Original Research

Critical Discourse Analysis of Persuasive Appeals and Ideological Frameworks in Harris and Biden's 2024 Campaign Rhetoric

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Abstract

Political campaign rhetoric is a crucial tool for shaping public perception, mobilizing support, and influencing electoral outcomes, especially in highly mediated and polarized contexts. This study examined the political campaign rhetoric of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris during the 2024 presidential campaign, highlighting its role in shaping public perception and influencing electoral outcomes in polarized contexts. By employing a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research analyzed selected rally speeches and debate transcripts to identify persuasive strategies and ideological frameworks within their discourse. The methodology integrated CDA principles with Discourse Space Theory, Proximization Theory, Alternative Futures, and Framing Theory, enabling a thorough exploration of how the candidates positioned themselves and articulated their visions. The analysis deconstructed texts to identify key elements such as deictic centers, spatial and temporal positioning, and proximization strategies, while coding rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) and dominant ideological themes. The findings highlight a consistent use of persuasive structures that create an inclusive 'Us' narrative, appealing to shared American values, empathy, and collective identity. Temporal proximization strategies emphasize the urgency of future visions, focusing on themes such as democracy, social justice, equality, and national security. Claims are supported by factual evidence, expert endorsements, and relatable personal narratives, presenting a positive and achievable future in contrast to negative alternatives. These insights deepen the understanding of political persuasion and promote better media literacy and critical engagement with political discourse.
Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse Space Theory, Framing, Persuasion, Political Rhetoric, Proximization Theory

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1. Introduction

Political rhetoric serves as a powerful tool for shaping public opinion, articulating policy agendas, and ultimately securing electoral success (Fairclough, 2013). More than merely transmitting information, persuasive language actively constructs meaning, reinforces power structures, and influences the beliefs and actions of audiences (van Dijk, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In the context of increasingly polarized societies and a fragmented digital media landscape, understanding the nuances of political rhetoric and its impact on democratic processes is paramount (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Tucker et al., 2018). This article employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) to deconstruct the persuasive appeals utilized by Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in their 2024 campaign rhetoric, revealing the underlying ideological frameworks and power dynamics embedded within their communication. It also explored how their rhetoric aimed to define virtue and negativity through emotional expression (Crawford, 2014).

CDA, as a methodological approach, transcends a simple description of language use; it seeks to expose the often implicit ways in which discourse shapes social realities and perpetuates power relations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). By scrutinizing the linguistic choices, rhetorical devices, and narrative strategies employed by political actors, CDA aims to uncover the values, assumptions, and worldviews informing their communication (Gee, 2014). Connecting a personal message effectively remains a significant goal .This involves examining the basis of a speaker's claims – whether rooted in personal conviction or supported by external logic and evidence. CDA acknowledges that language is not neutral but reflects and reinforces specific ideological positions, contributing to the construction of consent or the mobilization of resistance (Gramsci, 1971). This is particularly critical in politics, where a speaker's words can resonate with the audience, influencing engagement and behavior (Bil-Jaruzelska & Monzer, 2022). Candidates aim to instill beliefs through clear language, building trust, and focusing on long-term goals (Benoit, 2014; Dunmire, 2011). This analysis helps clarify these processes.

This study examined the specific strategies employed by Democratic Party nominees and their potential impact on social interactions and behaviors. It explored how Biden and Harris attempted to persuade voters and promote their political agenda using various rhetorical techniques, including the crucial aspect of creating a shared identity and promoting collective values. The Democratic Party often crafts messages aimed at building

a sense of community (Maceyko, 2021), actively encouraging societal unity to foster larger movements. This approach seeks to enhance audience knowledge and action, potentially influencing campaign dynamics and election outcomes (Benoit, 2014; Brader, 2005). This article focused on analyzing a corpus of the nominees' speeches. The construction of collective identity, appeals to shared values, and the presentation of a hopeful future are examined through the combined lenses of Discourse Space Theory (DST) (Chilton, 2014), Proximization Theory (ProxT) (Cap, 2013), and Alternative Futures (AFs) (Koselleck, 2004). This framework is enriched with insights from framing theory. Using this theoretical combination and empirical data, this article aimed to elucidate the persuasive skills employed by these candidates, potentially shedding light on factors that influence voter decision-making (Malka & Costello, 2023).

Ultimately, this study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the persuasive appeals embedded within Harris and Biden's 2024 campaign rhetoric. By employing CDA, the analysis seeks to reveal the ideological underpinnings of their communication, the power dynamics at play, and the potential impact on public opinion and democratic participation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis: Foundations and Key Concepts

CDA is a transdisciplinary approach viewing language as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 2013). It moves beyond describing linguistic features to examine how language constructs, maintains, and legitimizes power relations (van Dijk, 2008). CDA assumes that discourse is ideologically shaped, reflecting the interests of particular social groups (Wodak, 2011), and acknowledges the interplay between language, power, and social structures (Chilton, 2004). It holds an explicit commitment to social critique, aiming to expose hidden power dynamics (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Key concepts include ideology, the system of beliefs shaping world understanding, which CDA examines for its construction and dissemination through language, often reinforcing dominant structures (van Dijk, 2008); power, the ability to influence and control resources and representation, explored by CDA in its exercise through discourse, including marginalization (Martín Rojo & van Dijk, 1997; van Dijk, 2020); and hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), the normalization of dominant ideologies as common sense, which CDA seeks to uncover. CDA often draws on

social constructionism, recognizing reality as shaped through interaction and discourse, to understand the linguistic construction of social categories and hierarchies (van Dijk, 2008).

2.2. Political Discourse Analysis (PDA): Examining Language in the Political Sphere

PDA, a specialized branch of CDA, focuses on language in politics. It investigates how political actors use language to persuade, influence, and shape public opinion. PDA recognizes political discourse constructs identities, builds alliances, and legitimizes power (Chilton, 2004; Wodak, 2011), combining linguistics with political science, sociology, and communication studies (Chilton & Schäffner, 1997). Effective political messages often integrate ethical, emotional, and logical appeals. PDA investigates political speeches, debates, media, and increasingly, online communication (Zappavigna, 2018). Researchers examine rhetorical devices, framing, arguments, and narratives to understand the crafting of messages (Lakoff, 2004). Context—the historical moment, political climate, and audience—is crucial (van Dijk, 2008; Wodak, 2011).

2.3. Persuasion in Political Communication: Key Theories and Approaches

Persuasion is inherent to political communication. Actors use acclaim, attack, and defense to establish preferability (Benoit, 2014). Persuasion is vital in campaigns, often linked to public approval (Benoit, 2014; Brader, 2005). Researchers study rhetorical techniques that build trust and legitimacy, evaluating the perceived sincerity and effectiveness of influence attempts (Crawford, 2014; Fisher, 1987). Analysis includes how candidates build positive self-images and undermine opponents (van Dijk, 2008), assessing argument validity beyond mere audience appeal. Several theories explain political persuasion. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) posits two routes to persuasion: central (argument-focused) and peripheral (heuristic/emotional cues) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Narrative Paradigm Theory argues that people are persuaded by stories that resonate with their values and experiences (Fisher, 1987); narrative coherence and fidelity are key determinants of persuasive success. Rhetorical questions can enhance ethos and persuasive impact if the stories align with the listener's values (Al-Hindawi et al., 2017). These theories highlight the complexity of persuasion, involving cognitive, emotional, and social factors. Crafting messages that resonate across diverse audiences is key (Fisher, 1987; Maceyko, 2021), ideally fostering trust (Crawford, 2014; Fisher, 1987)

2.4. The Construction of Identity and Othering in Political Discourse

Understanding how language constructs identities and group boundaries is central to political analysis (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Politicians use language to forge a shared identity among supporters, often invoking common values, goals, and experiences, sometimes by addressing feelings of ontological insecurity to strengthen group cohesion (Kinnvall, 2019). Connecting on a community level can foster a sense of belonging (Maceyko, 2021), provided the leader's actions are perceived to reflect public needs. Concurrently, negative representations of out-groups are often constructed through stereotypes, accusations, and fear appeals (van Dijk, 2008). Constructing 'us vs. them' narratives simplifies complex issues and mobilizes support (Schaffner & Chilton, 2002), often relying on shared symbols and collective memory to foster in-group solidarity. However, this frequently involves 'othering'—portraying specific groups as fundamentally different, inferior, or threatening, sometimes employing dehumanizing language (Martín Rojo & van Dijk, 1997). Analyzing how identities are constructed and social divisions are linguistically reinforced is crucial for understanding persuasive effects and impacts on social cohesion.

2.5. Proximization Theory and the Creation of Relevance

Building on the dynamics of 'us vs. them', ProxT describes linguistic and rhetorical strategies used to portray distant entities, events, or ideologies as immediately relevant and consequential to the audience (Cap, 2013). Relevance is strategically manufactured through perceived encroachment along temporal, spatial, and axiological dimensions (Cap, 2014). Temporal proximization links past events or potential future scenarios to the present moment, thereby creating a sense of urgency (Hansen, 2018). Spatial proximization represents distant entities or abstract threats as geographically or conceptually encroaching upon the audience's space. Axiological proximization highlights conflicts between value systems, framing specific issues or opposing groups as clashing with the audience's core beliefs (van Dijk, 2020). These strategies aim to make external or abstract elements feel psychologically closer and more threatening or salient, thereby influencing beliefs and motivating action. Speakers select these approaches strategically to achieve communicative goals, negotiate power dynamics, reproduce ideologies, and structure political discourse (Cap, 2014; Hansen, 2018; van Dijk, 2020).

2.6. The Construction of Alternative Futures in Political Rhetoric

Political discourse is inherently future-oriented, articulating visions for society and justifying present actions based on their anticipated future outcomes (Dunmire, 2011; Koselleck, 2004). Politicians construct competing narratives about the future, presenting their preferred scenario as desirable and attainable, while portraying alternative possibilities, often associated with opponents, as dangerous or undesirable (Dunmire, 2011). This persuasive technique aims to shape audience expectations, mobilize support for specific policies or candidates, and legitimize particular courses of action (Lakoff, 2004), effectively projecting the candidate's worldview as the desired future reality. The construction of AFs employs various rhetorical techniques, including forecasting potential benefits (e.g., prosperity, security) associated with the speaker's agenda (Haidt, 2012) and highlighting the risks or negative consequences of alternative paths (e.g., economic decline, social instability) (Altheide, 2006). Framing these AFs is crucial. Language choices, such as modal verbs (will, must), evaluative adjectives (positive, disastrous), and reinforcing narrative structures, are used to emphasize the probability, desirability, or inevitability of certain futures while discrediting others (Dunmire, 2011; Lakoff, 2004). Communicating compelling visions of the future is a key aspect of political leadership, aiming to make these narratives feel tangible and binding for the audience.

2.7. Moral Foundations

Political legitimacy often relies heavily on emotional appeals, particularly those that invoke fear or hope, which can significantly influence voters (Brader, 2005). Candidates strive to appear competent, demonstrate leadership qualities, and connect emotionally to build trust and respect (Crawford, 2014). Portraying oneself and one's platform as morally sound or 'good' is vital. Moral Foundations Theory provides a framework for analyzing how candidates' ethical appeals resonate with different audience moral sensibilities (Haidt, 2012). Empathy plays a key role, requiring an understanding of diverse perspectives and beliefs (Malka & Costello, 2023). Connecting moral arguments to historical precedents or shared values, often linking them to constructed Alternative Futures, can strengthen persuasive impact (Haidt, 2012), effectively balancing historical context with future aspirations.

2.8. Community and Collective Identity

Connecting with audiences at a community level and reinforcing a sense of collectivity are essential aspects of political leadership and persuasion. Evoking strong cultural ties can inspire adherence to shared moral codes and collective goals (Maceyko, 2021). The objective is often to instill trust and motivate collective action. Messaging can be strategically adapted to appeal to different demographics based on their backgrounds and salient issues, thereby potentially increasing influence and building a broad coalition of supporters (Benoit, 2014; Maceyko, 2021).

This review highlights the complexities of political persuasion. This article adopted a combined theoretical approach, utilizing CDA as the critical lens to unveil ideologies and power dynamics, integrated with DST for spatial/cognitive mapping, ProxT for relevance creation, AFs for future orientation, framing theory for message structure, and concepts from social identity theory. This integrated approach connected linguistic analysis to ethical and moral considerations, emphasizing the interplay of persuasion, power, and emotion in political discourse. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the main persuasive pragmatic structures in the discourse of the Democratic nominees?
2. What are the main ideological and epistemological frameworks (content/topics) of persuasion in the discourse of the Democratic nominees?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive research design rooted in CDA principles. A qualitative approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the nuanced linguistic and rhetorical strategies within Harris and Biden's campaign rhetoric, facilitating the uncovering of embedded meanings, values, and ideologies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive analysis focused on detailing the specific persuasive strategies observed and how they were linguistically realized. The research was interpretive, as identifying persuasive structures, deictic spaces, proximization tactics, and alternative futures required the researchers' understanding of linguistics, political context, and socio-emotional dynamics to interpret both explicit statements and implicit meanings. This interpretive stance acknowledges that researchers' decisions regarding data selection and analytical

emphasis shape the findings. Grounded in CDA, the study was inherently critical, aiming to explore not just the persuasive techniques themselves but also their potential social and political effects within the broader discourse landscape (Fairclough, 2013). It was also comparative, identifying key rhetorical features across different speeches and the debate context to conclude consistent patterns and strategic variations.

3.2. Corpus

The corpus for this analysis was strategically selected to provide a representative sample of persuasive discourse from Kamala Harris and Joe Biden during the 2024 election cycle. Purposive sampling was employed, focusing on texts considered significant in terms of their potential reach, intended audience, and reflection of core campaign messaging (Patton, 2015). The primary data included eight rally speeches (four from Joe Biden, four from Kamala Harris). These speeches were selected to represent various campaign phases, geographical locations (to capture diverse regional audiences), and key thematic announcements, prioritizing moments where core persuasive arguments and signature rhetorical styles were likely to be most prominent. Additionally, the transcript from the September 10, 2024, debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump was included. This text was selected specifically to analyze persuasive and defensive strategies deployed in a direct, confrontational setting, offering a different discursive context compared to rallies. The data collection period spanned from early 2024 campaign events up to the election date, focusing on the general election phase where messaging would be most refined.

3.3. Instrument and Analytical Model

The primary instrument for this study was an eclectic analytical framework combining concepts from several compatible theoretical traditions. CDA provided the overarching theoretical orientation, guiding the analysis toward understanding the interplay of language, power, ideology, and social construction (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Within this overarching approach, specific analytical tools were integrated: DST was used to map the cognitive and conceptual landscape of the rhetoric, analyzing how speakers positioned themselves, their audience, and key referents within dimensions of reference, time, and modality (Chilton, 2014). ProxT provided categories to examine how relevance and urgency were constructed through the manipulation of perceived distance along temporal,

spatial, and axiological axes (Cap, 2013). The concept of AFs guided the analysis of how competing visions of the future were constructed, highlighting privileged outcomes versus potential negative consequences (Dunmire, 2011; Koselleck, 2004). Insights from Framing Theory were also incorporated to identify how issues were presented, which aspects were emphasized or downplayed, and how values were embedded within these frames. This integrated framework enabled a multi-layered analysis examining both the pragmatic structures of persuasion and the underlying ideological and epistemological commitments.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process involved systematically identifying, accessing, and compiling the transcripts for the selected speeches and the debate. Initial identification of potentially relevant events (major rallies, key policy speeches, the scheduled debate) was done through monitoring reputable news sources (e.g., Associated Press, Reuters, major newspapers) and official campaign communications during the 2024 election cycle. Once specific events were identified based on the purposive sampling criteria (significance, timing, and location), searches for full transcripts were conducted across multiple sources to ensure accuracy and completeness. Primary sources included the official Biden-Harris campaign website (when available), C-SPAN archives, and databases such as LexisNexis, which provided transcripts published by news organizations.

The study employed multiple strategies to ensure both data reliability and validity. Cross-referencing transcripts from reputable sources ensured data reliability, with minor variations in punctuation or stage directions deemed inconsequential to the linguistic analysis. Additionally, inter-rater reliability (IRR) was established among the three researchers, with a 20% subset of the transcribed corpus independently coded and subsequently compared, yielding a substantial Cohen's Kappa agreement score of $\kappa = 0.86$, which confirmed the consistency of the coding process. Interpretive validity was addressed through triangulation of data sources and contexts, analyzing rally speeches and debate interactions to identify consistent persuasive strategies and ideological themes across varied communication situations. Construct validity was enhanced by integrating multiple theoretical lenses (DST, ProxT, AFs, Framing within CDA), facilitating a comprehensive and multi-faceted interpretation of the discourse. Detailed descriptions of the analytical procedures further supported the transparency and trustworthiness of the interpretations.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis followed an iterative and systematic process guided by the principles of CDA and an integrated analytical framework. Initially, each transcript underwent multiple readings to establish contextual understanding, noting event type, location, date, main topics, explicit agenda, and overall tone. Subsequently, a detailed textual analysis and micro-coding phase involved a close reading to identify specific linguistic features, rhetorical devices (such as metaphors, appeals, and pronouns), argumentation patterns, and information conveyance methods. This included initial annotations related to persuasive language and ideological indicators, maintaining contextual awareness. The core analysis involved applying DST, ProxT, and AFs. Using DST, the speaker's deictic center was identified, and discourse referents were mapped. ProxT categorized proximization strategies, and AFs analyzed future scenario constructions. Persuasive strategies were coded according to classical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos), and dominant ideological themes were identified, noting emotional expressions. The coding scheme was iteratively refined to ensure clarity, consistency, and reliability.

4. Results

4.1. Persuasive Pragmatic Structures in Democratic Nominees' Discourse

The analysis revealed that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris employed several key linguistic tools to construct persuasive arguments and connect with voters. Their arguments employed techniques designed to foster shared values, often utilizing ProxT and DST principles.

Building Shared Identity ('Us'): Biden frequently constructed a shared identity by emphasizing common values and group membership.

> Fellow Democrats, my fellow Americans, nearly four years ago in winter
> on the steps of the Capitol, on a cold January day, I raised my right hand
> and I swore an oath to you and to God, to preserve, protect, and defend the
> Constitution and to faithfully execute the office of the President of the
> United States (Biden rally: March 8, 2024).

The use of phrases like 'fellow Americans' aimed to evoke unity and establish shared ground based on civic duty and trust. He related the oath of office to align his values with those of the audience.

Empathy Demonstrations: Both nominees frequently incorporated expressions of empathy, often drawing on personal narratives.

> I grew up as a child of the Civil Rights Movement. My parents would take me to marches in a stroller where crowds of people of all races, faiths, and walks of life came together to fight for the ideals of freedom and opportunity (Kamala Harris' speech in National Convention: August 23, 2024).

Harris utilized personal memories to establish connections and convey shared values, particularly regarding equality and social justice, employing an emotional appeal to foster a deeper connection.

Future as the 'Now' (Temporal Proximization): A common technique involved framing preferred future outcomes with present urgency, often using declarative and imperative moods.

> We got from economic crisis to the strongest economy in the entire world. Record 16 million new jobs... I'm going to make that available to every senior (Biden's speech explaining why he withdrew from the 2024 presidential race, July 25, 2024).

This statement combined past achievements with a future promise presented as an immediate action ('I'm going to make'), creating urgency around supporting seniors.

4.2. Ideological and Epistemological Frameworks of Democratic Nominees

The analysis identified core ideological and epistemological frameworks underpinning the nominees' persuasive content.

Commitment to Main Ideologies: Emphasis on core tenets, such as democracy, justice, safety, and global partnerships, formed the ideological backbone.

> The fact is that... Iran attacked American troops... caused brain damage... and he [Trump] did nothing about it... He said they're just having headaches... We didn't do a thing... (Joe Biden, June 28, 2024).

Biden framed his opponent's inaction as a failure of leadership and a disregard for troop safety, reinforcing the importance of national security (axiological proximization of threat/neglect).

Data and Expert Opinions (Logos/Ethos): A reliance on statistical data, factual arguments, and references to expert sources was evident, aiming to establish credibility.

"...The best economists in our country, if not the world, have reviewed our

relative plans for the future of America" (Kamala Harris, September 10,

2024 - Debate context).

By referencing the best economists, they aimed to validate their plans, lending authority and trustworthiness to their proposals.

Appeals to Core American Values and a Common Good (Pathos/Ethos): Recurring emphasis on shared values like decency, equality, and the essence of American identity, often delivered with emotional weight.

Is democracy still America's sacred cause? ...Whether democracy is still

America's sacred cause is the most urgent question of our time (Joe Biden,

January 5, 2024).

Framing democracy as a sacred cause and an urgent question served as a powerful emotional and value-based appeal to unite supporters around a core principle.

Establishing 'Common' Status: Nominees sometimes framed themselves as relatable individuals sharing everyday American experiences.

As a kid, I went through what everyone went through. (Kamala Harris,

October 29, 2024).

Using simple language and relatable experiences aimed to make Harris seem accessible and down-to-earth, connecting with audiences less focused on policy details.

Positive Visions of the Future (AFs): Articulating hopeful future scenarios was crucial, often linked to specific actions or policies.

We're going to make America great again, and it's going to happen fast

(Joe Biden, March 8, 2024).

Focusing on improvement and using powerful, concise language created a sense of urgent optimism, contrasting with the potential negative futures implied by opponents. The following Table 1 summarizes the results.

Table 1

Summary Table of Findings

Feature	Description	Example Strategy/Theme	Primary Appeal(s)	Associated Theory
Pragmatic Structures	How arguments were built linguistically	Building Shared Identity ('Us'); Empathy Demonstrations; Future as 'Now'	Ethos, Pathos	DST, ProxT
Ideological Frameworks	Core beliefs and values promoted	Commitment to Democracy, Justice, Safety; Appeals to Core American Values	Ethos, Pathos	CDA, MFT
Epistemological Frameworks	How knowledge/truth claims were justified	Reliance on Data & Experts; Establishing 'Common' Status; Personal Narratives	Logos, Ethos	Framing, NPT
Future Orientation	How future possibilities were presented	Positive Visions linked to action; Contrasting positive/negative scenarios (Implicit)	Pathos, Logos	AFs
Identity Construction	How in-groups and out-groups (implicit) were defined	Inclusive 'Us' vs. implied alternative (opponent's vision/failures)	Ethos, Pathos	CDA, SIT

(Note: MFT = Moral Foundations Theory, NPT = Narrative Paradigm Theory, SIT = Social Identity Theory)

The above table effectively synthesizes the study's core findings by mapping the identified persuasive features to their descriptions, specific examples, dominant rhetorical appeals, and associated theoretical underpinnings. It demonstrates how pragmatic structures, such as building a shared Us identity and creating urgency through temporal proximization (linked to DST and ProxT), primarily utilize ethos and pathos. These structures served to convey key ideological commitments to democracy and justice (connected to CDA and MFT). Epistemologically, the table highlights a dual approach: justifying claims through data and experts (logos/ethos, linked to Framing) while also using personal narratives and establishing common ground (ethos/pathos, linked to NPT). Finally, it shows how the articulation of positive AFs and the construction of an inclusive identity (SIT/CDA) were central strategies, often relying on pathos and ethos to present a compelling vision.

5. Discussion

The findings illuminate distinctive persuasive strategies and ideological frameworks employed by Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in their 2024 campaign rhetoric. Analyzing

these through the integrated lenses of CDA, DST, ProxT, AFs, and framing theory provides a nuanced understanding of how they engaged voters, shaped perceptions, and proposed their vision for the future.

Answering RQ1, the main persuasive pragmatic structures revolved around constructing an inclusive 'Us' and creating relevance through proximity. The frequent use of terms like 'fellow Americans' and empathetic narratives aimed to establish common ground and shared identity, aligning with research on collective identity mobilization (Maceyko, 2021) and the importance of narrative coherence (Fisher, 1987). Strategies like presenting future actions with present urgency (temporal proximization) align with Cap's (2013) ProxT, making desired outcomes feel immediate and actionable. These structures relied heavily on appeals to ethos (building trust and shared values) and pathos (empathy, shared identity), consistent with the need for political leaders to connect on a human level (Crawford, 2014).

Addressing RQ2, the main ideological and epistemological frameworks centered on core Democratic tenets (democracy, justice, equality) and justification through evidence and shared values. The consistent appeal to democracy as a 'sacred cause' reflects attempts to activate deeply held values (Haidt, 2012). The reliance on expert opinion and data aligns with strategies documented to increase perceived trustworthiness, especially in complex policy areas. This contrasts with rhetorical styles that might prioritize solely emotional or identity-based appeals over factual grounding. Framing themselves as common individuals served an epistemological function by suggesting their understanding stemmed from shared experience, aiming for relatability (Maceyko, 2021). The construction of positive Alternative Futures, often contrasted implicitly with the negative consequences attributed to opponents' actions or ideologies (Dunmire, 2011), served both ideological (promoting their vision) and persuasive (motivating action) goals.

The emphasis on unity and shared values reflects a strategy potentially aimed at countering polarization, although its effectiveness depends on the audience's perception of sincerity (Haidt, 2012). While constructing an 'Us' is common (Schaffner & Chilton, 2002), the breadth of the intended Us in Harris and Biden's rhetoric appears wider than strategies focused primarily on activating a narrow base through strong othering. The blend of logical appeals (data, experts) with emotional and value-based arguments (empathy, democracy) reflects the multi-faceted nature of persuasion described by ELM (Petty &

Cacioppo, 1986) and Narrative Paradigm Theory (Fisher, 1987). The consistent linkage of policy proposals to core values (e.g., fairness, opportunity) aligns with Lakoff's (2004) work on framing political debates around underlying moral worldviews.

The candidates' reliance on facts and expert opinions seeks to build credibility in an era often characterized by misinformation, positioning themselves as responsible and knowledgeable leaders. However, the challenge lies in ensuring these appeals resonate beyond audiences already inclined to trust such sources. Ultimately, the persuasive effectiveness hinges on the perceived coherence and fidelity (Fisher, 1987) of their overall narrative, which integrates personal stories, expert data, core values, and future visions into a compelling whole.

6. Conclusion

This critical discourse analysis of Harris and Biden's (2024) campaign rhetoric revealed a persuasive strategy centered on unity, competence, and a forward-looking vision. By strategically constructing an inclusive Us, grounding arguments in factual evidence and empathetic appeals, and articulating aspirational goals, the Democratic nominees sought to establish intellectual and emotional connections with voters. This approach, often in contrast to more divisive rhetoric, highlights the potential power of positive messaging and shared values in contemporary political discourse. The study highlights the role of language in shaping perceptions and influencing outcomes, demonstrating how strategic communication can be effectively leveraged.

The implications extend beyond the 2024 U.S. election. In an era of polarization and misinformation, this study offers insights for political communicators, strategists, and citizens. The findings suggest that striking a balance between emotional appeals and identity narratives, on the one hand, and factual accuracy, reasoned argument, and concern for broader societal well-being, on the other, is crucial. It provides a framework for politicians to be mindful of their rhetorical techniques and connect with voters more productively. Understanding these dynamics can contribute to enhanced political communication literacy and more informed voters, potentially fostering more constructive public discourse.

Limitations should be acknowledged. The qualitative analysis restricts generalizability; findings are specific to the selected corpus. The chosen theoretical

framework guided the analysis, but it potentially overlooked other relevant aspects of communication. The focus on speech texts neglects nonverbal cues, audience factors, and the broader socio-political climate. Qualitative interpretation inherently involves subjectivity.

Future research could complement these findings with quantitative methods (e.g., corpus linguistics) for objective assessment. Exploring alternative theoretical frameworks (e.g., cognitive linguistics, agenda-setting) could offer new insights. Longitudinal studies tracking persuasive strategies over time could reveal adaptations to changing contexts. Incorporating audience reception studies (surveys, focus groups) would directly assess the effectiveness of identified strategies. These efforts could further illuminate the interplay between society, politics, and communication, potentially empowering the public to make more informed choices and contribute to a healthier democracy.

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