Impact of Pragmatic Strategies in Arab and Western Political Discourse on Shaping Public Opinion Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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Abstract

This study examines the pragmatic strategies employed by Arab and Western politicians in shaping public opinion regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By analyzing political speeches and media statements, the research reveals a distinct contrast in rhetorical approaches between the two groups. Arab politicians predominantly use emotionally charged language and accusatory rhetoric, framing Israel as the aggressor and appealing to cultural and ideological sentiments that resonate with their domestic audiences. In contrast, Western politicians adopt a more neutral, diplomatic tone, focusing on cooperation and peaceful negotiations to navigate complex geopolitical interests. The findings confirm that these divergent strategies significantly influence public sentiment, with Arab leaders mobilizing strong support for Palestine, while Western leaders attempt to maintain international alliances by promoting balance and compromise. This study contributes to the fields of political pragmatics, cross-cultural communication, and conflict resolution by highlighting the role of language in shaping public perceptions and policy decisions. The research underscores the need for policymakers to consider cultural differences in political communication, offering insights into developing more effective communication strategies for international diplomacy.

Keywords: Pragmatic Strategies, Political Discourse, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Public Opinion

INTRODUCTION

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict stands as one of the most enduring and complex geopolitical crises in modern history. Spanning over a century, the conflict has been characterized by territorial disputes, religious tensions, and the struggle for national identity (Pappé, 2017). The conflict is deeply embedded in the historical narrative of both Israelis and Palestinians, each with distinct claims to the land and political

sovereignty. The frequent clashes, peace talks, and international interventions surrounding this conflict have made it a critical focal point of global political discourse (Said, 1979). Politicians and governments worldwide, especially those from Arab and Western nations, have long been involved in discussions, declarations, and policies related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, making the issue a key determinant in shaping international relations and regional politics (Lustick, 2019).

This conflict's complexity provides fertile ground for the use of rhetorical and communicative strategies aimed at influencing public opinion. Politicians, in particular, play a significant role in shaping the perceptions of both domestic and international audiences. Political discourse surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often serves dual purposes: it seeks to persuade global audiences while also addressing local public sentiments. Arab politicians typically focus on championing the Palestinian cause, framing Israel as an aggressor, and mobilizing support for Palestinian rights (Zureik, 2015). Conversely, Western politicians, particularly those from the United States and Europe, often take a more diplomatic approach, emphasizing the importance of peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians while navigating complex alliances (Quandt, 2005).

The role of language in politics cannot be overstated, particularly in conflict situations where narratives are carefully constructed to justify political positions and galvanize public support (Fairclough, 2013). Politicians often craft their language to present their viewpoint as not only reasonable but also morally justified. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, language becomes a tool for reinforcing ideological beliefs, mobilizing mass support, and influencing both domestic and international audiences (van Dijk, 2011).

Pragmatic strategies, such as speech acts, implicature, and framing devices, are central to the way politicians communicate about the conflict. Through strategic language use, they can appeal to nationalistic sentiments, highlight victimhood, or propose solutions framed within broader geopolitical contexts (Charteris-Black, 2014). For instance, Arab politicians frequently employ emotional appeals to invoke empathy for the Palestinian plight, calling attention to issues like displacement, military aggression, and human rights abuses (Gordon, 2010). On the other hand, Western politicians, often constrained by international alliances and diplomatic relations, use more balanced rhetoric that emphasizes peace, negotiation, and the two-state solution while often maintaining a stance of impartiality to maintain geopolitical alliances (Smith, 2018).

In this context, the analysis of political discourse becomes a powerful tool for understanding how politicians navigate the intricacies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Political leaders from both the Arab world and the West engage in "strategic maneuvering"—a term that refers to the balancing act of rhetorical effectiveness and logical reasonableness in argumentation (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2002). Through strategic maneuvering, politicians attempt to maintain their credibility while advancing persuasive arguments that resonate with their audience. This dual approach is vital in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where politicians must address their local electorate's ideological expectations while also aligning with broader international diplomatic norms (Al-Rawi, 2019).

The ability to sway public opinion through political discourse is particularly critical in this conflict because of the polarized and highly emotional nature of the issue (Gaber, 2016). Public sentiment can often

drive policy decisions, influence international diplomatic efforts, and even affect the dynamics of peace negotiations. For Arab politicians, appealing to a pan-Arab sentiment that is largely sympathetic to the Palestinian cause becomes a crucial element of their rhetoric (Zaharna, 1995). For Western politicians, particularly those in Europe and the United States, their discourse must balance internal political pressures, alliances with Israel, and the need to maintain an image of fairness and impartiality in the international arena (Kelman, 2018). Therefore, understanding how pragmatic strategies are employed by these political leaders to influence public opinion offers valuable insights into the power of language in shaping the conflict's ongoing narrative.

Theoretical Background

Pragmatics, as a branch of linguistics, explores how meaning is constructed and conveyed in real-world contexts, particularly in relation to the speaker's intentions, the audience's interpretations, and the situational context of the communication (Levinson, 1983). In political discourse, pragmatics provides a framework for understanding how politicians use language strategically to achieve specific communicative goals, such as persuading, justifying, or legitimizing their positions. Key concepts in pragmatics, such as speech acts, implicatures, presuppositions, and politeness strategies, are instrumental in understanding how political leaders craft their messages to resonate with both local and global audiences (Thomas, 1995).

Speech acts, first introduced by J.L. Austin (1962) and later developed by John Searle (1969), refer to the actions performed by utterances, such as making promises, giving orders, or issuing threats. In political contexts, speech acts are particularly significant because they not only communicate information but also perform an action, such as declaring support for a cause, condemning actions, or calling for peace (Searle, 1979). For instance, when Arab leaders issue statements of condemnation against Israeli military actions, they are performing speech acts that both criticize and mobilize public sentiment (Zaharna, 1995). Western politicians, in contrast, often issue more nuanced speech acts that call for restraint and emphasize the importance of diplomatic dialogue, reflecting their geopolitical alliances and strategic interests (Smith, 2018).

Implicatures, a concept introduced by H.P. Grice (1975), refer to the implied meanings that are not explicitly stated but are understood by the audience based on context and shared knowledge. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, implicatures play a crucial role in how politicians communicate their stance without overtly alienating certain groups (Fairclough, 2013). For example, Western politicians may imply support for Israel through phrases like "Israel's right to defend itself" while simultaneously calling for "peace and security for all parties involved," thus balancing their message to appeal to multiple audiences without directly taking sides (Quandt, 2005). Arab politicians, on the other hand, might imply support for Palestinian resistance without explicitly endorsing violence, using phrases such as "the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people" (Gaber, 2016).

Presuppositions are assumptions that are taken for granted within discourse. In political speech, presuppositions can be used to frame a narrative in a way that aligns with the speaker's ideological stance (Levinson, 1983). For example, Arab political discourse might presuppose the illegitimacy of the Israeli state by consistently referring to Israel as an "occupier" or "colonial power" (Zureik, 2015). Western politicians, particularly those aligned with Israel, might presuppose Israel's legitimacy by framing

discussions around Israel's security needs or its right to exist, subtly reinforcing pro-Israeli narratives through their language choices (Kelman, 2018).

Politeness strategies, as outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987), refer to the ways in which speakers mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) or maintain social harmony in their communication. In political discourse, particularly in the highly sensitive context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, politeness strategies are often employed to avoid direct confrontation or offense (Thomas, 1995). Western politicians, in particular, frequently use negative politeness strategies to show deference and avoid alienating either side, emphasizing neutrality and fairness in their calls for peace (Al-Rawi, 2019). Arab politicians, however, may use positive politeness strategies to align themselves more closely with the Palestinian cause, signaling solidarity and mutual support within the Arab world (Gordon, 2010).

Building on these pragmatic frameworks, strategic maneuvering, as developed by van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2002), offers a more nuanced understanding of how politicians manage their arguments to balance the dual goals of being persuasive while remaining reasonable. Strategic maneuvering involves selecting appropriate arguments, framing them in ways that appeal to the audience, and using presentational devices that enhance the rhetorical force of the message (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2002). In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, strategic maneuvering allows politicians to frame the conflict in ways that resonate with their audiences' values and expectations while maintaining a semblance of diplomatic propriety (van Eemeren, 2010).

Arab and Western politicians engage in strategic maneuvering differently, shaped by their respective cultural, political, and ideological contexts. Arab leaders often appeal to shared historical and religious narratives, using emotionally charged language to evoke solidarity and support for the Palestinian cause (Zaharna, 1995). Their rhetoric tends to emphasize themes of injustice, resistance, and liberation, aimed at rallying public opinion against Israeli policies (Al-Rawi, 2019). Western politicians, particularly those in Europe and the United States, face more complex rhetorical challenges. They must navigate the geopolitical implications of their discourse, particularly the need to maintain strong relationships with Israel while also addressing the concerns of pro-Palestinian constituencies and international human rights organizations (Kelman, 2018).

The current research seeks to investigate how Arab and Western politicians use these pragmatic strategies in their discourse about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, examining the extent to which these strategies shape public opinion in their respective regions. By analyzing political speeches and media statements, the study aims to uncover the subtle linguistic mechanisms that politicians use to influence the narrative surrounding the conflict and mobilize public sentiment in their favor. This analysis will provide valuable insights into the role of language in shaping international political discourse, particularly in the context of deeply entrenched conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian struggle (Lustick, 2019).

The Problem

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most ideologically charged and politically sensitive issues in contemporary international discourse. The conflict is not only a matter of territorial disputes but also involves deep-seated religious, cultural, and political tensions that continue to shape public

opinion worldwide (Pappé, 2017). While scholars have extensively examined various aspects of political communication related to the conflict (Said, 1979; van Dijk, 2011), there is a notable gap in comparative analyses that specifically explore how Arab and Western politicians use pragmatic strategies to influence public opinion.

In the context of this conflict, political rhetoric becomes a tool not just for advocating peace or highlighting injustices but for framing narratives that can significantly alter public perception and bolster support for one side or the other (Fairclough, 2013). Arab politicians often focus on narratives of resistance, liberation, and solidarity with the Palestinian cause, whereas Western politicians—particularly from countries like the United States and European nations—tend to emphasize diplomatic resolutions, often reflecting broader geopolitical interests (Zureik, 2015; Gordon, 2010).

Despite the wealth of research on political discourse and communication, relatively few studies offer a cross-cultural comparison of the rhetorical and pragmatic tools employed by Arab and Western politicians (Charteris-Black, 2014). The present comparative analysis is crucial because political communication does not function in a vacuum; it directly influences how citizens understand and engage with the conflict. Public opinion, shaped by the rhetoric of political leaders, can have profound implications for policy decisions, international diplomatic efforts, and the broader geopolitical landscape (Lustick, 2019).

Furthermore, the strategies employed by these politicians—whether emotional appeals, accusations, diplomatic calls for peace, or subtle implicatures—can vary significantly depending on their domestic and international audiences (Al-Rawi, 2019). Understanding these differences is key to analyzing the full impact of political communication on public perception and support for either Israel or Palestine. Thus, the current study seeks to address the gap in the literature by offering a comparative analysis of how Arab and Western politicians strategically use pragmatic tools to shape public opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By understanding the rhetorical differences and their implications, this research will provide deeper insights into the role of political communication in affecting both regional and international perceptions of the conflict.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on political discourse and public opinion underscores the pivotal role that language plays in shaping perceptions, particularly in conflict settings. Researchers such as van Dijk (2011) and Fairclough (2010) have extensively explored how political elites leverage discourse to reinforce power structures and influence public thought. Their work highlights the mechanisms through which language can serve as a tool for political control and mobilization. For instance, van Dijk (2011) argues that political discourse not only reflects but also shapes social identities and power relations, creating narratives that can galvanize public support or dissent.

Despite the wealth of research in this area, fewer studies have specifically compared the rhetorical strategies of Arab and Western politicians regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This gap is significant, as the dynamics of this conflict involve not only national interests but also deep-rooted ideological, historical, and cultural narratives that vary widely between these groups (Lustick, 2019). The comparative

analysis of their rhetorical strategies is crucial for understanding the broader implications of political discourse in shaping public opinion.

Empirical studies in political discourse analysis have revealed how metaphors and rhetorical strategies shape public perception of international conflicts. Research conducted by Charteris-Black (2005) illustrates the role of metaphorical framing in influencing how audiences perceive issues of conflict and cooperation. By framing a narrative in a particular way, politicians can evoke specific emotional responses and mobilize public support.

Studies by Zarefsky (2019) and Chilton (2014) have examined how politicians craft their messages to achieve strategic goals, emphasizing the importance of rhetoric in shaping political realities. However, comparative studies between Arab and Western discourses remain limited, particularly in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This lack of comparative analysis represents a critical gap in the literature, as understanding the divergent rhetorical strategies employed by these two groups can offer valuable insights into the broader dynamics of political communication and public opinion.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the rich body of research on political discourse, there is a gap in the literature regarding cross-cultural comparisons between Arab and Western pragmatic strategies, particularly in how they influence public opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Objectives of the Study

--To analyze the pragmatic strategies employed by Arab and Western politicians in their discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

--To compare how these strategies differ between the two groups in shaping public opinion in their respective countries.

--To assess the cultural, political, and geopolitical influences on the use of pragmatic strategies.

--To provide insights into how language can be used as a tool for conflict resolution by shaping public perceptions.

Novelty of the Study

The present study offers a novel cross-cultural comparison of Arab and Western political discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, focusing on how politicians' use of pragmatic strategies shape public opinion. It is among the few studies that explore the impact of these strategies within the framework of strategic maneuvering, linking linguistic choices directly to public sentiment.

Research Question and Hypothesis

Based on the above-mentioned objectives of the study, the following research question and hypothesis were formulated:

RQ. To what extent do the pragmatic strategies employed by Arab and Western politicians in their strategic maneuvering discourse shape public opinion in their respective countries concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Ho. The pragmatic strategies employed by Arab and Western politicians in their strategic maneuvering discourse significantly shape public opinion in their respective countries concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Significance of the Study

This research provides critical insights into the role of political communication in shaping public opinion on international conflicts, specifically the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The findings contribute significantly to the fields of political pragmatics, cross-cultural communication, and conflict resolution by elucidating how language influences perceptions, emotional responses, and policy support across different cultural contexts (Zaharna, 1995).

Understanding the nuanced ways in which political leaders utilize language is vital for grasping how public sentiments are mobilized around complex issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By examining the rhetorical strategies employed by Arab and Western politicians, this study sheds light on the cultural underpinnings that inform their communication styles and the implications for public opinion. Such insights are essential for policymakers and diplomats, who must navigate these rhetorical landscapes when formulating strategies for engagement, negotiation, and conflict resolution.

Moreover, the findings could assist in developing more effective communication strategies aimed at fostering mutual understanding between conflicting parties. In an era where misinformation and polarized narratives can exacerbate tensions, understanding the power of language to shape perceptions can help leaders communicate more effectively with their constituents and international audiences (Kelman, 2018). Ultimately, this research aims to bridge gaps in the literature and provide practical guidance for fostering dialogue and understanding in politically charged environments.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis of political speeches with quantitative measures of public opinion. This allows for an in-depth understanding of how pragmatic strategies influence public sentiment.

Corpus of the Study

The corpus consists of 100 political speeches from Arab and Western politicians, sourced from reputable news outlets such as *Khaleej Times*, *Arab News*, *The Guardian*, and *CNN*. The speeches were selected based on their relevance to key moments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between 2020 and 2024.

Model of the Study

The study integrates pragma-dialectical analysis with insights from speech act theory and politeness theory, providing a comprehensive model for examining how strategic maneuvering affect public opinion.

Data Collection Procedures

The needed data was collected from the following two sources:

1. Political speeches were analyzed for rhetorical devices and pragmatic strategies, such as accusations, emotional appeals, and diplomatic language.
2. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 Arab and 20 Western individuals to assess how political discourse influences their views on the conflict.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data from the speeches was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in the use of pragmatic strategies. Quantitative analysis was employed to measure the frequency of specific strategies and compare their impact on public opinion.

RESULTS

The results of data analysis reveal significant differences in the pragmatic strategies used by Arab and Western politicians, and the extent to which these strategies affect public opinion.

Statistical Results for the Research Question

Table 1

Comparison of Pragmatic Strategies between Arab and Western Politicians

Strategy	Arab Politicians (%)	Western Politicians (%)
Accusation/Blame	85	45
Diplomatic Tone	10	60
Emotional Appeals	75	25
Cooperative Principle	25	70

Arab politicians heavily rely on accusations and emotional appeals, whereas Western politicians predominantly use diplomatic tones and cooperative strategies. This suggests that Arab politicians aim to evoke strong emotional reactions from their audience, while Western politicians focus on maintaining international alliances and presenting a balanced perspective.

Table 2

Statistical Significance of Pragmatic Strategies

Strategy	p-value
Accusation/Blame	0.001
Diplomatic Tone	0.002
Emotional Appeals	0.015

The p-values indicate statistically significant differences in the use of accusations, diplomatic tones, and emotional appeals between Arab and Western politicians.

The above results confirm that Arab politicians predominantly use accusatory and emotional language to influence public opinion in favor of the Palestinian cause, while Western politicians employ diplomatic rhetoric aimed at maintaining neutrality or supporting geopolitical interests.

DISCUSION

The hypothesis proposed that Arab politicians would predominantly use emotionally charged rhetoric and accusatory language to frame Israel as the aggressor, while Western politicians would adopt a more neutral, diplomatic approach. The findings of this research confirm this hypothesis. Arab political discourse is characterized by high emotional engagement, utilizing rhetoric that invokes sentiments of victimization and resistance (Gaber, 2016). This aligns with Zureik (2015), who discusses how Arab leaders often appeal to shared cultural and historical narratives to galvanize public support, framing the Israeli actions as oppressive and unjust.

In contrast, Western politicians generally prefer a more measured tone. Their discourse frequently emphasizes diplomatic language and calls for peaceful negotiations, reflecting the need to balance international alliances and avoid overt bias in discussions surrounding the conflict (Zarefsky, 2019). This

aligns with the notion that Western discourse tends to prioritize maintaining relationships with both Israel and Arab states, often resulting in calls for compromise that seek to address the concerns of all parties involved (Smith, 2018).

The divergence in rhetorical styles can be attributed to the differing socio-political contexts and audience expectations faced by these politicians. Arab leaders often operate within a framework where mobilizing public sentiment is crucial, especially in contexts where the Palestinian cause resonates deeply with their electorate (Al-Rawi, 2019). In contrast, Western leaders must navigate complex geopolitical landscapes, where public opinion is often more fragmented, and maintaining a stance of neutrality can be politically advantageous (Kelman, 2018).

Recent studies support the above findings and highlight similar trends in political discourse. For instance, van Eemeren (2020) emphasizes that Western politicians are increasingly framing their arguments in terms of diplomacy and international cooperation, reflecting an understanding of the globalized nature of political issues. This aligns with the idea that political leaders must be strategic in their discourse, appealing to diverse audiences while also addressing domestic political pressures (Chilton, 2021).

Arab politicians' reliance on emotive strategies is, in contrast, consistent with research by Zarefsky (2019), who notes that such strategies resonate strongly with cultural and ideological sentiments surrounding the Palestinian cause. This suggests that the rhetorical choices made by Arab politicians are deeply rooted in historical grievances and a collective memory of conflict, which they mobilize to reinforce their legitimacy and rally public support (Gordon, 2010).

Generally, the comparative analysis of these two rhetorical styles underscores the complexities of political communication in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It reveals how politicians tailor their messages to align with cultural values and political realities, ultimately shaping public perception in distinct ways.

CONCLUSION

The current study reveals the extent to which pragmatic strategies employed by Arab and Western politicians in their discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shape public opinion. The findings confirm that Arab politicians tend to use accusatory and emotional rhetoric to mobilize public support for Palestine, focusing on themes of injustice and resistance. Conversely, Western politicians generally employ a more diplomatic tone that reflects their complex geopolitical interests, emphasizing negotiation and cooperation to navigate international relations. These findings have significant implications for understanding the role of language in conflict resolution and public diplomacy. The contrasting rhetorical strategies highlight the necessity for policymakers to be aware of the cultural contexts that inform political discourse. Recognizing how different rhetorical strategies influence public opinion can aid in developing more effective communication strategies that bridge cultural divides, fostering understanding and collaboration in conflict situations (Kelman, 2018).

Implications of the Study

The findings of this research emphasize the need for policymakers to consider cultural differences in political communication when engaging in international diplomacy. Understanding the impact of pragmatic strategies on public sentiment can assist in formulating communication strategies that effectively address the concerns and expectations of diverse audiences (Al-Rawi, 2019). In particular, fostering a dialogue that respects cultural narratives while promoting mutual understanding is vital in conflict resolution efforts.

Limitations of the Study

While the current study contributes valuable insights into the discourse surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The focus on major news outlets may not fully capture the breadth of political discourse, as smaller or alternative media sources often provide different perspectives that are also influential in shaping public opinion (Lustick, 2019). Additionally, public opinion was measured through interviews rather than surveys, limiting the generalizability of the findings and potentially introducing bias based on the selection of participants (Gaber, 2016).

Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should explore a wider range of media sources, including social media platforms, to capture the diverse landscape of political discourse. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how political rhetoric evolves over time in response to changing geopolitical contexts and public sentiment. Incorporating public opinion surveys could also offer more comprehensive insights into how political rhetoric influences public sentiment and behavior regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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