusing on the past (e.g., Vietnam) or the future (e.g., where he wants the country to go).

**POLITICAL VALUES:** McCain is the least ideological Republican, talking little about order. He stresses freedom often—second only to Romney. Otherwise, his keyword profile is closer to Clinton’s and Obama’s than to those of his fellow Republicans.

**UNIVERSAL VALUES:** McCain places emphasis on power in two ways—social power, that is, dominance and control over others, and the right to lead or command. Both are evident when he says, “I happened to have had a position of command in the late 1970s.”

★★★★★

## Mitt Romney

**RHETORICAL STYLE:** Romney's hortatory gusto—his use of adjectives, religious imagery, patriotic language, and references to voters—embodies old-fashioned, all-American, Fourth of July kind of language. It's most often used by someone without a platform because it gives them something to talk about.

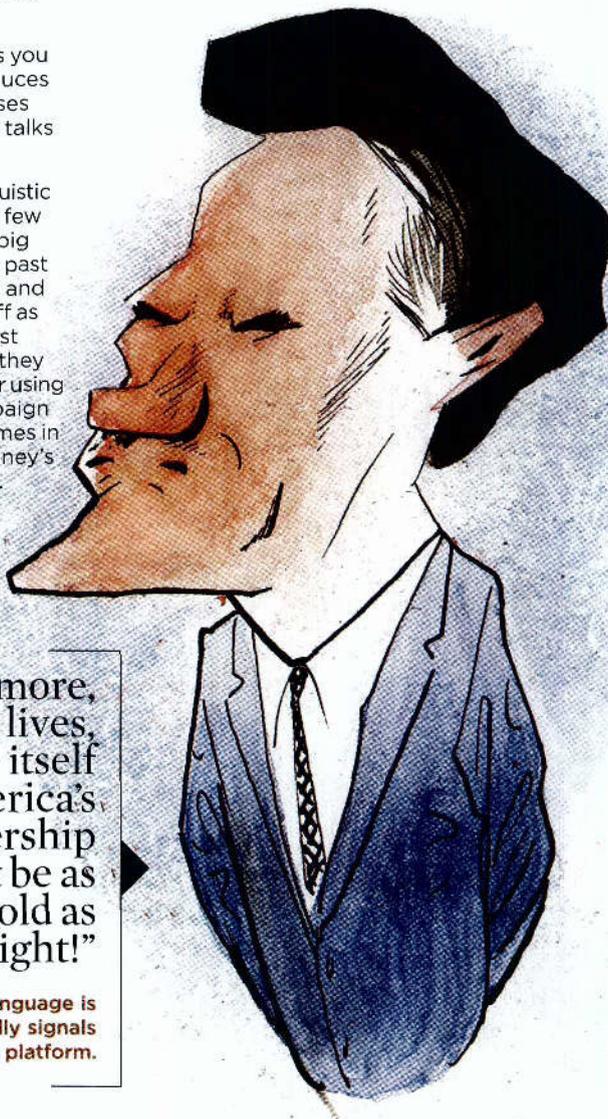
**BODY LANGUAGE:** "Romney uses his hands primarily in the palms-up position, which is perceived as open and nonthreatening," says Pease. "But on TV, he restrains his hands—probably from some well-intended advice—which forces him to use his face to show meaning and expression. This is a bad move, since his face is lopsided. He repetitively shrugs his shoulders, implying he doesn't necessarily believe or feel strongly about what he's saying." Like John McCain, Romney has a tendency to use "masking," a tense fake smile to cover his displeasure, says Wood.

**SELF-DEFINITION:** Romney wants you to know about his family. He introduces his wife as his sweetheart, he stresses his relationship with his father, and talks about his children.

**EMOTIONAL TONE:** Romney's linguistic style is formal and distant. He uses few first-person pronouns and a lot of big words. He also tends to focus on the past and the future rather than the here and now, which may make him come off as even more detached. Whereas most candidates are self-focused when they give interviews, Romney—known for using PowerPoint presentations at campaign rallies—focuses on very broad themes in an analytic way. Nonetheless, Romney's positive emotions convey warmth.

**POLITICAL VALUES:** Mitt Romney's speeches portray a compassionate conservative. Romney's two signature talking points are freedom and marriage, but he also refers to equality keywords far more than his Republican challengers. Romney appeals to freedom more than twice as often as his Republican challengers and more than three times as often as the Democrats.

**UNIVERSAL VALUES:** Romney's speech is dominated by a single value: universalism. He focuses on the beauty of nature and the arts, as when he says, "The state...has fabulous culture, great architecture. The ocean is gorgeous." He is the only candidate who talks this way. **PT**



"No nation gave more, shed more precious lives, and took less for itself than America... America's goodness and leadership in the world must be as bright and bold as our military might!"

**SUBTEXT:** Romney's language is über-patriotic, which usually signals a person without a platform.

★★★★★

## HOW THEY DID IT

**PT** compiled verbatim speech from each candidate: Since speeches are often ghostwritten, we included samples of extemporaneous speech like interviews and press conferences. Every researcher was given the same set of materials, with the exception of the body language experts, who scrutinized the candidates' own videos on YouTube.

### THE CATEGORIES:

★ **RHETORICAL STYLE:** including certainty (how assured the statements are), realism (how concrete vs. abstract the statements are), optimism (vs. pessimism), how active their language is (as opposed to passive), and commonality (how group-oriented the language is, as opposed to individualistic). Computed using Diction 5.0, a content analysis program. By **Roderick P. Hart** of the University of Texas at Austin.

★ **BODY LANGUAGE:** **PT** spoke to Allan Pease (coauthor of *The Definitive Book of Body Language*), **Patti Ann Wood**, and **Janine Driver**—each working independently—about the candidates' gestures and facial expressions.

★ **SELF-DEFINITION:** what the candidates want the public to know. Determined by looking at their recurrent messages. By **Kathleen Hall Jamieson** of the Annenberg School For Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

★ **EMOTIONAL TONE:** This includes positivity, negativity, machismo (using concrete examples and failing to consider other people's perspectives—both typical of men), and immediacy (a personal style marked by living in the moment). Computed by measuring candidates' use of "junk" words, including pronouns (*I, you, they*), articles (*a, the*), and prepositions (*about, to, for*). By **Richard B. Slatcher** and **James W. Pennebaker** of the University of Texas at Austin.

★ **POLITICAL VALUES:** freedom, order, and equality, the three core values that underlie most policy conflicts in American politics, usually referred to only indirectly. Computed by counting keywords. By **Kenneth Janda** of Northwestern University.

★ **UNIVERSAL VALUES:** 75 values recognized around the world, in 11 categories: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security, and spirituality. Computed by randomly sampling excerpts from the candidates' speech. By **Rajiv Jhangiani**, **Katya Legkaia**, **Ryan Cross**, **Viktoria Ivanova**, **Lindi Cassel**, and **Peter Suedfeld** of the University of British Columbia.

With additional reporting by **Marissa Kristal**.



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