

# Rhetorical Discursive Strategies in 2024 U.S. Presidential Campaigns: A Critical Pragmatic Analysis

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## Abstract

This study explored the rhetorical strategies employed by Republican and Democratic nominees during the 2024 U.S. presidential campaigns, focusing on the discursive techniques used to appeal to partisan bases and shape voter perceptions. Grounded in Van Dijk's Ideological Square—a theoretical framework for analyzing how language constructs ideological divides—the research investigated the role of positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, and the strategic framing of political ideologies in the construction of party identity. A mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative analysis of discourse patterns and qualitative examination of rhetorical strategies, uncovered the distinctive ways each party uses language to reinforce ideological commitments and polarize the electorate. The findings reveal significant differences in how Republicans and Democrats position themselves and their opponents, with Republicans often employing fear-based rhetoric, in-group/out-group distinctions, and a focus on "threat" narratives. In contrast, Democrats tend to emphasize unity, inclusivity, and collective responsibility, though occasionally at the risk of alienating moderates or dissenting voices within their own ranks. The study also highlights the growing role of digital media and algorithm-driven communication, demonstrating how technological platforms have amplified the impact of these rhetorical strategies, especially in the form of targeted misinformation and tailored inclusivity messages. The implications of the study extend to the fields of sociolinguistics, political communication, and media studies, emphasizing how language shapes ideological alignment, reinforces social divisions, and influences democratic processes in the digital age. The research also raises important ethical considerations regarding the manipulation of voters through algorithmic targeting, calling for greater transparency and accountability in political messaging.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how political discourse operates in contemporary elections, offering insights that can inform policy, media literacy initiatives, and future research on the intersection of language, technology, and democracy.

**Keywords:** Rhetorical Strategies, Political Discourse, Ideological Polarization, Partisan Rhetoric, Van Dijk's Ideological Square, Political Communication

## Introduction

Language, as a medium of political communication, plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and constructing ideological narratives. Political rhetoric functions not merely as a tool for information dissemination but as a mechanism to invoke emotional resonance and reinforce ideological commitments. Van Dijk's Ideological Square offers a robust framework for analyzing these rhetorical strategies, revealing how political actors emphasize in-group virtues while marginalizing out-group attributes.

The 2024 U.S. presidential campaigns epitomize this dynamic, with nominees leveraging both traditional and digital platforms to propagate polarized narratives. These campaigns occur in a sociopolitical climate characterized by heightened polarization, where discourse increasingly reflects binary ideological divides. This polarization is further exacerbated by digital platforms that amplify selective narratives, fostering echo chambers and reducing exposure to diverse viewpoints (López-Nicolás et al., 2021; Murphy, 2024).

Recent scholarship has expanded our understanding of the intersection between cognitive processes and sociolinguistic factors in political discourse. Cognitive frameworks, such as those articulated by Lakoff (2016), underscore how metaphoric and conceptual structures shape political messaging. For instance, metaphors framing immigration as a "flood" or "crisis" evoke fear and urgency, strategically aligning with conservative rhetoric. Simultaneously, progressive campaigns employ metaphors of "building bridges" and "unity," reflecting inclusive ideologies. These linguistic choices influence not only immediate perceptions but also long-term ideological alignments (Fairclough, 2015; Shinbori et al., 2022). Furthermore, the role of emotional appeals in political communication has garnered significant attention in the past decade. Studies by Wodak (2015) and Tang & Chen (2023) highlight how fear, hope, and anger are strategically deployed to mobilize voters. The Republican campaign in 2024, for example, has been noted for its recurrent use of fear-based narratives, often centered on themes of national security and cultural preservation. In contrast, the Democratic campaign's rhetoric has emphasized collective action and progressive values, aiming to foster hope and inclusivity.

The evolution of media ecosystems also plays a critical role in shaping modern political rhetoric. Platforms like Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook serve as arenas where political discourse is not only disseminated but also reframed through user interactions. Algorithm-driven content curation further amplifies ideological divides, creating fertile grounds for targeted political messaging (Cruz et al., 2023; Beddoe, 2024). Such digital innovations demand a reevaluation of traditional rhetorical strategies within the broader context of sociolinguistic and cognitive frameworks.

As the field of cognitive sociolinguistics continues to evolve, the interplay between language, ideology, and voter behavior remains a critical area of study. This paper builds on these foundational insights, focusing on how rhetorical strategies employed during the 2024 campaigns illuminate broader trends in political discourse and voter mobilization. By integrating contemporary academic discourse with empirical analysis, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying political communication in an increasingly polarized society.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Theoretical Background***

Van Dijk's Ideological Square posits four core strategies for political rhetoric: (1) emphasizing positive attributes of the in-group, (2) deemphasizing negative attributes of the in-group, (3) emphasizing negative attributes of the out-group, and (4) deemphasizing positive attributes of the out-group. This framework provides a lens to deconstruct how language is used strategically to consolidate in-group loyalty and marginalize opposition. Recent advancements in critical discourse analysis (e.g., Murphy, 2024; Tang & Chen, 2023) have extended this framework to digital and multimodal contexts, demonstrating its adaptability to evolving political landscapes. These studies highlight the importance of understanding how visual and textual elements coalesce to reinforce ideological divides, particularly in the context of social media platforms.

Moreover, Chouliaraki's (2021) concept of mediated discourse offers valuable insights into the role of intertextuality and recontextualization in political narratives. This perspective reveals how political actors adapt their rhetoric across various platforms to resonate with different audience segments. For instance, while televised debates emphasize formal and policy-driven arguments, social media platforms enable more personalized and emotive appeals, amplifying their persuasive impact. The integration of cognitive and social dimensions in discourse analysis has further enriched our understanding of rhetorical strategies. Lakoff's (2016) work on political metaphors demonstrates how conceptual framing influences public perception and policy support. This cognitive dimension complements Van Dijk's sociolinguistic focus, emphasizing the interplay between mental models and linguistic structures in shaping ideological narratives.

### ***Empirical Studies***

Recent research underscores the transformative impact of digital platforms on political communication. López-Nicolás et al. (2021) and Shinbori et al. (2022) have documented how algorithm-driven amplification of content fosters ideological echo chambers, where users are exposed predominantly to congruent viewpoints. These environments not only entrench existing biases but also amplify polarized rhetoric, creating a fertile ground for strategic political messaging. Cruz et al. (2023) explores the role of artificial intelligence in crafting personalized political messages, revealing how data-driven strategies enhance the precision and emotional resonance of rhetorical appeals. Their findings align with Beddoe's (2024) observations on the ethical implications of AI-generated content, particularly in the context of misinformation and deepfake technologies.

Comparative analyses, such as Papageorgiou and Bateman's (2021) investigation of European political campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlight the integration of emotional appeals and misinformation in political rhetoric. These studies demonstrate how crisis contexts serve as catalysts for heightened polarization, with political actors leveraging fear and uncertainty to consolidate support. García et al. (2022) have applied Van Dijk's framework to analyze visual rhetoric in political advertisements, illustrating how imagery complements textual strategies to manipulate perceptions. Their research emphasizes the multimodal nature of contemporary political communication, where visual and textual elements operate synergistically to reinforce ideological narratives.

### ***Gap in the Literature***

While significant progress has been made in understanding political discourse, several gaps persist. First, the nuanced dynamics of sectarian rhetoric—particularly how it varies across political ideologies and cultural contexts—require further exploration. Existing studies often focus on broad trends, leaving the micro-level intricacies of rhetorical strategies underexamined.

Second, there is a paucity of comparative analyses focusing on the U.S. political context, especially concerning the divergent strategies employed by Republican and Democratic nominees. This gap is particularly pronounced in the context of the 2024 presidential campaigns, where the interplay between traditional and digital platforms has reshaped rhetorical norms. Lastly, the ethical dimensions of emerging technologies, such as AI-driven campaign tools and deepfake technologies, warrant deeper academic scrutiny. While Cruz et al. (2023) and Beddoe (2024) have initiated discussions on these topics, their broader societal implications remain underexplored. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by integrating theoretical insights from Van Dijk's framework with empirical findings from diverse contexts, offering a comprehensive analysis of rhetorical strategies and their implications for democratic governance.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating qualitative discourse analysis with statistical examination of rhetorical patterns. This design enables a comprehensive understanding of both the linguistic and sociopolitical dimensions of campaign rhetoric. Creswell's (2018) guidelines for mixed-methods research provided the foundational framework for this study, incorporating advancements in computational linguistics and thematic coding.

Mixed-methods research facilitates the integration of diverse data types, allowing for a nuanced exploration of rhetorical strategies. By combining qualitative insights with quantitative rigor, this study aligns with recent trends in political discourse analysis, where computational tools and statistical models complement traditional discourse techniques (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2020). The dual approach ensures that both linguistic subtleties and overarching trends are captured effectively.

## Corpus of the Study

The dataset comprises 40 campaign speeches (20 from each nominee), 50 social media posts, and 10 televised debate transcripts from the 2024 election period. Texts were selected to ensure thematic and contextual diversity, representing a balanced perspective on key campaign issues such as immigration, healthcare, and economic policy. To enhance the representativeness of the dataset, the selection criteria included geographic diversity, media platform variations, and temporal distribution. This comprehensive approach ensured that the corpus reflected the multifaceted nature of the 2024 campaign rhetoric. Emerging methodologies in corpus construction, such as leveraging AI-driven tools to identify thematic patterns, were also employed to refine the dataset (Pennebaker et al., 2022).

## Analytical Framework

Van Dijk's Ideological Square guided the discourse analysis, while SPSS software facilitated the statistical evaluation of rhetorical patterns. To ensure methodological rigor, the study incorporated inter-coder reliability measures and triangulated data from multiple sources to enhance validity and reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The analytical process integrated traditional discourse techniques with computational advancements. For qualitative analysis, thematic coding in NVivo identified recurring rhetorical strategies, while sentiment analysis tools quantified emotional appeals. Quantitative evaluations included chi-square tests to determine significant differences in strategy deployment across parties. This integrative approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how rhetorical choices align with ideological objectives.

## Results

### Rhetorical Strategies: Quantitative Analysis

**Table 1**

*Distribution of rhetorical strategies across the Republican and Democratic nominees*

Strategy	Republican (%)	Democratic (%)
Positive In-Group	65	70
Negative Out-Group	80	55
Fear-Based Narratives	75	35
Unity and Inclusivity	30	75

Republican rhetoric emphasized fear-based narratives and negative out-group depictions, aligning with themes of national security and cultural preservation. These strategies rely on dichotomous framings, often invoking metaphors of conflict and crisis. For instance, narratives

surrounding immigration often depict it as an existential threat, using terms like “invasion” or “crisis” to foster urgency and in-group solidarity. This aligns with prior research on conservative rhetoric's reliance on fear appeals to galvanize support (Jost et al., 2017). In contrast, Democratic discourse focused on inclusivity and unity, promoting collective progress and shared responsibility. Slogans such as “building a better future” and “stronger together” exemplify this approach. These narratives were more optimistic, employing metaphors of growth and collaboration to appeal to progressive values. Statistical tests confirmed significant differences in strategy deployment ( $p < 0.01$ ), reinforcing the ideological distinctions between the parties.

The reliance on these contrasting strategies reflects broader sociopolitical divides. Republicans' higher emphasis on fear-based narratives (75%) underscores their focus on mobilizing voters through perceived threats to cultural identity and national security. Conversely, the Democratic emphasis on unity (75%) reflects a strategic effort to appeal to a broader coalition of voters by fostering hope and solidarity.

## **Qualitative Perceptions**

The qualitative analysis further highlights the framing techniques employed:

**Republican Nominee:** Frequently employed metaphors of defense and preservation, framing issues like immigration and economic policy as battles requiring vigilance. This rhetoric often portrayed the opposition as fundamentally threatening American values.

**Democratic Nominee:** Leveraged aspirational metaphors of building and progress, emphasizing collective goals and societal harmony. The rhetoric often framed challenges as opportunities for collaborative solutions, contrasting sharply with the Republican focus on conflict.

These results indicate that rhetorical strategies are not merely reflections of ideological positions but also strategic tools for mobilizing voter bases and shaping perceptions. The contrasting emphasis on fear versus hope highlights the differing cognitive and emotional appeals utilized by each party to achieve their electoral objectives.

## **Discussion**

### ***Comparative Analysis***

The findings from this study align with longstanding patterns in political rhetoric while offering novel insights into how these strategies have evolved in response to the unique dynamics of the 2024 electoral context. Conservative rhetoric continues to leverage polarization, creating stark in-group/out-group distinctions that align with earlier studies, such as Perry and Scrivens (2019), who argue that the deliberate construction of an ideological "other" has become a hallmark of right-

wing discourse. The use of fear-based appeals and existential threats, as identified in recent work by Swafford et al. (2022), not only fuels division but also primes emotional responses that solidify partisan boundaries. In contrast, the rhetoric of liberal candidates, with its emphasis on unity, inclusivity, and social justice, reflects a broader trend identified by Krämer (2020) and more recently, Chang and Liu (2023), who highlight the liberal tendency to craft narratives centered around collective responsibility and progressivism.

However, the integration of digital tools—specifically social media platforms—has accentuated these ideological divides. Republican campaigns have increasingly relied on sophisticated, data-driven misinformation campaigns (Jin & Li, 2021), aiming to exploit cognitive biases through hyper-targeted ads and emotionally charged messaging. On the other hand, Democratic rhetoric has made extensive use of algorithmically curated messages designed to foster inclusivity and encourage engagement among marginalized groups (Kuo, 2023). The dual influence of these technological mechanisms represents a shift in political campaigning, underscoring the growing entanglement between political rhetoric and digital media ecosystems (Shinbori et al., 2022).

### ***Sociolinguistic Implications***

The strategic use of language in these campaigns is not merely a tool for communication but a force that actively shapes political identities and voter alignments. Republican rhetoric's reliance on fear and divisiveness, for example, not only enhances polarization but may contribute to a sense of ideological "tribalism" (Moffitt, 2020). The divisive language often used by conservative actors is implicated in the creation of rigid, mutually exclusive in-group/out-group boundaries, which may exacerbate social fragmentation (Berg & Wexler, 2023). Democratic rhetoric, on the other hand, is designed to appeal to ideals of solidarity and collective action, but this can inadvertently alienate individuals who may view such messages as overly idealistic or exclusionary of alternative viewpoints (Zhu & Zhang, 2021).

From a cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to polarized language has significant implications for voter behavior and ideological commitment (Frisch et al., 2023). Such language not only reinforces pre-existing beliefs but may also impair individuals' ability to engage in nuanced, cross-ideological discussions, thereby solidifying entrenched positions. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the digital age, where echo chambers and algorithmically reinforced filter bubbles have created environments where alternative viewpoints are often silenced or marginalized (Tufekci, 2023).

### ***Relevance to Recent Literature***

The study supports and extends recent work on the influence of digital platforms on political discourse (Cruz et al., 2023; Tang & Chen, 2023). As digital platforms have become central to political communication, their impact on shaping the content and reception of political messages is profound. The ability of political campaigns to target specific voter segments with tailored rhetoric, as highlighted by Shinbori et al. (2022), is a significant departure from traditional media's broader, less personalized reach. This targeted approach raises questions about the ethical implications of such strategies, particularly in regard to the manipulation of voter emotions and

the potential erosion of democratic norms (Sunstein, 2024). Furthermore, the findings resonate with research that emphasizes the diminishing role of traditional media in shaping political discourse. As more voters turn to social media for political information, traditional media outlets' influence wanes, potentially reinforcing partisan biases and reducing the opportunities for cross-party dialogue (Kelley et al., 2021).

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the divergent rhetorical strategies employed by the Republican and Democratic nominees in the 2024 U.S. presidential campaigns, illustrating how language has been strategically manipulated to reflect broader ideological divides. The findings suggest that while both parties continue to utilize time-tested rhetorical strategies—polarization for conservatives and inclusivity for liberals—these approaches are increasingly mediated by digital tools that allow for more targeted and personalized communication. The rise of misinformation, particularly within conservative circles, and the focus on algorithmic inclusivity by the left underscore the profound impact of technology on modern political discourse.

## **Implications of the Study**

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on political communication by offering a sociolinguistic and cognitive lens through which to understand the dynamics of modern political rhetoric. It underscores the significant role of language in shaping voter perceptions, reinforcing ideologies, and influencing political engagement. For educators, policymakers, and media practitioners, these findings provide crucial insights into how political messages can be crafted and the ethical considerations that must be taken into account when navigating the intersection of politics and digital media.

Future studies should explore the longitudinal effects of these digital-driven rhetorical strategies on voter behavior, particularly in terms of political polarization and its impact on democratic cohesion. The ethical implications of AI and algorithmic-driven political messaging remain a critical area of investigation, particularly regarding the potential manipulation of voters and the degradation of informed, participatory democratic processes (Binns, 2022). Researchers should also consider how these strategies evolve across different political systems and whether global trends in political rhetoric and technology may signal new challenges for democratic societies.

## **Suggestions for Further Research**

While this study offers significant insights into the evolving strategies of political rhetoric in the 2024 U.S. presidential campaigns, it also opens several avenues for further exploration. As the intersection of digital technology and political discourse continues to reshape the landscape of modern campaigning, future research can deepen our understanding of its long-term implications and uncover new dimensions of influence.



One key area for future investigation is the **longitudinal impact of digital rhetoric on voter behavior**. While this study has primarily examined the immediate effects of the rhetorical strategies used during the 2024 election, it raises important questions about the lasting influence of these strategies on voters. In particular, how do hyper-targeted, algorithm-driven messages affect political attitudes over time? Longitudinal studies could explore whether repeated exposure to such tailored rhetoric leads to shifts in partisan alignment or alters voting patterns in future elections. Understanding the prolonged cognitive and emotional effects of these digital campaigns could help policymakers and researchers assess the deeper impact on democratic engagement.

Another important direction for future research involves conducting **cross-cultural and cross-national comparisons**. As digital campaigning tools become increasingly globalized, it is essential to understand how political rhetoric shaped by digital platforms plays out in different political contexts around the world. Do political parties in other democratic nations employ similar strategies, or are these tactics uniquely American? How do cultural differences influence the use of digital tools in political messaging? Comparative studies could highlight how digital political campaigns are adapted to local political environments, providing a more comprehensive view of the global trends in political discourse.

The **ethical dimensions of AI-driven political messaging** also deserve greater attention. The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies has revolutionized how political messages are crafted and delivered, but it also raises significant ethical concerns. Future research could delve into the specific ways in which AI systems influence the framing of political messages and the potential risks posed by algorithmically driven manipulation of voter emotions. What measures can be implemented to ensure transparency and fairness in AI-assisted political communication? Addressing these questions is critical for safeguarding the integrity of democratic processes in an era where technology has the potential to sway public opinion with unprecedented precision.

The study also touches on the importance of **political echo chambers and filter bubbles**, yet this area warrants further exploration. The filtering effects of algorithms on social media platforms can create isolated informational environments where individuals are exposed only to content that aligns with their existing beliefs, further entrenching partisan divisions. More research could examine the psychological effects of these digital silos on political cognition, empathy, and discourse. How do echo chambers shape voters' perceptions of political adversaries, and what strategies can be employed to counteract this polarization? Research into interventions designed to foster cross-party dialogue and expose individuals to diverse perspectives could help mitigate the dangers of ideological isolation.

The emergence of new media forms, such as **influencers, memes, and platforms like TikTok**, has added a new layer to political messaging. While this study focused on traditional political rhetoric, the growing influence of non-traditional media figures is a phenomenon worth investigating. These new forms of communication have the potential to reach younger, more diverse audiences in ways that traditional political discourse cannot. Future research could explore how influencers and meme culture contribute to shaping political narratives, mobilizing voters, and influencing public opinion. Understanding the interplay between new media and traditional

political campaigns could offer insights into how political messages are received and acted upon by different demographic groups.

**Intersectionality** in political rhetoric is another area that warrants more attention. This study provided a broad overview of political strategies, but it did not specifically address how factors such as race, gender, or socio-economic status intersect with rhetorical choices. Future research could examine how political messages are tailored to resonate with different demographic groups and how these messages either reinforce or challenge existing societal inequalities. Investigating the role of intersectionality in political rhetoric could offer new insights into how language functions as a tool of inclusion or exclusion, particularly for marginalized communities.

Lastly, the **psychological mechanisms behind political polarization** are a crucial subject for further study. While this research touched on the cognitive effects of polarized language, it did not delve deeply into the underlying psychological processes that drive increasing polarization. Future studies could explore how emotional appeals, fear-based rhetoric, and the use of divisive language affect voters' cognitive processes, such as their capacity for empathy or their tendency to engage with opposing viewpoints. Understanding these psychological mechanisms could help inform strategies aimed at reducing political polarization and fostering more constructive political dialogue.

Finally, this study has highlighted the complex relationship between political rhetoric, digital media, and voter behavior. However, as digital technology continues to evolve and reshape political discourse, there is still much to be understood about its long-term impact, ethical challenges, and psychological effects. By pursuing these avenues of research, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how modern political campaigns operate and how they influence democratic processes. As new technologies emerge and political dynamics shift, ongoing research will be essential to ensure that political communication remains transparent, ethical, and conducive to a healthy democracy.

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