

**Speaking character:
Kamala Harris and the construction
of a rhetorical character
in the 2024 Presidential Campaign
(Part 1)**

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Abstract

This study investigates how Kamala Harris constructed her rhetorical *ethos* in 2024 presidential campaign rally speeches through the lens of Aristotle's three dimensions of *ethos*: *arete*, *phronesis*, and *eunoia*. It explores both the balance among these dimensions and the rhetorical strategies through which they are discursively realized. Specifically, drawing on Herman's typology, the study examines an interplay between *direct (said)* and *indirect (shown) ethos* as it manifests itself through the *ethotic* subtypes: *community*, *contrario*, *borrowed*, *confronted*, and *neutralized*. This approach allows one to fully map the rhetorical techniques that shape her character as perceived by the audience. Each *ethos* dimension was operationalized using clearly defined indicators – specific personal traits drawn from Pew Research Center Report (2024), which the author interprets as expressions of *arete*, *phronesis* and *eunoia*. These traits served as coding criteria for identifying and annotating relevant rhetorical strategies in the speeches, enabling a consistent and replicable method for analyzing

ethos-driven appeals and their relationship to Harris's projected presidential character.

Keywords

arete, phronesis and eunoia, character, Kamala Harris, presidential elections

Wizerunek mówcy: Kamala Harris i budowanie tożsamości retorycznej w kampanii prezydenckiej 2024 (część 1)

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje, w jaki sposób Kamala Harris konstruowała swój charakter retoryczny (etos) w przemówieniach wyborczych podczas kampanii prezydenckiej w 2024 roku, korzystając z perspektywy trzech wymiarów etosu Arystotelesa: arete, phronesis i eunoia. Odwołując się do typologii Hermana, praca bada interakcję między etosem bezpośrednim (wypowiedzianym) a pośrednim (ukazanym) oraz sposób, w jaki objawia się ona w poszczególnych podtypach etosu: community (wspólnotowy), contrario (przeciwstawny), borrowed (zapożyczony), confronted (konfrontacyjny) i neutralized (zneutralizowany). Takie podejście pozwala w pełni zmapować techniki retoryczne kształtujące postrzegany przez odbiorców charakter Harris. Każdy wymiar etosu został określony za pomocą precyzyjnie określonych wskaźników – konkretnych cech osobistych zaczerpniętych z raportu Pew Research Center (2024), które autorka interpretuje jako przejawy arete, phronesis i eunoia. Cechy te posłużyły jako kryteria identyfikacji strategii retorycznych w przemówieniach i pozwoliły na spójną i powtarzalną analizę przejawów etosu oraz ich związku z kreowanym przez Harris wizerunkiem prezydenckim.

Słowa kluczowe

arete, phronesis, eunoia, charakter (etos), Kamala Harris, wybory prezydenckie

1. Introduction

The present study analyzes how Kamala Harris constructed her rhetorical *ethos* during the 2024 presidential campaign through a qualitative study of sixty-three rally speeches, delivered between July 22 and November 4. The focus is on identifying the three classical dimensions of *ethos* – *arete* (moral character), *phronesis* (competence), and *eunoia* (goodwill) – as defined by Aristotle. By operationalizing *arete*, *phronesis*, and *eunoia* into a set of identifiable indicators (character traits), this study offers a structured framework for analyzing how character-based appeals are employed in campaign rhetoric. Personal traits served as coding criteria for identifying, isolating, and annotating language corresponding to each dimension of *ethos* in Harris's campaign speeches. Each rally speech had been closely read and annotated for the most articulated dimension of *ethos*. The framework ensures methodological consistency and sets the stage for discussing a correlation between Kamala Harris's reliance on *ethos* and her unsuccessful bid for the presidency.

The study is divided into two parts. Part 1 frames the importance of presidential character in presidential campaigns and grounds the analysis in Aristotle's triadic model – *arete*, *phronesis*, and *eunoia* and outlines how these dimensions align with voter-valued traits. It then introduces Herman's typology of *ethotic* subtypes (*community*, *a contrario*, *borrowed*, *confronted*, and *neutralized*) to analyze how Harris constructs her character discursively in campaign rally speeches. Part 1 concludes with a detailed, data-driven analysis of sixty-three speeches, mapping how *ethos* dimensions are distributed across Harris's 2024 campaign.

Part 2 of the present study applies Herman's *ethotic* typology – *community*, *a contrario*, *borrowed*, and *neutralized ethos* – to Kamala Harris's rally speeches to illustrate how each subtype contributes to the construction of her rhetorical persona. It then analyzes representative excerpts from selected speeches to show how *said* (direct) and *shown* (indirect) *ethos* function in practice

through discursive techniques – such as pronoun use, storytelling, evaluative language, and expert references – that serve as textual “symptoms” or “cues” for inferential *ethos* construction. Finally, the paper reflects on the implications of using these techniques for constructing Harris’s character and her electoral appeal.

2. The rhetorical construction of presidential character

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said that the presidency “is preeminently a place of moral leadership.” Today, the character of the president of the United States still “matters to the vast majority of Americans” and “roughly nine-in-ten or more say it is either somewhat or very important to have a president who lives a moral, ethical life”, however, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say it is “very” important (71% vs. 53%) (Diamant 2020). A September 16-28, 2024, Gallup survey (Saad) found that the candidates offered a choice between character (Kamala Harris) and leadership skills (Donald Trump). Harris outpaced Trump in voter perceptions of having strong moral character (53% vs. 40%) and being honest and trustworthy (49% vs. 41%).

Presidential scholars have addressed the question of the importance of presidential character. James P. Pfiffner (2002: 7) states that “presidential character is important [...]. The values, principles, and habits of behavior that mark an individual will strongly influence his or her behavior.” In his biography of Harry Truman, historian David McCullough argues that character is the single most important quality a president must have (Renshon 1996: 606). Peggy Noonan (1995: 202) goes as far as to say that

[i]n a president, character is everything. A president doesn’t have to be brilliant; Harry Truman wasn’t brilliant, and he helped save Western Europe from Stalin. He doesn’t have to be clever; you can hire clever [...]. But you can’t buy courage and decency, you can’t

rent a strong moral sense. A president must bring those things with him.

Character is strongly related to the Aristotelian concept of *ethos*. Aristotle conceptualized *ethos* as one of the three principal modes of persuasion in rhetoric, alongside *pathos* – appeal to the emotional state of the audience, and *logos* – appeal to reason (Perloff 2003: 22). *Ethos* concerns the character and credibility of the speaker. Aristotle also identified three essential dimensions, or aspects, of *ethos* that make it easier to trust the speaker (Aristotle 1991: 1378a) and these include: *phronesis* (competence), *arete* (moral virtue), and *eunoia* (goodwill).

Previous studies (qtd. in Prysby 2008: 115) have highlighted essential traits that voters tend to prioritize in presidential elections, and these involve:

(a) integrity, which includes qualities like honesty, morality, and trustworthiness; (b) leadership, which involves being decisive, strong, and inspiring; (c) competence, referring to experience, knowledge, and intelligence; and (d) empathy, which involves showing compassion and concern for others.

The set of these traits – (a) integrity, (b) leadership, (c) competence, and (d) empathy – falls within the parameters identified by Aristotle: *arete*, *phronesis*, and *eunoia*. Specifically, *arete* corresponds most directly with integrity, virtuous, moral leadership, and encompasses qualities, such as honesty, courage, and moral uprightness. *Phronesis* relates to competence and practical leadership, and involves good judgment, knowledge, experience, decisiveness, and the ability to make sound decisions. *Eunoia* is best reflected in a speaker's expressions of empathy and compassion. It involves demonstrating genuine concern for others' well-being, fostering emotional connection. Thus, to persuade the electorate, a projected *ethos* of a presidential candidate must encompass the candidate's personal story, values,

and actions to build trust, establish authority, and create rapport with voters.

Prysby's (2008: 119) findings on the 2004 elections illustrate that competence and empathy, which correspond to *phronesis* and *eunoia*, respectively, were the most important candidate traits for Democrats when making their voting decisions. Among Republicans – leadership, empathy, and morality. Thus, all three dimensions of *ethos*, had a strong impact on the vote. Although Aristotle conceived of character as “the most authoritative form of persuasion” (Aristotle 1991: 1356a), the focus is not on character as an inherent quality of an individual, but rather on the traits that the audience perceives as representative of their character. According to Aristotle (1991: 1356a),

[There is persuasion] through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence; for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly [than we do others], on all subjects in general and completely so in cases where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt.

A notable feature shared by all the dimensions of *ethos* is that they are products of inferential reasoning (Herman 2022: 2) and refer to the judgments a listener makes about a speaker (O’Keefe 2016: 291). For instance, attributes like “goodwill” or “trust” are not pre-existing qualities but are the result of inferential reasoning (Herman 2022 after Eco 1992; Peirce 1932). *Ethos*, thus, functions as an interactive process aimed at influencing the audience.

A speaker’s rhetorical *ethos* stems from her *prediscursive* and *discursive ethos*. *Prediscursive* (Amossy 2010), or *situational ethos* (Herman 2022: 4) encompasses the collective perceptions, societal roles, and shared cultural understandings associated with an individual before they speak. As Herman argues (2022: 2), *prediscursive ethos* or “the image of a speaker before his or her speech, is not a construction: it is a preliminary

image, more or less stabilized, on which the discursive ethos will capitalize.” *Discursive ethos* is the image constructed through the actual performance in each communicative situation. It is shaped by genre conventions and social dynamics and unfolds during the interaction itself, either reinforcing or challenging the audience’s prior assumptions (Roitman 2014: 744). *Ethos*, thus, is a hybrid notion that is both social and *discursive*, grounded in socially evaluated behavior that must be understood within a specific communicative context shaped by historical and social conditions (Maingueneau 2006: 60). Importantly, speakers construct multiple self-images in discourse, reflecting both personal and collective identities (Amossy 2010: 211). A speaker’s rhetorical *ethos* is, thus, “the result of the confrontation between what is called *situational ethos*, i.e., the image of the speaker before they utter the first word in the current situation and *discursive ethos*, i.e., the image that is constructed through their speech” (Herman 2022: 4; Aristotle 1991: 1355b10). Analyzing such a *discursive* self-presentation requires attention to both pre-existing *ethos* and the *ethos* constructed within the speech itself.

This process involves interpreting textual and linguistic cues that implicitly suggest the speaker is trustworthy or benevolent. Analyzing *ethos* involves examining how language enables speakers to construct their persona. Rather than asserting expertise directly – “I am competent in international finance” – a speaker may demonstrate it using technical vocabulary or statistical evidence that implicitly conveys their knowledge and authority (Herman 2022: 2). Thus, *ethos*, as it emerges progressively throughout a discourse, can be either explicitly stated or implicitly conveyed. As Herman (2022: 7) argues,

[d]iscursive ethos is thus more the result of an inferential process based on different “symptoms” or cues in a text (shown ethos) than a self-portrait of the speaker (said ethos). In the latter category, direct ethos can be defined as covering cases of self-images that are personally (“I”) or collectively (“we”, “scientists” – when

the speaker is one of them) conveyed. Indirect ethos covers cases where inferences [...] may be derived from how other people or groups are referred to. Interestingly, indirect ethos can be created from the image given of others in one's discourse [...].

For instance, by expressing approval or disapproval of other people, the speaker implicitly constructs their own credibility, values, and character. To use Herman's example, when Donald Trump refers to election officials as "scoundrels" and praises Senator Perdue as "a great guy", he is not only characterizing those individuals, but also revealing aspects of his own *ethos* – his stance, values, and affiliations (Herman 2022: 9). These evaluative portrayals contribute to the audience's inferential understanding of who the speaker is. This inferential mechanism is why Herman (2022: 9) emphasizes the distinction between *images* – representations of others and *ethos* – the inferred credibility or character of the speaker. In short, *individual ethos* is the speaker's inferred character as constructed both by how they represent themselves and how they represent others. In classical rhetoric, *ethopoeia* is the technique of constructing *arete*, *phronesis* and *eunoia* through self-representations in speech (Bruss 2011: 26). It involves vividly presenting values, emotions, and personal history to make character come alive for the audience. Specifically, a speaker's *ethos* is inferred from *images* that manifest themselves through the following subtypes of *ethos*,

the personal pronouns and the position taken in the relationship to others (positive, negative, or neutral), as manifested on the semantic level: I (individual ethos), you (confronted), we (community), he/she/they considered as allies (borrowed), as opponents (a contrario) or as third parties (neutralized). The interest of the closed list is not the multiple labels of subtypes but the fact that it is closed and helps to identify different ethotic strategies without creating ad hoc ethos types (Herman 2022: 10).

Community ethos is a direct *ethos* of the group the speaker belongs to. While often linked to the pronoun “we”, it can also be conveyed through allegory or by adopting the role of a spokesperson. *Confronted ethos* is a term used to describe cases where the speaker’s *ethos* is indirectly constructed through the image of the addressee – “you.” In this subtype, the speaker defines herself in contrast to the audience, and this contrast is essential; if the speaker and audience were aligned, *community ethos* would be more appropriate. The key feature of *confronted ethos* is the deliberate distinction between the self (“I”) and the other (“you”), which plays a crucial role in shaping the speaker’s rhetorical identity. A *contrario ethos* and *borrowed ethos* are types of indirect *ethos* linked to the pronouns “he”, “she”, “they”, referring to individuals not directly involved in the interaction but mentioned in the speech. When the referenced person is portrayed as neutral or opposed to the speaker, this is called a *contrario ethos*. Conversely, if the person is depicted as supporting the speaker, it is termed *borrowed ethos*. For example, celebrity endorsements in advertising illustrate *borrowed ethos* by enhancing a brand’s credibility through the endorser’s image. References to admired individuals contribute to building *ethos*, as the praised person’s values, actions, and statements are seen as closely aligned with those of the speaker (Herman 2022: 10). Finally, *neutralized ethos* refers to the speaker’s presentation of third-party statements or facts without expressing personal judgment or involvement. Common in journalism and scientific reporting, this form conveys seriousness and impartiality, allowing facts to “speak for themselves” and lending the speaker an image of moral integrity. However, even in this neutral mode, the speaker’s *ethos* is still shaped through the act of communication. For example, when Trump stated unverified or false claims as facts, his neutral delivery lent credibility to those statements for some listeners, reinforcing their beliefs and fueling political anger. Thus, *neutralized ethos* can be a powerful rhetorical strategy that supports the speaker’s image by appearing objective while influencing audience perception (Herman

2022: 11). Public speeches thus serve as discursive performances through which candidates construct their *ethos*.

3. Research aim, questions, and methodology

The aim of the present paper is to examine how Kamala Harris constructed her rhetorical ethos in 2024 presidential campaign rally speeches through the lens of Aristotle's three dimensions of ethos: *arete*, *phronesis*, and *eunoia*. The present study explores the overall projection and interplay of the three *ethos* dimensions in Kamala Harris's sixty-three presidential campaign rallies, treating *ethos* as a *discursive* and *inferential* construct. Based on an assumption that language reveals character discursively, the study asks,

1. Which ethos dimension – *arete* (moral character), *phronesis* (practical wisdom), or *eunoia* (goodwill) – is the most articulated in Kamala Harris's 2024 presidential campaign rally speeches?
2. What do the *ethotic* subtypes in Herman's typology reveal about how the character of a speaker is constructed?
3. Which rhetorical techniques did Kamala Harris use to convey moral character (*arete*), competence (*phronesis*), and empathy (*eunoia*) in her speeches?

To better understand how the classical dimensions of *ethos* align with traits valued by American voters in 2024, the author consulted a Pew Research Center Report (2024) on public perceptions of the presidential candidates. The Report identified a set of personal characteristics that voters deemed important, including: "even-temperedness", "being a good role model", "being down-to-earth", "mentally sharp", "honest", "well-informed", "caring about the needs of ordinary people", "having a good sense of humor", and "standing up for what they believe in." Specifically, *arete* was identified in rally speeches through references to moral integrity ("being a good role model", "standing up for what they believe") and ethical character ("honesty") grounded in public service, personal stories or examples that

illustrate moral courage, defense of widely held civic or national values, and condemnation of unethical behavior. The study of *phronesis* focuses on a speaker's demonstration of competence, experience, political acumen, and sound judgment ("mental sharpness"). This is reflected in references to experience, accomplishments, expertise, the use of data and facts, and the strategic framing of issues or proposals in ways that appear informed and realistic (being "well informed"). An analysis of *eunoia* centers on the speaker's expression of empathy and emotional stability ("even-temperedness"), relatability ("down to earth"), commitment to the public good and concern for audience's interests and well-being ("cares about the needs of ordinary people") as well as likability ("has a good sense of humor"), which reflects in inclusive language ("we", "us") and personal anecdotes that humanize the speaker and show respect for the audience's values. The table below presents a conceptual correlation between these traits and the Aristotelian dimensions of *ethos*.

Table 1. The author's interpretation of the correlation between personal traits identified by Pew Research Center (2024) and the classical dimensions of *ethos* – *arete*, *phronesis*, and *eunoia* – in the context of voter perception

Traits	Dimension of ethos	Justification
even-tempered	<i>eunoia</i>	reflects empathy, calm demeanor, and connection with audience
a good role model	<i>arete</i>	indicates perceived moral integrity and exemplary conduct
down-to-earth	<i>eunoia</i>	signals relatability and warmth, alignment with ordinary people
mentally sharp	<i>phronesis</i>	implies intellectual competence and sound judgment
honest	<i>arete</i>	speaks to trustworthiness and ethical character

cares about the needs of ordinary people	<i>eunoia</i>	shows concern for audience interests and well-being
has a good sense of humor	<i>eunoia</i>	enhances likability and rapport with audience
well-informed	<i>phronesis</i>	reflects knowledge, intelligence, and political acumen
stands up for what they believe in	<i>arete</i>	demonstrates moral courage and ethical leadership

Voters assessed Vice President Kamala Harris more positively than former President Donald Trump across several personal characteristics, with her largest advantages in “even-temperedness” (+32), being “a good role model” (+19), and “down-to-earth” (+13) (Pew Research Report 2024). Trump, by contrast, was rated higher in “standing up for what they believe in” (+9). Thus, the aspect of Kamala Harris’s rhetorical character that emerges most prominently in Pew Research Center (2024) analysis of voter perception is *eunoia*, followed by *arete* and *phronesis*. *Eunoia* is particularly evident in attributes such as being “even-tempered”, “down-to-earth”, “caring about the needs of ordinary people”, and “having a good sense of humor.” *Arete*, or moral integrity, appears as the second most salient dimension, reflected in perceptions of Harris as “honest” and “a good role model”, emphasizing her integrity and ethical conduct. However, in terms of voter perceptions of the candidates’ demonstration of *phronesis* – practical wisdom and competence – neither candidate had a clear advantage in being seen as “well-informed”, and Harris held only a modest lead over Trump in being viewed as “mentally sharp” (+9).

Overall, the distribution of *ethos* dimensions in the table above shows that, while Harris was recognized for her empathy (*eunoia*) and moral character (*arete*), she struggled to project political competence – the key aspect of *phronesis*. As of late August 2024, when the Pew Research Center conducted the

survey, Harris's rhetorical *ethos* appeared unevenly distributed across the three dimensions. This imbalance may have limited Harris's appeal among voters who prioritize competence and practical wisdom over warmth and integrity. However, as *eunoia*-based traits are the most articulated in the Pew Research Center Report (2024), the correlation of character traits with classical rhetorical dimensions of *ethos* indicates that voters may be especially drawn to candidates when *eunoia* emerges as the most prominently perceived component of their political character.

Also, studying *ethos* in a presidential candidate's *rally speeches* offers consistent insights into how a candidate strategically constructs her public image. As standardized, repeatedly delivered and focused on self-presentation, rally speeches reveal how *ethos* is consistently built over time through appeals to competence (*phronesis*), moral character (*arete*), and goodwill (*eunoia*). They also provide a framework for examining the balance between positive self-presentation and negative attacks on opponents, highlighting the ethical implications of such rhetoric (Abramson et al. 2007; Tuman 2008). Because of their uniform structure, *rally speeches* serve as a reliable basis for comparative analysis across campaign venues, making them a valuable resource for understanding how language functions as a tool of persuasion and electoral strategy. Speakers tend to reveal expertise using specialized language rather than stating it directly, which can risk appearing arrogant (Herman 2022: 9). This makes *rally speeches* a valuable site for observing how both *shown* and *said ethos* operate in high-stakes political communication. Although this paper focuses on *discursive ethos* – which, in the Aristotelian sense, is constructed through speech rather than based on a pre-existing image – a brief overview of Kamala Harris's *prediscursive ethos* is necessary to provide a fuller understanding of her overall presidential appeal.

4. More than words: Kamala Harris' *prediscursive ethos*

Although a candidate's image has only a modest influence on electoral outcomes (Bartels 2002), scholars have shown that "we are more likely to be persuaded by sources we perceive to be powerful, in authority, attractive, likable, or similar to us than by sources we perceive as not possessing these traits" (Stacks et al. 2019: 262). In the context of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, character-based appeals remained highly relevant. The campaign was heavily shaped by personality-driven narratives and stark contrasts between the candidates – particularly between former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris.

Kamala Harris's uniquely American background – marked by historic firsts, cultural diversity, and a longstanding commitment to public service – contributed to her *prediscursive ethos* by shaping the audience's perception of her character and enhancing her perceived credibility, relatability, and moral authority. Harris made history by becoming the first Black and South Asian female VP candidate when Joe Biden selected her as his Democratic running mate for the 2020 election. For second-generation Americans with mixed cultural backgrounds, Harris has come to embody the American Dream and the nation's promise of opportunity. After Joe Biden announced on July 21, 2024, that he would not seek reelection and endorsed Harris as his successor, she became the first woman and the first incumbent VP of African and Asian descent to run for the presidency. Born in Oakland, California, to immigrant parents – an Indian-born mother and a Jamaican-born father – Harris was raised primarily by her Hindu single mother, a cancer researcher and civil rights activist. After graduating from law school, Harris began her career as a prosecutor, serving as a deputy district attorney for Alameda County, district attorney for the city of San Francisco, and later as California's first Black American, first woman, and first Asian American attorney general. Before ascending to the vice presidency, she represented California in the

U.S. Senate from 2017 to 2021. Her 2024 presidential campaign emphasized her record as a prosecutor who, in her own words, had served only one client throughout her career: “the people.”

Harris’s opponent, Donald Trump, had established himself as one of the most controversial presidents and presidential candidates in modern U.S. history. The New York businessman turned politician became the first president to be impeached twice – once for obstruction of Congress and abuse of power, and again for incitement of insurrection (The White House). He was also the first former president to seek re-election while facing multiple legal challenges, including federal indictments for mishandling classified documents in Florida and for election interference in Washington, D.C.; a state indictment for election interference in Georgia; and a pending sentencing in New York following a conviction on business fraud charges (Quinn and Kates 2024).

Voters consistently rated Harris more favorably than Trump across a range of personal traits, including “honesty”, “empathy”, and “even-temperedness” – all of which are central to *ethos*-based rhetorical appeals (Pew Research Center Report 2024). While key policy issues – such as reproductive rights, the economy, and immigration – were present, media coverage, public discourse, and voter attention often centered on the candidates’ perceived character, temperament, and personalities (Astvansh 2024; McLaughlin 2024; Deggans 2024; Kellman 2024; Kuscu 2024). Public assessments of these traits played a role in shaping voter perceptions and campaign strategies, suggesting that *prediscursive ethos* – the candidate’s public image and reputation prior to the speech – had a measurable impact on the electoral narrative (Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, Sept. 8, 2024).

Kamala Harris positioned herself as a moral counterpoint to Trump’s conduct by presenting herself as a principled leader with a prosecutorial background uniquely suited to confront a candidate who had made history as the first former president to have been convicted of a felony. On the campaign trail, Harris

repeatedly framed this contrast, claiming she knew “Donald Trump’s type” because she had “been dealing with people like him [her] entire career” (e.g., Aug. 2). However, unlike past vice presidents who sought the presidency after serving under unpopular or polarizing Administrations (e.g., Al Gore, Hubert Humphrey), Harris faced a unique set of constraints. She inherited an Administration marked by unmet promises – such as immigration reform, wage increases, and the codification of *Roe v. Wade* (*Politifact*) – and had limited time, approximately one hundred days, to distinguish herself from the Biden legacy. With the economy and cost of living ranking as top concerns for voters, Harris’s rhetorical emphasis on defending democracy and discrediting Trump’s character may have come at the expense of articulating a clear and compelling policy agenda. In what follows, I examine Kamala Harris’s major rally speeches to assess how her *ethos* was constructed across these dimensions and argue that *ethos* distribution may have shaped the outcome of the election.

5. Kamala Harris’s *discursive ethos*

The data presented in Table 2 tracks the dominant rhetorical appeals – *arete*, *eunoia*, and *phronesis* – across Kamala Harris’s key 2024 rallies.

Table 2. Dominant rhetorical appeals in Kamala Harris’s 2024 rallies

Date	Location – event type	Dominant <i>ethos</i> dimension	Rationale
July 22	Wilmington, Delaware – Campaign Headquarters Speech	<i>arete</i> <i>eunoia</i>	KH elevates her own ethical authority by presenting her personal and professional history, achievements, problem-solving capabilities side-by-side with Trump’s unethical actions; emphasis on moral

			character, leadership integrity; demonstrates deep affection, solidarity, and care for both Joe Biden and the audience
July 23	Milwaukee, Wisconsin – Campaign Event	<i>arete eunoia</i>	connects with local communities; focuses on professional achievement and her vision to build up the middle class as a defining goal of her presidency; policy focus and practical plans
July 23	West Allis, Wisconsin – Campaign Event	<i>arete eunoia</i>	connects with local communities; presents his vision to build up the middle class as a defining goal of her presidency; policy focus and practical plans
July 27	Pittsfield, Massachusetts – Campaign Fundraiser	<i>eunoia arete</i>	connects with local communities; focuses on professional achievement; articulates her leadership philosophy centered on empathy, empowerment, moral integrity, ethical leadership
July 30	Atlanta, Georgia – Campaign Event	<i>arete eunoia phronesis</i>	connects with local communities; focuses on professional achievement and her vision to build up the middle class as a defining goal of her presidency; policy focus and practical plans
August 6	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – Rally (introducing Tim Walz)	<i>arete eunoia</i>	arete demonstrated through achievement and recognition of Tim Walz for VP; emphasizes Tim Walz's relationships with various groups of people; emotional appeal to

			shared American values and possibility is the centerpiece of this message
August 7	Eau Claire, Wisconsin – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i> <i>arete</i>	establishing trust through warmth, shared identity, gratitude, mutual respect, shared love for democracy; enhancing her ethos as a virtuous leader
August 8	Romulus, Michigan – Campaign Rally	<i>arete</i> <i>eunoia</i>	portraying Tim Waltz and Kamala Harris as virtuous leaders, unlike DT
August 9	Glendale, Arizona – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i> <i>arete</i>	appeals to shared values, portraying themselves as virtuous leaders; embodying a promise of America: from humble beginnings to the White House, caring about ordinary Americans
August 10	Las Vegas, Nevada – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i> <i>arete</i>	emotional connection and community engagement
August 16	Raleigh, North Carolina – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i>	display of judgment and real-world competence through strategy, policy focus (“opportunity economy”) and actionable goals
August 20	Milwaukee, Wisconsin – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i> <i>phronesis</i>	seeks to build trust and rapport with her audience by expressing genuine concern for their needs and aspirations
August 22	Democratic Convention – Acceptance Speech	<i>arete</i> <i>phronesis</i> <i>eunoia</i>	moral authority and character highlighted; leadership experience, shared immigrant experience, warmth
August 29	Savannah, Georgia – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i> <i>arete</i>	shared identity, care for the audience’s interests; stance on justice, democracy, and freedom

September 2	Detroit, Michigan – Campaign Rally	<i>arete</i>	justice and ethical leadership; emphasizing what is right, what is just, and what good leadership looks like
September 2	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – Campaign Event (with Biden)	<i>phronesis</i>	underscores experience, actionable plans, and policy understanding to establish credibility
September 4	North Hampton, New Hampshire – Campaign Event	<i>phronesis</i> <i>arete</i>	Ethical leadership, fairness, legislative agenda, cares about the people, fights for their ideals
September 12	Charlotte, North Carolina – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i> <i>arete</i>	detailed plans, policy knowledge, economic reasoning, alternative to DT
September 12	Greensboro, North Carolina – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i> <i>arete</i>	practical policy, detailed plans, alternative to DT
September 13	Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i>	centers on the needs of ordinary people by suggesting policy proposals, justice emphasis
September 20	Madison, Wisconsin – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i>	emotional connection through storytelling and critique of DT
September 20	Atlanta, Georgia – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i>	emotional connection through storytelling and critique of DT
September 22	New York, New York – Campaign Fundraiser	<i>phronesis</i> <i>arete</i>	contrasting her competence and people-oriented campaign and economic plan with immoral, dangerous, and unserious DT
September 25	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – Economic Club Remarks	<i>phronesis</i> <i>eunoia</i>	grounds her vision of the presidency in pragmatic leadership; economic policy proposals contrasted with DT's;

			economy for the people, not the rich
September 28	San Francisco, California – Campaign Fundraiser	<i>arete</i> <i>eunoia</i>	places the people in the center of her economic plan, appeals to America’s excellence and leadership
September 29	Las Vegas, Nevada – Campaign Event	<i>arete</i> <i>eunoia</i>	inclusivity and fairness, emphasizing opportunities for all Americans; community-oriented; contrasted with DT
September 29	Los Angeles, California – Campaign Fundraiser	<i>arete</i> <i>eunoia</i>	highlights consistent fight for justice, fairness, the people; contrasts herself with Donald Trump’s “tired playbook” and “unserious” approach
October 3	Ripon, Wisconsin – Campaign Event	<i>arete</i>	underscores moral courage, principled leadership, and fidelity to the Constitution using her own and Liz Cheney’s example
October 4	Redford, Michigan – Campaign Event	<i>phronesis</i>	connects policies to personal or community experience (e.g., her childhood above a daycare, small business ownership, housing affordability); proposals grounded in lived understanding, not abstraction
October 4	Flint, Michigan – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i>	connects policies to personal or community experience (e.g., her childhood above a daycare, small business ownership, housing affordability); proposals grounded in lived understanding, not abstraction

October 10	Chandler, Arizona – Campaign Rally	<i>arete</i>	highlighting a strong record of public service, personal integrity, character
October 11	Scottsdale, Arizona – Campaign Event	<i>eunoia</i>	unity and shared values; respect for ideological diversity and bipartisan cooperation
October 13	Greenville, North Carolina – Campaign Rally	<i>arete</i>	emphasizes lifelong dedication to public service, justice
October 14	Erie, Pennsylvania – Campaign Rally	<i>arete</i>	emphasizes her record, moral commitment, and dedication to public service; frames DT as lacking arete
October 16	Pennsylvania (general) – Campaign Event	<i>arete</i>	emphasizes moral commitment, and dedication to public service; speaks about the rule of law, standing up or democratic ideals, and for the Constitution of the United States
October 17	Near Green Bay, Wisconsin – Campaign Event	<i>phronesis</i>	acknowledges real difficulties faced by voters, offers realistic solutions
October 17	La Crosse, Wisconsin – Campaign Event	<i>eunoia</i>	emphasizes empathy, shared values, and a deep personal commitment to the American people
October 18	Oakland County, Michigan – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i>	invokes themes of dignity, caregiving, and shared struggle, advocates for the working class
October 18	Lansing, Michigan – Campaign Event	<i>eunoia</i>	aligning herself with her audience: union workers, labor leaders, and working-class Americans; praises their dignity, effort, and contributions; expresses sincere

			appreciation and moral solidarity
October 18	Grand Rapids, Michigan – Campaign Event	<i>eunoia</i>	defending values, the audience holds dear; amplifies shared ideals, reinforcing trust
October 19	Atlanta, Georgia – Campaign Event	<i>eunoia</i>	emotional connection; invokes themes of dignity, caregiving, and shared struggle, advocates for the working class
October 19	Detroit, Michigan – Campaign Event	<i>eunoia</i>	justice, community building, uplifting people; caring about the middle class
October 20	Jonesboro, Georgia – Campaign Event	<i>arete</i>	appeals to moral integrity, dignity, and a faith-based moral framework
October 24	Clarkston, Georgia – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i>	record of competence; detailed, concrete policy proposals, showing a command of what needs to be done and how
October 25	Houston, Texas – Rally with Beyoncé	<i>eunoia</i>	inclusive language (“we”, “us”, “together;” deep empathy for people hurt by abortion bans; references personal stories of pain, loss, and injustice to express emotional solidarity
October 26	Kalamazoo, Michigan – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i>	contrasting her competence and people-oriented campaign and economic plan with immoral, dangerous, and unserious DT
October 28	Ann Arbor, Michigan – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i>	deep empathy, goodwill, and alignment with the audience’s struggles, hopes, and identities

October 29	Washington, DC (Ellipse) – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i>	repeated use of “America”, “we”, “you”, and “us” builds a collective identity with the audience; acknowledges the audience’s concerns, challenges, and struggles (e.g., cost of living, caregiving, reproductive freedom), showing deep empathy.
October 30	Harrisburg, Pennsylvania – Campaign Rally	<i>arete</i>	the 2024 election as a moral contest between right and wrong, virtue and vice
October 30	Raleigh, North Carolina – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i>	emotional connection, gratitude, unity, goodwill
October 30	Madison, Wisconsin – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i>	emotional rapport and a sense of shared identity with the audience;
October 31	Phoenix, Arizona – Campaign Rally	<i>arete</i>	character, moral leadership, and lifetime of public service
October 31	Reno, Nevada – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i>	expression of goodwill, emotional connection, and shared values with the audience
October 31	North Las Vegas, Nevada – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i>	enhances trust and democratic leadership, proven judgment in action, competence under pressure
November 1	Little Chute, Wisconsin – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i>	voter mobilization, leadership, competence
November 1	West Allis, Wisconsin – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i>	leadership, policy focus, agenda
November 1	Janesville, Wisconsin – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i>	labor-focused, solidarity with union members, reinforces emotional

			connection and shared values
November 2	Atlanta, Georgia – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i>	leadership, political competence, small business centered
November 2	Charlotte, North Carolina – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i>	leadership, political competence
November 3	East Lansing, Michigan – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i> <i>phronesis</i>	goodwill, leadership, voter mobilization
November 4	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i> <i>phronesis</i>	expression of gratitude to voters, goodwill; leadership
November 4	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – Campaign Rally	<i>eunoia</i> <i>phronesis</i>	goodwill, leadership, voter mobilization
November 4	Allentown, Pennsylvania – Campaign Rally	<i>phronesis</i>	voter outreach, experience and competence, outlines specific plans

The findings provide evidence that throughout the campaign, Harris's rhetorical appeal was unevenly distributed across *eunoia*, *arete*, and *phronesis*, which suggests a potential gap in persuading voters who prioritize competence over emotional connection. The analysis reveals a consistent emphasis on moral character and empathy (*eunoia*), especially in the initial stages of the campaign, while appeals to virtue (*arete*) and competence (*phronesis*) appeared more prominently later in the campaign. Harris's campaign failed to convince voters of her ability to lead on the most urgent issues, suggesting a disconnect between her rhetorical ethos and overall electoral strategy. In part 2 of the present study, I take a closer look at how Kamala Harris constructs her rhetorical persona by drawing on Herman's typology to illuminate the strategies she uses to shape audience perception.

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