



EMOTIONAL STRATEGIES IN POLITICAL SPEECH: HOW POLITICIANS MANAGE AUDIENCES THROUGH EMOTION

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Abstract. *Emotions have emerged as a central mechanism through which political meaning is constructed and stabilized in contemporary public discourse. Rather than being spontaneous or secondary elements, emotional appeals in political speech are strategically organized to manage audience interpretation, moral judgment, and collective identification. This article examines emotional strategies in political speech, conceptualizing them as structured mechanisms of audience management. Drawing on political discourse analysis and cognitive theories of emotion, a three-dimensional analytical model is proposed, encompassing cognitive orientation, moral positioning, and collective identification. Qualitative analysis of high-impact political speeches in electoral, crisis, and policy contexts demonstrates how emotions such as hope, fear, and empathy are systematically embedded in linguistic choices and narrative structures to shape political legitimacy and mobilization. The findings suggest that emotional strategies enhance persuasive effectiveness by simplifying complex political realities, legitimizing political actions, and fostering affective alignment between speakers and audiences.*

Keywords: *political speech; emotional strategies; political discourse; audience management; persuasion*

Introduction. Political speech should be understood not merely as a persuasive act but as a form of strategic emotional governance. In political discourse, emotions do not simply accompany arguments; they structure how arguments are perceived, evaluated, and internalized. Emotional strategies function as mechanisms regulating audience interpretation, prioritizing certain meanings while marginalizing others. This positions emotion at the core of political power, rather than at its periphery.

Traditional approaches to political communication often separate rational persuasion from emotional appeal, treating emotion as secondary or disruptive. However, this dichotomy overlooks how political meaning is actually constructed. Emotional framing operates as a cognitive filter through which political information is processed. Emotion does not oppose rationality; rather, it conditions attention, relevance, and moral evaluation. Political speech



relies on emotions to stabilize meaning in contexts of uncertainty and ideological competition.

From a discourse-theoretical perspective, emotional strategies are discursive resources enabling political actors to manage audience alignment. Emotions contribute to legitimacy construction by transforming political positions into moral imperatives. By evoking hope, fear, or empathy, political speech does more than persuade; it defines what is considered normal, necessary, or inevitable. Emotional discourse thus plays a key role in reproducing power relations by naturalizing particular political interpretations.

This study argues that emotional strategies in political speech operate along three interrelated dimensions: cognitive orientation, moral positioning, and collective identification. At the cognitive level, emotions simplify complex political realities by directing audience attention to emotionally salient elements. At the moral level, emotional framing assigns value judgments, distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable political choices. At the collective level, emotions foster shared identities by invoking common feelings, memories, and expectations. These dimensions interact dynamically within political discourse.

Positive emotional strategies, such as appeals to hope and unity, primarily foster collective identification, encouraging audiences to perceive themselves as part of a coherent political community oriented toward a shared future. Negative emotional strategies, particularly fear-based framing, operate strongly at cognitive and moral levels by narrowing acceptable interpretations and legitimizing urgent political action. Empathy-based strategies bridge these dimensions by humanizing political authority and aligning individual experience with broader political narratives.

Importantly, emotional strategies should not be interpreted solely as manipulative. While they can be strategically exploited, emotions are integral to democratic communication, providing the motivational force necessary for political participation. The critical issue is not the presence of emotion in political speech, but its structure and purpose.

By conceptualizing emotional strategies as structured, multi-dimensional mechanisms of audience management, this article contributes to political discourse analysis in two ways. First, it moves beyond descriptive accounts of emotional language by offering a theoretical model explaining how emotions function within political power structures. Second, it integrates insights from cognitive psychology and discourse theory, demonstrating that emotional persuasion is neither irrational nor accidental but systematically embedded in political communication.





Methodology. This study employs qualitative discourse analysis as its primary methodological approach. A corpus of contemporary political speeches delivered in high-impact contexts—including electoral campaigns, national addresses, and crisis communication—was selected based on public visibility and relevance to political decision-making.

The analysis focused on emotional vocabulary, metaphorical structures, narrative sequencing, and patterns of emphasis. Emotional strategies were identified through contextual interpretation rather than quantitative measurement. This approach enables an in-depth examination of emotional discourse as a deliberate communicative practice embedded within broader political objectives.

Discussion. The analysis demonstrates that emotional strategies function as systematic mechanisms of audience management rather than incidental rhetorical embellishments. Conceptualizing emotion as a discursive resource that structures interpretation challenges traditional distinctions between rational argumentation and emotional appeal in political communication. Emotions actively shape cognitive processing, moral evaluation, and collective internalization of political messages.

The proposed three-dimensional model—cognitive orientation, moral positioning, and collective identification—provides a theoretically grounded framework for understanding emotional influence. At the cognitive level, emotional framing directs attention and reduces interpretive complexity, foregrounding specific meanings while backgrounding alternatives. At the moral level, emotional appeals assign evaluative weight to political positions, transforming policy preferences into moral imperatives. At the collective level, emotions foster affective bonds that align individual experiences with broader political narratives, reinforcing group cohesion and political loyalty.

These findings extend research on political persuasion by showing that emotional strategies actively participate in constructing political reality. Emotional discourse normalizes certain interpretations by presenting them as emotionally self-evident and morally compelling. Emotion, therefore, operates as a form of discursive power stabilizing meaning in contexts of ideological contestation.

The study avoids reducing emotional strategies solely to manipulative practices. While emotions can constrain democratic deliberation, they also motivate political engagement and collective action. The distinction lies in how emotional strategies are structured and whether they enable or restrict reflective political judgment.

By foregrounding emotion as constitutive of political meaning-making, this article contributes to theoretical debates in political discourse analysis and political communication. The proposed framework can be applied across contexts and genres, including comparative, multimodal, and digital discourse, positioning emotion at the center of political power and persuasion.





Conclusion. Emotional strategies are not peripheral embellishments but constitutive elements of political discourse. They systematically shape cognitive processing, moral evaluation, and collective identification, enabling politicians to construct legitimacy, guide interpretation, and mobilize support.

Future research may extend this framework to cross-cultural contexts, media-mediated communication, and digital political discourse, including social media. Recognizing emotion as central to political meaning-making advances both conceptual understanding and practical tools for critical evaluation.

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