

# GENDERED PERSUASION IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS: ARISTOTELIAN ANALYSIS OF ETHOS, PATHOS, LOGOS IN HARRIS-TRUMP RHETORIC

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**Abstract.** The 2024 United States presidential campaign offered a unique opportunity to examine the intersection of gender and political communication, particularly through the persuasive linguistic strategies of Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. Although extensive scholarship exists on gender bias in political leadership, fewer studies have analyzed how gender expectations shape candidates' deployment of classical rhetorical appeals. Guided primarily by Aristotle's concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos, and supported interpretively by Lakoff's gender and language theory and Role Congruity Theory, this manuscript explores the ways in which Harris and Trump construct credibility, evoke emotional responses, and develop logical arguments in their campaign speeches. The analysis draws on six speeches delivered across three key campaign stages, representing primary election statements, pre-election arguments, and post-election remarks. Speech texts were assembled into a cleaned corpus and coded through NVivo, supported by type-token ratio calculations to capture lexical diversity. Findings show that Harris constructs an ethos rooted in moral legitimacy, service, and collective identity, deploys empathetic and inclusive emotional appeals, and relies on structured, policy-oriented logical reasoning. Trump constructs a contrasting ethos of authoritative dominance, uses fear, anger, and crisis-driven emotional activation, and employs simplified causality to justify assertive political action. The comparative analysis reveals that Aristotelian appeals are deeply shaped by gender norms, with Harris navigating contradictory expectations of authority and warmth, and Trump amplifying traditionally masculine rhetorical conventions without penalty. By demonstrating how persuasive appeals intersect with gendered communicative structures, this manuscript contributes to scholarship in political rhetoric and gender studies, offering insights relevant for understanding contemporary presidential discourse and the challenges faced by female candidates in navigating expectations of leadership, emotion, and public credibility.

**Keywords:** *Aristotle, persuasion, gendered rhetoric, Kamala Harris, Donald Trump, political communication*

## Introduction

Political communication is central to the functioning of democratic society, and presidential campaigns in the United States have long served as stages upon which rhetorical identities are constructed, negotiated, and contested. From the early foundations of the republic in 1787 to contemporary elections that unfold under global scrutiny, presidential campaigns rely heavily on persuasive speech as a mechanism for shaping public opinion and asserting candidate legitimacy. Rhetoric provides the means through which candidates articulate values, clarify visions, define problems, and position themselves in relation to national identity and political leadership. Yet the rhetorical landscape is neither neutral nor uniform. Instead, it is shaped by historical, social, and cultural expectations, including those related to gender. In the 2024 presidential election, Kamala Harris and Donald Trump represented two distinct

rhetorical traditions and navigated profoundly different gendered expectations. Harris entered the campaign as the first woman, first African American, and first Asian American vice president, bearing demographic distinctions that signified both historic progress and ongoing vulnerability to gender and racial bias. Prior research indicates that women leaders face persistent doubts about their legitimacy because leadership stereotypes remain overwhelmingly masculine, emphasizing decisiveness, assertiveness, and authority (Koenig et al., 2011). Gender stereotypes also impose contradictory expectations on women: they must demonstrate strength without appearing overly aggressive, warmth without seeming weak, and moral clarity without violating expectations of femininity (Rohrbach, 2025; Heilman et al., 2004). Harris's rhetorical choices were therefore shaped within a context of heightened scrutiny, with Pew Research Center (2024) reporting that over forty percent of her own supporters perceived her gender and racial identity as electoral disadvantages.

In contrast, Donald Trump continued to rely on a rhetorical persona rooted in assertive masculinity, combative expression, and populist framing. His speeches in prior elections were characterized by aggressive language, stark divisions between “us” and “them,” and crisis-laden narratives that called for strong national leadership. Statements such as “I’m really rich” exemplify Trump’s strategy of constructing authority through dominance, success, and unwavering confidence. Public expectations for male leadership align well with Trump’s rhetorical style, freeing him from the double bind faced by female candidates. These contrasting rhetorical environments and gender expectations raise important questions about how persuasive strategies operate differently across male and female presidential candidates. Aristotle’s rhetorical theory offers a powerful framework for this inquiry. Ethos, pathos, and logos represent credibility, emotional appeal, and logical reasoning, respectively, and together they provide a structured lens for analyzing political persuasion. While these categories have been applied extensively in political rhetoric research, much less attention has been given to how gender shapes the deployment and reception of Aristotelian appeals, particularly in modern presidential elections.

This manuscript examines how Harris and Trump use ethos, pathos, and logos across key speeches from the 2024 presidential campaign, and how their persuasive choices intersect with gender-based linguistic expectations. Although Aristotelian rhetoric provides the primary analytical framework, gender linguistics—especially Lakoff’s gender and language theory and insights from Role Congruity Theory—serve as interpretive tools to contextualize differences without dominating the analysis. Through qualitative textual analysis supported by NVivo-assisted coding and corpus linguistic statistics, this study demonstrates that persuasive appeals are deeply influenced by gendered communicative norms, which shape the rhetorical strategies available to and expected from male and female candidates. The findings contribute to theoretical understanding of gendered persuasion and illuminate the unique communicative challenges faced by women seeking presidential leadership.

### *Literature review*

Research on political rhetoric has long emphasized the importance of persuasive communication in shaping public perceptions and legitimizing leadership. Aristotle’s rhetorical framework remains foundational in analyzing political speech, as it offers a structured model for understanding how speakers persuade through credibility, emotion, and logic. Ethos refers to the speaker’s character and trustworthiness, pathos appeals to

the audience's emotions, and logos pertains to the logical consistency and evidential support of arguments. Scholars have applied this framework to a wide range of political contexts, including the speeches of Kennedy, Roosevelt, Obama, Putin, and British prime ministers (Tian, 2022; Kazemian and Hashemi, 2014; Osborne, 1980). These studies consistently show that successful political leaders integrate appeals in ways that reflect audience expectations and situational demands. Despite this extensive body of work, the literature often assumes a rhetorical environment unaffected by gender. However, gender significantly shapes both the performance and interpretation of persuasive appeals. Research indicates that leadership stereotypes remain closely aligned with traditional masculinity, valuing assertiveness, independence, and rationality (Koenig et al., 2011). Women who aspire to leadership positions face a double bind: when they adopt masculine traits, they risk backlash for violating feminine norms; when they conform to feminine expectations, they risk being perceived as weak and unfit for leadership (Heilman et al., 2004). This paradox profoundly impacts women's rhetorical strategies in political contexts.

Studies of gender bias in U.S. presidential campaigns illustrate the persistence of these challenges. Bligh et al. (2004) found that voters often acknowledge the competence of female candidates like Hillary Clinton while simultaneously harboring mistrust rooted in gender norms. Rohrbach (2025) further explains that voter evaluations are shaped by stereotype incongruity, where women politicians must navigate competing expectations of kindness and competence. These findings suggest that female candidates must carefully calibrate their rhetorical strategies, particularly when constructing ethos and deploying emotionally charged language. Lakoff's gender and language theory provides additional insight into gendered linguistic expectations. Lakoff (1973) argued that women's speech has historically been characterized by politeness, indirectness, and emotional expressiveness, traits traditionally misinterpreted as linguistic weakness but more accurately reflective of societal expectations. Later scholars such as O'Barr and Atkins (2005) reframed these features, noting that so-called "women's language" is better understood as "powerless language," shaped not inherently by gender but by social position. Nevertheless, political audiences often interpret linguistic choices through gendered lenses, granting legitimacy to authoritative male speech while scrutinizing or penalizing forceful speech by women.

In presidential rhetoric, these gendered dynamics are especially salient. Trump's speeches employ confrontational, emotionally charged, and crisis-oriented rhetoric that aligns with cultural associations of masculine leadership. His use of phrases such as "they are killing our people," "we will save the country," and descriptions of national threats as "invasions" reinforce a strongman persona that resonates with a sizable segment of the electorate. Harris, conversely, utilizes empathetic, inclusive, and community-oriented language that reflects expectations for feminine communication. She speaks of "faith," "care," and "community," often invoking family narratives and shared values, thereby reinforcing emotional connection and moral legitimacy. Although scholars have analyzed gendered rhetoric in presidential races, there remains a notable gap in research that integrates Aristotle's rhetorical appeals with gender linguistics in the context of modern U.S. presidential campaigns. Existing scholarship tends to treat Aristotelian and gender frameworks separately, missing the opportunity to examine how persuasive appeals operate differently across gendered communicative landscapes. The present manuscript addresses this gap by offering a gendered Aristotelian analysis of the rhetorical strategies employed by Harris and Trump, with

attention to how credibility, emotion, and logic are strategically adapted to navigate public expectations shaped by gender norms.

## Materials and Methods

This manuscript uses qualitative textual analysis to examine the rhetorical strategies of Kamala Harris and Donald Trump through the lens of Aristotle's ethos, pathos, and logos. The analysis focuses on six major speeches delivered during three pivotal stages of the 2024 U.S. presidential campaign: the primary election period, the final statements before the general election, and the post-election period. These speeches were sourced from reputable news organizations, including BBC News Chinese, The Washington Post, Vanity Fair, and Oklahoma Voice. The speeches were compiled into a textual corpus and prepared for analysis using EmEditor. Corpus cleaning included the removal of extraneous punctuation, timestamps, hyperlinks, and formatting irregularities. All texts were standardized and saved in UTF-8 format to ensure compatibility with NVivo. The cleaned corpus contained a total of 7,177 tokens across the six speeches (*Table 1*). Type-token ratio calculations revealed that Harris's corpus exhibited higher lexical diversity than Trump's, with a TTR of 37.75% compared to Trump's 35.32%. Higher lexical diversity in Harris's speeches suggests a broader range of vocabulary and more nuanced linguistic choices, which may reflect gendered rhetorical adaptation.

*Table 1. Summary statistics.*

Candidate	Total Tokens	Total Types	Type-Token Ratio (TTR)
Harris	3,425	1,294	37.75%
Trump	3,752	1,325	35.32%
Combined Corpus	7,177	-	-

Due to significant differences in speech length between the two candidates, an interval sampling method was applied to ensure comparability. Harris's speeches averaged approximately 20 paragraphs, while Trump's speeches were considerably longer. To address this imbalance, the sampling procedure extracted equal numbers of segments from Trump's speeches by selecting paragraphs at equidistant intervals from the beginning, middle, and end of each text. This head-middle-tail sampling approach ensured that the analytical corpus remained representative of each speech's structure and thematic progression while maintaining manageable and comparable data volumes for qualitative coding. The analytical framework was built around Aristotle's rhetorical appeals. NVivo was used to code instances of ethos, pathos, and logos across the corpus. Ethos was operationalized as expressions of credibility, integrity, leadership identity, and moral character. Pathos was coded as the use of emotionally charged language, narratives, or imagery that sought to evoke empathy, fear, pride, anger, hope, or community sentiment. Logos was coded as logical argumentation, including causal reasoning, evidence-based claims, structured policy explanations, or appeals to rational decision-making.

Gender linguistics, including elements from Lakoff's gender and language theory and Role Congruity Theory, were not coded as primary categories but were used interpretively to contextualize the findings. Instances of gendered language, such as inclusive pronouns, emotional vocabulary, or aggressive rhetorical framing, were examined only after the initial Aristotelian coding to avoid imposing gender

frameworks prematurely. This approach preserved the primacy of Aristotelian rhetoric while enabling a nuanced interpretation of how persuasive appeals intersect with gender norms. Reliability was maintained through iterative coding cycles. Segments were re-examined multiple times to ensure consistency in the categorization of appeals. Ethical considerations were met by using publicly accessible data, maintaining transparency in analytical procedures, and ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in the empirical corpus rather than researcher bias.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis of six speeches delivered by Kamala Harris and Donald Trump across three phases of the 2024 U.S. presidential campaign revealed distinct rhetorical patterns aligned with Aristotle’s ethos, pathos, and logos. The NVivo-assisted coding identified how each candidate constructed credibility, emotional activation, and logical argumentation in gender-differentiated ways. Ethos emerged as a key area of divergence. Harris constructed credibility through moral legitimacy, personal family narratives, and service-minded public identity (Lakoff, 1973) (*Table 2*). Her reliance on inclusive pronouns such as “we” and “our” reinforced a collective persona grounded in empathy and shared values. In contrast, Trump projected an ethos rooted in strength, dominance, and economic success, frequently emphasizing his achievements with statements such as “I’m really rich”. This ethos aligned with culturally entrenched stereotypes of masculine leadership (Eagly, 2007). Pathos showed similarly sharp contrasts (*Table 3*). Harris’s emotional appeals centered on unity, care, empathy, and collective hope. She frequently invoked the aspirations of ordinary Americans and relied on affective expressions that align with feminine communication expectations. Trump’s emotional landscape was shaped by fear, threat, anger, and crisis. He repeatedly described immigration and national issues using crisis-laden metaphors, evoking militaristic terms such as “invasion” that intensified emotional urgency among supporters. These findings were consistent with research that male anger is often culturally rewarded while female anger is penalized (Stanaland et al., 2023).

*Table 2. Summary of ethos differences.*

Harris	Trump
Service-oriented	Dominance-oriented
Moral legitimacy	Wealth/success as credibility
Collective identity	Strongman persona
Balances warmth & authority	Amplifies aggression

*Table 3. Summary of pathos differences.*

Harris	Trump
Hope, unity, empathy	Fear, anger, crisis
Avoids aggression	Normalizes aggression
Inclusive emotion	Polarizing emotion

Logos also differed significantly (*Table 4*). Harris demonstrated detailed, structured, policy-focused reasoning, drawing causal connections and relying on evidence-based claims to build logical arguments. This emphasis on structured logic corresponds to observations that women often must demonstrate heightened competence to overcome gendered assumptions of inadequacy (Koenig et al., 2011; Heilman et al., 2004). Trump

relied on simplified, narrative-driven causal chains that framed political issues in direct cause-and-effect terms. His speeches favored bold, action-oriented reasoning and avoided extended policy detail, reflecting a rhetorical style aligned with assertive masculine authority. Collectively, these results indicate that despite both candidates drawing on Aristotle’s appeals, the shape and function of their rhetorical strategies diverged sharply along gendered communicative expectations. The speeches demonstrate consistent patterns in ethos, pathos, and logos that correspond to culturally gendered norms and constraints. The findings demonstrate that gendered expectations strongly condition the persuasive strategies available to political candidates. Harris and Trump employ Aristotle’s appeals, but the rhetorical consequences differ because the cultural reception of ethos, pathos, and logos remains deeply gendered.

**Table 4.** Summary of logos differences.

Harris	Trump
Policy-driven	Action-driven
Structured logic	Simplified logic
Evidence-based reasoning	Bold claims, minimal evidence

***Ethos as gendered leadership performance***

Harris’s reliance on moral legitimacy, family narrative, and collective identity reflects a calibrated ethos shaped by the double bind described by Heilman et al. (2004). Her rhetorical persona attempts to reconcile feminine expectations of warmth with masculine expectations of authority. The personal narratives she deploys, particularly references to her mother’s resilience, reinforce her authenticity while maintaining a communal leadership identity aligned with Lakoff (1973) observations about feminine relational linguistic styles. This aligns with broader scholarship demonstrating that women frequently rely on relational ethos to counteract stereotypes of incompetence (Rohrbach, 2025; Bligh et al., 2004). Trump’s ethos, in contrast, is built upon dominance, strength, and personal exceptionalism. Statements highlighting wealth, toughness, and unique capability reflect a rhetorical performance of masculinity that aligns with cultural expectations of male leaders (Eagly, 2007). His ethos benefits from what Role Congruity Theory identifies as congruence between masculine traits and leadership stereotypes (Koenig et al., 2011). Because assertiveness and aggression are not penalized when performed by men, Trump’s ethos is allowed to expand within rhetorical spaces denied to women.

***Pathos and the limits of emotional legitimacy***

Harris’s emotional appeals emphasize inclusion, compassion, and shared hope, reflecting her commitment to community-based rhetorical grounding. These emotional strategies align with cultural expectations for women to express empathy rather than anger. Her avoidance of anger, even when discussing systemic injustice, mirrors Stanaland et al. (2023) findings that women who display anger are perceived as less competent and less likable than men exhibiting the same emotions. Trump’s emotional rhetoric is confrontational, crisis-driven, and polarizing. His repeated use of fear and anger “They are killing our people” mobilizes supporters while reinforcing his strongman persona. This pattern aligns with masculine-coded emotional expression, where anger serves as a legitimate political tool. The pathos strategies available to each candidate are thus shaped by gender: Harris’s emotional register is constrained to

socially permissible affect, while Trump's register expands into aggression without penalty.

### ***Logos and gendered demonstrations of competence***

Harris's logical reasoning is characterized by elaborate causal chains, structured policy explanations, and evidence-based argumentation. This reflects the heightened requirement for women to display competence in order to be perceived as credible political actors (Heilman et al., 2004). Her speeches demonstrate the kind of meticulous logical organization identified by Kazemian and Hashemi (2014) as markers of effective political rhetoric. Trump's logos relies less on detail and more on decisive, simplified causal claims. His narrative logic frames problems in binary terms, emphasising immediate, strong action over nuanced policy explanation. Because masculine authority is culturally associated with decisiveness rather than elaboration, his simplified logical style strengthens rather than undermines his ethos. This reflects the rhetorical privilege afforded to male candidates: they may rely on narrative and crisis framing without suffering credibility loss.

### ***Gendered persuasion and the limits of Aristotelian Universality***

While Aristotle's appeals remain foundational in rhetorical analysis, the findings underscore that ethos, pathos, and logos are not applied or received neutrally. Their execution is filtered through gendered norms governing who is allowed to speak with authority, anger, or brevity. Harris must exhibit warmth and detail simultaneously, while Trump may amplify dominance and emotional extremity without violating expectations. This mirrors broader patterns of gendered performance documented in Kamaruzaman (2024) work on non-normative identity negotiation, where public legitimacy is mediated by adherence to culturally sanctioned scripts. The campaign speeches therefore reveal the structural asymmetry embedded within contemporary political persuasion. While Harris's rhetoric represents an attempt to broaden the interpretive space available to women leaders, Trump's rhetoric reinforces the normative masculine performance that continues to shape political communication.

## **Conclusion**

The 2024 U.S. presidential campaign offered a vivid demonstration of how gender shapes rhetorical persuasion. Through an Aristotelian analysis of ethos, pathos, and logos across speeches by Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, this manuscript has shown that persuasive appeals are deeply intertwined with gendered expectations of leadership, emotion, and credibility. Harris constructs ethos through moral legitimacy and inclusivity, deploys pathos through hope and empathy, and builds logos through detailed policy reasoning. Trump constructs ethos through dominance, deploys pathos through anger and crisis, and strengthens logos through simplified causal narratives. These differences are not merely stylistic but reflect broader sociocultural norms that privilege masculine rhetorical performance. Women candidates face the burden of balancing contradictory expectations that require them to be strong yet warm, logical yet approachable, and authoritative yet humble. The rhetorical freedom available to men allows them to deploy persuasive strategies that would expose women to criticism. As demonstrated throughout this analysis, gender continues to shape political

communication in ways that challenge the pursuit of equitable democratic participation. Future research may expand on these insights by examining multimodal rhetorical strategies, such as visual communication or social media discourse, or by exploring cross-cultural differences in gendered persuasion. Nonetheless, the present analysis underscores the enduring relevance of Aristotelian rhetoric and the importance of integrating gendered perspectives when examining contemporary political communication.

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