

**Speaking character:
Kamala Harris and the construction
of a rhetorical character
in the 2024 Presidential Campaign
(Part 2)**

IWONA ŚWIĄTCZAK-WASILEWSKA

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Abstract

Building on Part One, which mapped Kamala Harris's use of Aristotle's *ethos* dimensions – *arete*, *phronesis*, and *eunoia* – across sixty-three 2024 presidential campaign speeches, Part Two applies Thierry Herman's *ethotic* typology (*community*, *contrario*, *borrowed*, and *neutralized ethos*) to analyze how these subtypes construct her rhetorical persona. Through representative speech excerpts, the study examines how *said* (direct) and *shown* (indirect) *ethos* function via discursive strategies such as the use of pronouns, *ethopoeia*, storytelling, and evaluative language. These strategies contribute to the inferential construction of *ethos* and influence audience perceptions of Harris's character. The analysis reflects on the effectiveness of these rhetorical strategies in shaping Harris's projected persona and their potential influence on voter perception.

Keywords

ethos, Kamala Harris, presidential campaign, Herman's ethotic typology

**Wizerunek mówcy:
Kamala Harris i budowanie tożsamości retorycznej
w kampanii prezydenckiej 2024 (część 2)**

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł (część 2) stanowi kontynuację części pierwszej, w której przeanalizowano sposób, w jaki Kamala Harris konstruowała swoją tożsamość retoryczną (*etos*) w sześćdziesięciu trzech przemówieniach podczas kampanii prezydenckiej w 2024 roku z perspektywy trzech wymiarów *etosu* Arystotelesa: *arete*, *phronesis* i *eunoia*. Odwołując się do typologii *etosu* Thierry'ego Hermana (*etos* wspólnotowy (*community*), przeciwstawny (*contrario*), zapożyczony (*borrowed*), konfrontacyjny (*confronted*) i zneutralizowany (*neutralized*)), część druga bada, w jaki sposób powyższe podtypy konstruują tożsamość retoryczną Harris. Na podstawie reprezentatywnych fragmentów przemówień niniejsze badanie analizuje, jak *etos* bezpośredni (wypowiedziany) oraz *etos* pośredni (ukazany) przejawiają się w strategiach dyskursywnych, takich jak użycie zaimków, etopeja, storytelling i język wartościujący. Artykuł podejmuje również refleksję nad skutecznością tych strategii retorycznych w kształtowaniu tożsamości Harris oraz nad ich potencjalnym wpływem na percepcję wyborców.

Słowa kluczowe

etos, Kamala Harris, kampania prezydencka, typologia *etosu* Thierry'ego Hermana

1. Introduction

Part Two of the present study applies Herman's *ethotic* typology – *community*, *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 strategies – such as the use of pronouns, *ethopoeia*, storytelling, evaluative language – that serve as textual “symptoms” or “cues” for inferential *ethos* construction. Finally, the paper reflects on the implications of using these strategies for constructing Harris's character and her electoral appeal.

The findings indicate that *eunoia* constitutes the most prominent dimension of *ethos* in the analyzed discourse. It is primarily realized through strategies that emphasize community building, empathy, and solidarity with the audience. *Arete* and especially *phronesis* appear less frequently and less consistently. The analysis also draws on data from the Pew Research Center (2024) to situate the rhetorical findings within a broader context of public perceptions of political leadership. The study suggests that the imbalance between the three *ethos* dimensions may have limited the effectiveness of Harris's projected leadership in the electoral context.

2. Eunoia

Eunoia in Kamala Harris's rally speeches manifests itself through both *said* and *shown ethos*, and multiple *ethotic subtypes* as defined by Herman (2022), including *community ethos*, *borrowed ethos*, *a contrario ethos*, and *neutralized ethos*. The study of *eunoia* in Kamala Harris's speeches reveals the presence of all four personal traits identified in Pew Research Center Report (2024), which I interpret as manifestations of *eunoia* – “even-temperedness,” being “down-to-earth,” care for ordinary

people, and a good sense of humor using a variety of rhetorical techniques, including repetition, call and response chants, rhetorical questions, inclusive pronouns, direct acknowledgment of supporters, and affectionate personal tone.

Individual Ethos is developed through personal narrative and evolves around Harris's direct self-presentation – *ethopoeia*, or what Herman calls *said ethos*. She explicitly recounts her legal and personal story by constructing a narrative of public service and moral commitment. The passage from Kamala Harris's August 22 acceptance speech reinforces both personal character and a broader sense of moral leadership: "And every day in the courtroom, I stood proudly before a judge, and I said five words: Kamala Harris for the people. And to be clear, my entire career, I've only had one client: the people" and "I will always put middle-class working people first [...] I know where I come from" (Sept. 4). Through her emphasis on public service, Harris connects personal experience to a democratic ethos rooted in civic duty Harris makes the people not just the subject of her actions, but the reason for her political existence. Also, her even-temperedness emerges through her calm, composed and emotionally grounded tone, "When my mother was sick, I took care of her... It's about dignity" (La Crosse, Wisconsin, Oct. 17). The philosophy of ethical obligations to others resonates in Harris's speeches throughout her campaign. For instance, in her September 2 speech in Detroit, "From a very young age, I learned that [...] we can drive extraordinary change... no one should ever be made to fight alone." The essence of Harris's *eunoia* is captured in an emotionally affirming language, which signals her loyalty, empathy, and care. Harris focuses heavily on gratitude, love, and connection. Through emotional, personal storytelling and by invoking American cultural references, Harris integrates her personal immigrant childhood experience into the broader American story,

But I'm no stranger to unlikely journeys. So, my mother, our mother, Shyamala Harris, had one of her own, and I miss her

every day and especially right now. And I know she's looking down smiling. I know that. So, my mother was 19 when she crossed the world alone, traveling from India to California with an unshakable dream to be the scientist who would cure breast cancer. When she finished school, she was supposed to return home to a traditional arranged marriage. But as fate would have it, she met my father, Donald Harris, a student from Jamaica. They fell in love and got married, and that act of self-determination made my sister Maya and me. Growing up, we moved a lot. I will always remember that big Mayflower truck packed with all our belongings ready to go to Illinois, to Wisconsin, and wherever our parents' jobs took us. My early memories of our parents together are very joyful ones: a home filled with laughter and music, Aretha, Coltrane, and Miles at the park (Aug. 22).

Kamala Harris weaves her parents' immigrant background into a broader American narrative which aligns with national ideals and portrays the United States as a land of opportunity for immigrants. The family's frequent relocations mirror the mobility and resilience of working-class Americans, while Harris's rise from the daughter of immigrants to Vice President and presidential nominee embodies the promise of upward mobility and the American Dream. Her references to cultural touchstones like Aretha and Coltrane, as well as stories of struggle and aspiration, place her within the shared cultural landscape of the nation. By affirming: "I come from the middle class, and I will never forget where I come from" (Atlanta, Oct. 19), Harris positions herself as both a product and champion of the American experience.

Community ethos is prominently featured throughout Kamala Harris's rally speeches, particularly through her consistent use of inclusive pronouns and phrases that cultivate a shared identity. Expressions such as "Everybody here does," "You all," and "This truly is a Delaware family" (July 22) work to create a sense of belonging and collective purpose. A central theme in Harris's discourse is her commitment to economic justice: a "defining goal of my presidency," as she puts it, is

“building up the middle class. Because we know, when America’s middle class is strong, America is strong” (July 27; Aug. 9). Harris consistently emphasizes a future in which all individuals can thrive – own homes, build businesses, and access essential services. Her aspirational and value-driven rhetoric reinforces this vision, “We believe in a future where every person can build a business, to own a home, to build intergenerational wealth. A future with affordable health care, affordable childcare, paid leave” (July 30). This commitment to collective progress is underscored by her description of the campaign as “people-powered,” (July 30). Unity and shared purpose are further articulated through slogans such as “We are one team, one fight” (July 22) and “We are all here because we love our country” (Las Vegas, Nevada, Sept. 29). Declarations like “We fight for a future, where...” (Lansing, Michigan, Oct. 18) “We are all in this together” and “We are here together because we know what is at stake, and we are here together because we love our country” (Las Vegas, Nevada, Sept. 29) deepen this communal bond by inviting the audience to see themselves as active participants in a common cause. Such language not only underscores the campaign’s emphasis on grassroots involvement over elite political backing but also appeals to the audience’s sense of agency. By centering her rhetoric on the well-being of middle-class families and vulnerable populations – such as “children with asthma, breast cancer survivors, [and] grandparents with diabetes” – Harris demonstrates a genuine concern for everyday Americans. In doing so, she effectively embodies *eunoia*, the rhetorical dimension of goodwill, allowing the audience to perceive her as a leader who prioritizes their needs and aspirations. The repetition of “on behalf of,” in the following passage from Harris’s August 22 acceptance speech,

on behalf of the people; on behalf of every American, regardless of party, race, gender, or the language your grandmother speaks; on behalf of my mother and everyone who has ever set out on their own unlikely journey; on behalf of Americans like the people

I grew up with, people who work hard, chase their dreams, and look out for one another; on behalf of everyone whose story could only be written in the greatest nation on earth, I accept your nomination to be president of the United States of America

highlights her devotion to “the people,” reinforces her *individual ethos* and reflects a deep concern for the well-being of the audience and the nation. The repeated call-and-response, “We are not going back” reinforces her commitment to progress and resistance to regressive policies (Sept. 13), but also creates a feeling of community: a “we” that signals not just political alignment but emotional unity. In rhetorical terms, this constitutes *community ethos*, where *ethos* is enacted through shared affect rather than declared.

Also, Harris employs a rhetorical strategy that combines the “underdog” narrative with an emphasis on grassroots support to galvanize her audience (July 30; Oct. 13). She refers to her audience in Atlanta (July 30) as “friends.” By acknowledging, “We have a fight in front of us, and we are the underdogs in this race,” she positions herself and her campaign as challengers facing formidable odds. This dual strategy of embracing the underdog role while emphasizing grassroots empowerment is a calculated move to build solidarity and motivate action among supporters. The use of rhetorical questions and direct appeals to the audience, “You guys remember what that was?” or “So are you ready to get to work? Do we believe in freedom? Do we believe in opportunity?” (July 22). Or,

Wisconsin, ultimately, in this election, we each face a question: What kind of country do we want to live in? [...] – do we want to live in a country of freedom, compassion, and rule of law – or a country of chaos, fear, and hate? And here’s the beauty of this moment: We each have the power to answer that question. The power is with the people. We each have the power to answer that question (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 23)

engages listeners emotionally, prompting them to recall past hardships and consider the consequences of policy changes.

Moreover, Kamala Harris appeals to shared American ideals – upward mobility, opportunity, and the “promise of America” where “two middle-class kids” from humble backgrounds, “one a daughter of Oakland, California, who was raised by a working mother. [...] The other, a son of the Nebraska plains, who grew up working on a farm [...] would be running together all the way to the White House” (Aug.10). By presenting herself and her running mate, Tim Waltz, as relatable, she appeals to the audience’s emotions and values (Aug. 6). The phrase “that kitchen table, like the one I grew up at” signals Harris’s being down-to-earth and shared experience with the audience, especially working- and middle-class listeners. Also, in the National Convention speech, Harris creates a sense of shared identity and emotional connection through repeated love for the audience: “We are so honored to be your nominees;” “We love our country. We believe in our country;” “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you;” “We care about each other... seeing a neighbor, understanding what that love of each other means.”

Kamala Harris’s repeated defense of values the audience holds dear, “We are here because we love our country;” “It is a fight to realize the promise of America;” “Enough of the division. Enough of the hate. We are all in this together;” (Las Vegas, Nevada, Sept. 29); “;” “ “We believe together in building a future — in what we can do together as a nation — and a nation of people who see what we have in common more than what separates us” (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Oct. 18); “ours is a fight for the future. And it is a fight for freedom [...] the fundamental freedom of a woman to make decisions about her own body and not have her government telling her what to do.” (Atlanta, Georgia, October 19); “We know the power of the people;” “We have grit, we have excellence, we have history;” “We are in this to win it;” “We’re going to remind people they are important” (Detroit Oct. 19) amplifies shared ideals and underscores a collective commitment to improving the lives of all Americans (). Harris

further demonstrates her concern for the well-being of her audience by outlining specific policies aimed at benefiting the broader population, such as affordable healthcare, housing, and paid leave, childcare, “That’s about help with a car seat, with a crib, with diapers, with baby clothes. If we care about children, then let’s help people, help people do what they naturally want to do but don’t always have the resources to do it” (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 20).

Eunoia is evident in how she speaks warmly and respectfully about small business owners as civic leaders and “the glue” of communities (Sept. 4). Her repeated focus on the middle-class working families and small-business owners, on dignity, compassion, and collective progress as well as commitment to uplifting all Americans clearly embodies the spirit of *eunoia*. Excerpts from her October 18 rally in Michigan, including “Strong unions mean higher wages, better health care, and greater dignity...;” “We will build an opportunity economy...;” “Let’s help them out...” (young parents, small businesses, seniors) reflect a servant-leader posture. In her economic plan, Harris emphasizes shared struggles and aspirations, e.g., her mother’s hard work and the role of small business in her childhood. Kamala Harris’s economic plan is strongly conveyed through *eunoia* via *community ethos*. While elements of *phronesis* are also present, particularly when she discusses plans to lower the cost of living and make markets more competitive, these serve to bolster her demonstration of goodwill by showing actionable steps toward the shared goal. Harris makes it clear that she is *with* and *for* the people she’s addressing. The essence of Harris’s campaign is best captured in her statement from October 19 speech in Atlanta: “This is what our campaign is about. Our campaign is about the people. Our campaign is about the people.”

It is through inclusive language (“we,” “us,” “together”) that Harris validates the experiences of women and families suffering under restrictive laws. She expresses deep empathy for people who have been hurt by the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and state-level abortion bans, especially in Texas (Oct. 25). Harris

validates the pain and experiences of others – survivors of violence, grieving mothers, and everyday women affected by abortion bans by affirming “Your voice is your power” (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Oct. 17); “So, to those women, to those families, I say on behalf of what I believe we all say, we see you, and you are not alone, and we are all here standing with you” (Atlanta, Georgia, Sept. 20). Harris wants “to be a president for all Americans” (Oct. 11). Similarly, when she emphasizes national unity – “We have so much more in common than what separates us” or “We share not only a concern but a commitment to our country” (Oct. 11) – she uses measured, conciliatory language to de-escalate division – a manifestation of even-temperedness. The repeated use of “we” positions Harris as part of the same collective as her audience – not above or outside of it. By appealing to community and faith, “I know there are a lot of members of the LDS community here [...],” Harris demonstrates she is speaking *to* the audience, not just *at* them. Furthermore, in a moment of empowerment during her Ann Arbor (Oct. 28) speech, Harris encourages the crowd to “shout your own name,” thereby symbolically placing everyone’s identity at the center of the political moment.

Eunoia is also realized through *borrowed ethos* – Harris’s praise of allies, expressed using informal language, which shows that she is relatable, approachable, and in touch with the places and people she visits. The opening remarks in her rallies always include informal, affectionate remarks immediately set a warm, personal tone, for example, “How are you? Aww, He’s sleeping.” or lightly humorous, “You know I got some Madison cred, right?” (Sept. 20). Listing local leaders by names, “Can we please thank Bill for fighting every day...” shows her genuine appreciation and respect for individuals in the community, reinforcing that she values partnership and collective work. *Eunoia* is also demonstrated through Harris’s constant recognition of campaign staff and local officials, “And it is good to be with so many incredible leaders, including the most magnificent, wonderful governor, Tony Evers. Every time I come to

Wisconsin; Tony meets me on the tarmac. He's such an incredible human being" (Aug. 7).

Harris repeatedly uses affectionate language, deep personal gratitude and familiarity with Joe Biden, "I love Joe Biden," "You're not going anywhere, Joe," and "I love you, Joe;" "To our president, Joe Biden... Doug and I love you and Jill and are forever thankful to you both;" "We love Joe and Jill. We really do. They truly are like family to us" (July 22; Aug. 22). These affirmations demonstrate warmth, appreciation, and shared values, creating a strong rapport with the audience. Similarly, in her depiction of Tim Walz: "To his wife, Gwen, he is a husband [...]. To his former high school football players, he was Coach" (Aug. 6), Harris consistently validates *borrowed ethos* and creates a picture of familial and civic reliability that indirectly bolsters her own ethos through association with admired figures. By showing warmth and admiration toward others, Harris builds *borrowed ethos* that reflects her own relational values – kindness, respect, loyalty. Harris's multidimensional portrayal of her VP pick Tim Walz, former governor of Minnesota, conveys a personal bond. Specifically,

So, to those who know him best – to those who know him best, Tim is – is more than a governor. To his wife, Gwen, he is a husband. To his kids, Hope and Gus, he is a dad. To his fellow veterans, he is Sergeant Major Walz. To the people – to the people of Southern Minnesota, for 12 years, he was Congressman. To his former high school students, he was Mr. Walz. And to his former high school football players, he was Coach – Coach – Coach. (Aug. 6)

By recognizing Tim Walz's relationships with various groups of people – family, veterans, constituents, students, and athletes, Harris shows care, respect, and connection to them. Walz also emphasizes positive personal qualities of Vice President Harris – "compassion," "decency," "humor," and "joy" (Aug. 6). By acknowledging the emotional tone she brings to politics, Walz

appeals to the audience's sense of shared values and a desire for humane, empathetic governance. Harris elaborates more on the values herself in her acceptance speech on August 22, 2024, when she says that it was her family that "instilled in us the values they personified: community, faith, and the importance of treating others as you would want to be treated: with kindness, respect, and compassion." Waltz's focus on Midwestern values like caring for neighbors and kindness, "a commitment to a better world, a common good, a belief that one single person can actually make a difference;" commitment to public service, love for democracy and country establishes a communal bond and shows he's relatable and in touch with the crowd (Aug. 7).

A *contrario ethos* involves constructing the speaker's own credibility in contrast to third parties (he/she/they) who are not directly present in the interaction but are referenced to define what the speaker is not. It functions prominently in her contrasts with Donald Trump. Harris states,

There is a yearning for a president of the United States, who will see you, who gets you, and who will fight for you. And my whole career, I have put the people before partisanship... Instead, I always asked, "How can I help you?" And that is a major difference between Donald Trump and me, and between the two very different – extremely different visions that he and I have for our nation: one, his, focused on the past and himself; the other, ours, focused on the future and you (Oct. 24).

Harris employs a *contrario ethos* by discrediting Trump through the lens of *eunoia*'s absence and suggesting that "He's way too busy serving himself." From mid- September onwards, Harris does not only use *eunoia* to uplift her own campaign; she uses it to sharpen attacks on Donald Trump. The negative portrayals of Trump position Harris as the benevolent alternative, reinforcing her *eunoia* via contrast: "He intends to cut Social Security and Medicare... We are not going back" (Sept. 13); "Donald Trump will give billionaires massive tax cuts..." vs. "My plan

would grow our economy” (Madison, Wisconsin, Sept. 20), and “We know who Donald Trump is... he sent an armed mob to the United States Capitol” (Washington DC, Oct. 29) construct Harris’s ethos by denigrating her opponent’s image. Here, goodwill is not only affirmed, but strategically opposed to Trump’s implied indifference. Kamala Harris portrays Donald Trump as someone who does not care about the needs of ordinary people by drawing a sharp rhetorical and policy-based contrast between her vision of inclusive, people-first governance and what she presents as Trump’s record of self-interest, elitism, and neglect for the average American (Sept. 13). Thus, *eunoia* can be used not just positively (to show you care), but also comparatively (to show your opponent does not). In her July 27 speech, Harris calls for leadership grounded in empathy,

[...] some folks would suggest that the measure of the strength of a leader is based on who you beat down – you know that – have you noticed? – right? – that somehow you’re strong if you’re a bully? – instead of what we all know: The true measure of the strength of a leader is based on who you lift up – who you lift up. That’s the strength of a leader. And so, to the friends here, I say, it is we who are working to lift up the people of America. We’re clear about this. You know, and when you know what you stand for, you know what to fight for. We are clear, it is we who are intent on lifting up the people of our nation.

These unnamed “folks” function as an implied third-party opponent – political adversaries, possibly Donald Trump or his supporters – and create a moral contrast. By rejecting the *ethos* of the “bully,” Harris implicitly elevates her individual *ethos* as one based on compassion and uplift. These elements collectively highlight her commitment to principled and wise leadership. In this powerful statement, by contrasting the notion of strength as “beating down” others with her belief that true leadership is measured by “who you lift up,” she positions herself as a leader committed to uplifting communities. This perspective reflects a broader theme in Harris’s rhetoric, where she emphasizes the

importance of compassion and support over dominance and aggression.

According to Herman (2022), *neutralized ethos* constructs credibility through the appearance of objectivity or appeal to shared truths. Harris adopts this rhetorical stance when she references external validation or widely accepted values without personal bias. For instance, her declarations, “I love good ideas. Wherever they come from, I love good ideas,” or “Democrats, Republicans, and independents are supporting our campaign” (Madison, Wisconsin, Sept. 20) reveal a pragmatic, unifying *ethos* grounded in shared purpose rather than partisan ideology cultivates trust by showing that her leadership is not only principled but also inclusive and empathetic. By acknowledging support across the political spectrum, Harris conveys a willingness to unify and serve all Americans, not just a party. Her claim that “Not only will I have a Republican in my Cabinet [...] I want to create a bipartisan council of advisers” (Oct. 11) reflects a commitment to collaboration. She opens her October 17 speech in La Crosse, Wisconsin by stressing unity over partisanship, “It was about putting country before party [...] Americans want a president who works for all the American people.” It presents a broad, widely accepted value (“country before party”) without directly attributing it to herself or attacking an opponent. The phrase “Americans want” frames the statement as an objective observation or shared national desire, rather than an opinion – typical of *neutralized ethos*. It appeals to civic unity and national values, reinforcing *eunoia* (goodwill) while maintaining rhetorical impartiality.

A sense of *eunoia* is also expressed through Harris’s personal traits, which correlate with traits identified in Pew Research Center Report (2024) – “even-temperedness,” “down-to-earth authenticity,” “care for ordinary people,” and “a good sense of humor.” Even-temperedness emerges through her calm and composed tone. Being down-to-earth is demonstrated through her casual speech and personal storytelling in which she aligns herself with the everyday realities of working-class

families. Harris uses informal language to show that she is relatable, approachable, and in touch with the places and people she visits. Her deep care for the needs of ordinary people is consistently evident. She draws attention to real-life struggles and support for families. Vivid, specific details humanize policy. Her repeated lines – “We work for you” and “We will always fight for you” – frame governance as service and reinforce a servant-leader posture. Finally, Harris’s good sense of humor is expressed in an affectionate, candid moment when she playfully acknowledges a sleeping baby in the audience (“Aww, he is sleeping”). Similarly, her warm banter with Joe Biden – “You’re not going anywhere, Joe,” and “I love you, Joe” – lightens the tone and demonstrates personal warmth. These moments humanize her and strengthen her *eunoia*.

3. Arete

Arete, which reflects the speaker’s virtue and ethical integrity, is the second most articulated dimension of *ethos* in Kamala Harris’s speeches. Her rhetoric reveals Herman’s *ethotic* subtypes through a narrative of moral and legal authority, civic or national values, condemnation of unethical behavior, public service, moral integrity (“being a good role model,” “standing for what they believe”), and ethical character (“honesty”). By using first-person narration and legal lexis,

I have sworn an oath to uphold the Constitution six times in my career, including as vice president, as a United States senator, and as the top law enforcement officer of the largest state in our country responsible for upholding and enforcing the laws of the state and the laws of the United States was the work I did (Oct. 3).

Harris is not simply listing titles or appealing to authority but displaying a long-standing commitment to legal and constitutional principles. Harris consistently frames the 2024 election

as a moral contest between right and wrong, virtue and vice, in which Harris's own ethical history of prosecuting banks, predators, cartels, fighting for the middle class, small businesses, and the vulnerable frames leadership as a moral calling, not just a job, often through a mix of *eunoia* and *arete*. In her October 30 Harrisburg, PA, speech Harris declares that she is "ready to offer that leadership as the next president of the United States of America."

Through both an *individual* and a *contrario ethos*, Harris elevates her own ethical authority by presenting her professional history and achievements side-by-side with Donald Trump's criminal and unethical actions. This pattern is evident throughout her campaign, starting with her first campaign speech in Willington, Delaware, where she framed Trump as akin to the criminals she prosecuted. Statements, such as the following, reinforce her commitment to justice and ethical stance against misconduct, "I will proudly put my record against his [Donald Trump's]," (July 22) or "As a young prosecutor... I specialized in cases involving sexual abuse," (July 22) or "[b]efore I was elected vice president, before I was elected a United States senator, I was elected attorney general of the state of California. And I was a courtroom prosecutor before then." She would often follow this with details concerning her roles as a courtroom prosecutor, district attorney, and attorney general, emphasizing her commitment to justice by prosecuting "perpetrators of all kinds – predators who abused women, fraudsters who ripped off consumers, cheaters who broke the rules for their own gain. So, hear me when I say: I know Donald Trump's type" (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 23). Harris's focus on her lifelong commitment to protecting the vulnerable and standing up for what is right, anchors the speech in her personal virtue and moral authority.

Harris's speech at National Democratic Convention on August 22, 2024, is a culmination of her deep moral convictions and ethical grounding as a prosecutor. The value-laden language that employs abstract nouns, such as *justice*, *integrity*, *dignity* in statements such as, "I believe everyone has a right to

safety, to dignity, and to justice;" and "From the courthouse to the White House, that has been my life's work," reinforces the rhetorical construction of *arete* by framing Harris's commitment to service and justice throughout her career. Harris's assertion, "You can always trust me to put country above party and self" amplifies her selflessness as a public servant.

In her September 28 speech, Harris establishes her *individual ethos* through *ethopoeia* by invoking her personal identity "As a proud daughter of California" to root her credibility in a genuine connection to her background and experience. She also demonstrates moral integrity and leadership by articulating a clear, forward-looking vision for America's future. By committing to specific investments in advanced industries (biomanufacturing, AI, quantum computing, clean energy) and the people behind these efforts ("factory towns and workers who help build our country"), she highlights her moral courage to champion innovation while affirming the value of everyday workers. This move portrays her as a principled leader who cares about the well-being of all citizens and the nation's future. Also, when Harris declares, "I will strengthen, not abdicate, America's global leadership," she casts herself as a virtuous steward of international democratic ideals. By presenting herself as someone who represents a steadfast commitment to the Constitution and who "never wavered in upholding that oath. And I've always executed it faithfully and without reservation," Harris illustrates what ethical, principled leadership should look like.

Through a *contrario ethos* Harris builds a contrast between her own record and that of Donald Trump "who violated the oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America" (Oct. 16). Harris juxtaposes her legal actions against Trump's legal issues – including his for-profit college scandal, sexual abuse liability, and fraud convictions. She contrasts her own approach to leadership ("to-do list") with Trump's "enemies list." Harris is not merely criticizing Trump's tax and healthcare plans as unpopular or misguided (Sept. 4). She employs evaluative adjective to frame Trump's policies as morally wrong – "immoral" and

“unjust.” Harris defends justice and fairness, especially regarding women’s rights and reproductive freedom and patriotism rooted in democratic values, such as protecting the Constitution and fighting for freedom. She underscores the moral consequence of her opponent’s policies, such as preventable deaths from abortion bans by calling it “a health care crisis, and Donald Trump is the architect” (Madison, Wisconsin, Sept. 20). In addition, Trump is portrayed as elitist and self-serving, focused on helping “his rich friends.” This sharpens the speakers’ ethical appeal by positioning themselves as morally grounded and Trump as detached from ordinary Americans (Aug. 7) and as someone who “doesn’t know the first thing about service, because he’s way too busy serving himself” and who “mocks our laws, he sows chaos and division amongst the public” (Aug.8). She repeatedly (e.g., Oct. 14, Oct. 29) frames Donald Trump as lacking integrity and virtue, “a huge risk for America and dangerous [...] increasingly unstable and unhinged, and he is out for unchecked power” and as someone who “should never again have the opportunity to stand behind the seal of the president.” Although *arete* is typically used to praise someone’s character or to show why they deserve trust and respect, Harris uses it negatively, by highlighting the absence of virtue in Donald Trump to discredit him. Shortly before the election, Harris intensifies her attacks on Trump by stating, “America, this is not a candidate for president who is thinking about how to make your life better. This is someone who is unstable, obsessed with revenge, consumed with grievance, and out for unchecked power” (Oct. 29).

Harris employs *community ethos* by aligning herself with the electorate and appealing to shared civic virtue, “We fight for the future. We believe in the future [...] affordable health care [...] childcare [...] housing and paid leave.” *Arete* functions here as a fear tactic because she is tapping into the audience’s fears about what could happen if someone without *arete* gains power. By asking rhetorical questions, Harris offers the audience a choice, “Do we want to live in a country of chaos, fear, and

hate... or a country of freedom, compassion, and the rule of law?" (Oct. 29). This use of negative *arete* also draws a stark moral contrast between Harris and Trump. *Arete* is present in her emphasis on fairness and justice (e.g., taxing billionaires and corporations equitably, honoring the dignity of workers (Sept. 4).

Through *borrowed ethos* and, specifically, by aligning with President Biden who endorsed Harris and whose "record is extraordinary [...] and [...] character is inspiring" (Aug. 22), Harris signals moral bond with a respected figure, suggesting she shares his integrity and public service values. By referencing her running mate's humble, working-class upbringing ("wondering how we were going to pay the bills"), and as someone who "never hesitated to reach across the aisle," (Aug. 6) Harris aligns with honesty, personal integrity, bipartisanship, and being a good role model, which are further strengthened by Tim Walz's repeated framing of Vice President Harris as a principled, courageous, and morally upright leader, who is willing to "take on the predators," "fraudsters," and "corporate interests" (e.g. Aug. 9), who stands up for justice and fights on behalf of "the American people." In her August 7, 2024, speech in Eau Claire, Harris frames herself and her running mate as "joyful warriors." As Ronald Reagan used a similar phrase "happy warriors" to describe principled, optimistic fighters for values, Harris *borrow*s moral authority by invoking a familiar and positive archetype.

Through *neutralized ethos*, Harris presents a vision of the presidency grounded in ethical duty and selflessness, "[t]he president... must not look at our country as an instrument for their own ambitions." Kamala Harris's October 3 speech in Ripon, Wisconsin, is especially significant, not only for its content but also for its setting – the birthplace of the Republican Party. The speech is centered entirely on constructing *arete* as Harris makes a compelling case for the importance of character in presidential leadership. As Harris notes, "character is among the most important attributes of leadership." This underscores the idea that integrity and virtue, not just political skill, define

a legitimate president. *Arete* is strongly articulated through Kamala Harris's appeals to upholding the Constitution as a baseline moral obligation for any presidential candidate, along with civic responsibility and a principled vision of presidential duty, "Upholding the Constitution must be a basic requirement we expect of anyone seeking the highest office in the land" (Ripon, Wisconsin, Oct. 3). By speaking in Ripon, Harris implicitly appeals to the Republican party's moral roots, suggesting that her message about moral leadership aligns more closely with Republican founding principles than Donald Trump's actions do. The setting underscores her broader rhetorical strategy – reaching across party lines. Furthermore, Harris's reference to "America's fundamental principles" such as the rule of law, free and fair elections, and the peaceful transfer of power reinforces the moral core of democratic governance – further highlighting *arete* as a leadership ideal that transcends partisan identity. By presenting her campaign as "a fight for something [...] for the fundamental principles upon which we were founded" she calls upon the people to "stand up for the rule of law, for our democratic ideals, and for the Constitution of the United" (Oct. 16). Harris's September 2 speech in Detroit echoes her July 27 speech, which directly contrasts ethical leadership (lifting others) with unethical leadership (beating others down), by asserting that "The true measure of the strength of a leader is based on who you lift up," Harris defines virtuous leadership through a mix of *arete* and *eunoia*.

4. Phronesis

Kamala Harris's 2024 presidential campaign also reveals an evolving rhetorical strategy grounded in the demonstration of *phronesis* – practical wisdom, competence, political acumen, and sound judgment ("mental sharpness"). *Phronesis* reveals itself in references to experience, accomplishments, expertise, the use of data and facts, and framing of issues or proposals in ways that appear pragmatic and informed ("being well informed").

Kamala Harris accomplishes this through the integration of *individual ethos*, *community ethos*, *a contrario ethos*, *borrowed ethos*, and *neutralized ethos*. Throughout the campaign, but in Harris's early speeches, *phronesis* plays only a supporting role. Harris strengthens her competence by borrowing credibility from Biden and his "legacy of accomplishment [...] unmatched in modern history" (July 22). She builds her *individual ethos* indirectly by emphasizing her White House experience and proximity to power, as seen in her reference, "Joe got the COVID-19 pandemic under control [...] created more than 15 million new jobs [...] passed historic legislation" (July 22), followed by, "I have been a firsthand witness [...] in the Oval Office" (July 22). Although these statements contribute to her *individual ethos*, they position her more as an observer than as a policy leader. By late July, Harris begins to bring attention to her own ability to lead. She establishes *individual ethos* through detailed, actionable proposals. She states, "On day one, I will take on price gouging" and "We will cap unfair rent increases" then adds, "When I am president, I will work to actually solve the problem. As president, I will bring back the border security bill [...] and I will sign it into law." Her references to legislation like the Freedom to Vote Act and plans to "take on Big Pharma to cap prescription drug costs for all Americans" show a growing emphasis on personal competence and experience.

In her August 16 campaign rally in Raleigh, North Carolina, Harris presents a more developed vision of practical leadership. She articulates an "opportunity economy" – "an economy where everyone can compete and have a real chance to succeed; everyone, regardless of who they are or where they start, has an opportunity to build wealth for themselves and their children." She proposes "cutting bureaucracy," "investing in America," and "removing barriers." She further pledges, "I announced my plan to build millions of new homes and help first-time homebuyers with a down payment;" "My tax plan will give 100 million more Americans a tax cut, including \$6,000 to families during the first year of a child's life;" "I will bring down the cost of groceries

by making sure markets are competitive and fair.” These specific policy solutions reinforce her *individual ethos*. Her practical wisdom is continually demonstrated through specific policy commitments informed by her experience. For instance, in her October 4 speech, in Redford, Michigan, Harris reflects, “Housing is too expensive. My mother saved up for years, until I was a teenager, when she was able to buy our first home” and ties this to her legislative competence,

We have a plan to lower costs on everything from health care to groceries, including what I’ve done in my career as attorney general, which is we got to take on corporate price gouging [...] We created 730,000 manufacturing jobs and announced the opening of more than 20 new auto plants in the United States.

Her October 17 speech in Green Bay, Wisconsin, further reinforces her policy experience through a series of concrete proposals, “Under my plan, we will bring down the cost of housing, including with a \$25,000 down payment assistance so you can just get your foot in the door.” Harris adds, “We will expand Medicare to cover home health care for seniors;” “I will get rid of unnecessary degree requirements for federal jobs;” and “My plan will also give a middle-class tax cut to 100 million Americans, including \$6,000 during the first year of your child’s life.” These initiatives underscore her capacity for detailed and pragmatic policy planning. An emphasis on actionable proposals is complemented by her references to labor-related reforms, which, although less frequent and often framed through shared institutional efforts, further reflect her direct involvement, “As vice president, I worked alongside then-Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh [...] to increase the ability for collective bargaining;” and “I also helped to do the long overdue work to protect the pensions of more than 1 million union members” (Oct. 18, Lansing). Here, her *individual ethos* is interwoven with *borrowed ethos*.

In late campaign speeches by building on her *individual ethos*, Harris presents herself as a leader who values dialogue

and reasoned decision-making. For instance, in a November 1 speech in West Allis, Wisconsin, “I pledge to you to seek common ground and common sense solutions to the challenges you face” and, “I pledge to listen to experts [...] and to people who disagree with me. Unlike Donald Trump [...] I’ll give them a seat at the table. That’s what leadership looks like.” She closes by invoking her record: “I won fights against the big banks [...] for-profit colleges [...] cartels,” which strengthens her *individual ethos* through expertise and achievement, and by employing a *contrario ethos* – a major rhetorical tool she uses throughout the campaign to construct her own credibility through contrast with Donald Trump. In speech after speech, Harris defines herself through what Donald Trump is not. For instance, in October 24 speech in Clarkston, she declares: “He had \$400 million served to him [...] filed for bankruptcy six times;” “He talks about being a good businessman – come on;” “His plan would raise costs and trigger a recession.” These uses of third-person contrast construct her own image as a competent and steady leader.

Community ethos is articulated by showing that Harris not only understands everyday struggles but also has the tools to address them. In Charlotte, NC, Harris presents herself as a capable, knowledgeable leader who understands the challenges Americans face, such as costs of living, health care, reproductive rights and offers detailed proposals, including a pledge to build “3 million new homes by the end of my first term” and “a plan to lower the cost of living,” which reinforce her competence and policy knowledge (Sept. 12). Her involvement in real-world policy outcomes and practical leadership comes to light during campaign stops across the Rust Belt states. For example, in Michigan and Pennsylvania, Harris recalls, “That day, we met with a group of computer programmers. One month later they became one of the first technology unions.” She builds on this by citing key policy initiatives, “The White House Labor Task Force that I lead;” “We will continue to strengthen the Affordable Care Act;” and “We will pass the PRO Act and end union busting

once and for all.” She also addresses economic barriers in practical terms by “expanding the startup tax deduction, streamlining tax filing, supporting innovation hubs,” and showing understanding of “startup costs, venture capital access, and red tape” (Sept. 4). These references present her growing record of pragmatic governance, reinforcing *community ethos* alongside.

Throughout the campaign, Harris also leverages *borrowed ethos*, aligning herself with respected political figures and traditions to boost her political acumen. She frequently invokes President Biden. By stating, “Your record is extraordinary as history will show, and your character is inspiring” (Aug. 22), Harris aligns herself with Biden’s legacy of achievement while reinforcing her own role in executing key policy victories, “Building on the work we have done in the White House.” In a particularly compelling anecdote, she recalls Republican Senator John McCain’s bipartisan approval, “He looks at me, and he says, ‘Kid, come over here. You’re going to make a great senator.’” This recollection of praise from across the aisle helps reinforce Harris’s bipartisan credibility.

By September 25 at the Economic Club of Pittsburgh, Harris fully articulates *neutralized ethos* by presenting her leadership qualities as the standard, not the exception. She states,

I will be pragmatic in my approach. I will engage in what Franklin Roosevelt called bold, persistent experimentation because I believe we shouldn’t be constrained by ideology and instead should seek practical solutions to problems, realistic assessments of what is working and what is not, applying metrics to our analysis, applying facts to our analysis...

This language of data, metrics, and pragmatism reinforce her identity as a competent and thoughtful leader operating with common-sense, fact-based judgment, which is central to *phronesis* and the *neutralization* of her *ethos*. In Charlotte, NC, Harris compares her policies directly with Donald Trump’s record and proposals using economic data and expert

endorsements, “Goldman Sachs says my plan would grow our economy,” “Sixteen Nobel Prize-winning economists say he would reignite inflation” (Sept. 12).

Thus, *phronesis* is conveyed through *neutralized* and *individual ethos*, as well as *borrowed ethos*, with Harris relying on *ethopoeia*, storytelling, enumeration and repetition of policy measures, data-driven language, and expert validation to underscore her competence and judgment. Through legislative referencing and institutional credibility, she reinforces her involvement in policymaking processes, while contrastive framing – *contrario ethos* – serves to highlight her rationality against Donald Trump’s perceived instability.

5. Conclusions

The study closely examined sixty-three rally speeches using the Aristotelian *ethos* framework (*arete*, *phronesis*, *eunoia*) and Herman’s typology of *said* and *shown ethos*, and *ethotic* subtypes: *community*, *a contrario*, *borrowed*, and *neutralized*. *Community ethos*, which reinforced solidarity and shared purpose, was used the most frequently. *Individual ethos* helped humanize her through personal stories and reflections on public service. *Borrowed ethos* strengthened her credibility through alignment with respected allies. A *contrario ethos* was used effectively to create moral and ideological distance from Trump. *Neutralized ethos* projected seriousness and impartiality, especially in policy-driven moments. These *ethotic* strategies demonstrate a layered, inferential *ethos* construction where Harris’s character was not only declared through self-presentations, but shown through a variety of discursive techniques, cues, patterns, and contrasts.

The analysis of discursive techniques – inclusive pronouns, *ethopoeia*, storytelling, evaluative language – identified how *ethos* emerges inferentially across discourse. By drawing explicitly on the Pew Research Center’s Report (2024) and operationalizing the classical rhetorical concepts into measurable,

culturally grounded traits, taken together, the findings answer the study's core questions about ethos construction, while also clarifying how rhetorical imbalance may have contributed to Kamala Harris's unsuccessful bid for the presidency.

Importantly, Kamala Harris's rhetorical *ethos* is not static; it is built over time through a dynamic interplay of Aristotle's *ethos* dimensions, Herman's *ethotic* subtypes, and rhetorical techniques. Together, these *ethotic* strategies support an inferential construction of character that is rooted not only in self-presentation (*ethopoeia*), but also in how she represents others, creating a rhetorically coherent campaign persona. These *ethos* components do not function in isolation. In fact, they often overlap. *Phronesis* and *arete* are intertwined in speeches about justice and constitutional duty. *Eunoia* supports both *arete* (moral character) and *phronesis* (competence). By using *direct ethos* ("I have always upheld the Constitution") and *indirect ethos* ("He mocks our laws... sows chaos"), Kamala Harris creates a multi-layered *ethos* that is virtuous in contrast to Trump (*a contrario*), competent through references to policy and experience (*neutralized* and *individual*), compassionate through shared values and emotional appeals (*community* and *borrowed*).

Eunoia is the most consistently and prominently articulated dimension of *ethos*, a fact reflected both in the Pew Research Center's voter perception data (Pew Research Center Report 2024) and in Harris's rally speeches. It emerges through *community*, *borrowed*, *a contrario*, and *neutralized ethos*, along with consistent appeals to empathy, shared struggle, and collective values. Specifically, *eunoia* is enhanced by such discursive rhetorical techniques as inclusive pronouns, "we," "us," and "our" to form *community ethos*, by affective storytelling that includes narratives about her mother and upbringing (*individual ethos*); by praising and affiliating with Biden and Walz (*borrowed ethos*); by contrastive framing, which includes drawing moral and policy lines between herself and Trump (*a contrario ethos*), as well as neutral appeals to shared value, bipartisan language and references to non-partisan facts (*neutralized ethos*). Although

Harris uses rhetorical questions and second-person pronouns, which are typically associated with *confrontedethos*, Harris uses these strategies not to make a deliberate distinction between the self (“I”) and the other (“you”), but to connect with the audiences. Harris never defines herself in contrast to the audience. Thus, the *confronted ethos*, as defined by Herman, is nonexistent in Harris’s speeches.

In sum, every rhetorical gesture – from personal story to political contrast – is tied to a specific *ethotic* function. Harris’s *eunoia* is thus constructed through layered use of Herman’s *ethotic* subtypes, creating a credible, compassionate, and collaborative image that resonates with diverse audiences. Harris positions herself as a protector and ally, especially to women, veterans, workers, and children – an act of goodwill to those often marginalized or underrepresented. These rhetorical choices built a persona that was emotionally engaging and trustworthy, resonating with traits that voters valued, including being “down-to-earth,” “even-tempered,” and caring about ordinary people.

Harris’s appeals to moral virtue, or *arete*, were strong but secondary to *eunoia*. Kamala Harris constructs her *arete* through a deliberate interplay of rhetorical strategies and techniques, particularly using pronouns, honorifics, and referential framing of third persons. A key rhetorical technique is Harris’s repeated use of inclusive first-person plural pronouns – “we,” “our,” and “us” – which evoke a shared ethical community, invite listeners into a collective moral identity and project Harris as part of a morally engaged public. Harris’s own identity is further bolstered through *individual ethos*, expressed through a strategic use of first-person singular pronouns, often in conjunction with references to legal and civic roles. These techniques ground her *arete* in a proven record of public service and affirm her consistency and personal commitment to justice. Her forms of address toward allies also reinforce ethical values. Figures like “President Biden,” “my running mate,” or “the American people” are referred to with honorifics and respectful titles,

reinforcing moral alignment and shared values. In contrast, Harris's references to opponents, particularly Donald Trump, are carefully crafted using third-person references. Trump is stripped of honorifics or institutional framing and portrayed in terms of character failings. This deliberate shift in address creates a moral hierarchy, where language signals ethical worth and political legitimacy. She avoids honorifics such as "President" and instead repeatedly speaks about her opponent as "Donald Trump," often followed by morally evaluative descriptors: "unstable," "obsessed with revenge," "consumed with grievance," or "out for unchecked power." These references enact a *contrario ethos*, which linguistically separates Harris from Trump. Finally, Harris's use of rhetorical questions serves to morally charge the audience's choices, framing the election as a referendum not just on policies but on character. In doing so, she enacts *arete* both as self-presentation and as an ethical appeal, inviting the audience to participate in the same values she embodies. This dimension of *ethos* aligned with voter perceptions of honesty, being a good role model, and standing up for one's beliefs. However, while her ethical stance was persuasive, it was often expressed in moral terms that may have been less effective with audiences who prioritized pragmatism and competence.

Practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, was the least consistently expressed dimension of Harris's *ethos*. Although there were moments when she demonstrated competence through policy language, technical terms, and appeals to common sense and pragmatism, this dimension lacked the frequency of *eunoia* and *arete*. Harris conveyed *phronesis* through fact-based, bipartisan appeals designed to project credibility and seriousness. Her lexical choices emphasizing competence, such as "streamlining," "metrics," and "affordable," contributed to an overall rhetorical character of a pragmatic, experienced leader – one whose competence is not simply claimed but demonstrated. However, according to Pew Research Center Report (2024), Harris only modestly outperformed Trump on traits related to "mental sharpness" and "being well-informed." The relative weakness in

projecting *phronesis* and the uneven emphasis on each *ethos* dimension reflect a deeper challenge. While Harris succeeded in projecting virtue and connection, she struggled to fully convince undecided or swing voters of her executive readiness and strategic acumen. Given that presidential character remains a key factor for most Americans, but definitions of character vary by political affiliation, the lack of strong emphasis on *phronesis* may have left some voters unconvinced. This suggests that a more balanced *ethos*, with stronger expressions of competence and decision-making ability, might have broadened her appeal, especially among independents and moderates.

Ethos construction in campaign rhetoric must be dynamic, multi-dimensional, and strategic. Harris's rhetorical character evolved throughout the campaign, with later speeches showing greater attention to moral virtue and practical wisdom. However, the campaign's initial focus on *eunoia* shaped public views in ways that were difficult to adjust later. The emotional richness of *eunoia* could not fully compensate for the comparatively limited emphasis on *phronesis* in a political culture where competence, toughness, and authority are highly valued. The inconsistent projection of *phronesis*, a critical component of leadership did not align with the full spectrum of character traits that voters deemed essential in a president.

In a political landscape where different audiences prioritize different components of character, Harris's *ethos* failed to meet the full spectrum of expectations. Thus, the *ethos* she constructed – though rhetorically layered and ethically compelling – was not optimally balanced for a national electoral context. The mismatch between rhetorical character and public expectation played a significant role in the outcome of the 2024 election.

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Iwona Świątczak-Wasilewska
ORCID: 0000-0003-4397-3403
University of Gdańsk
Institute of English and American Studies
Wita Stwosza 51
80-308 Gdańsk
Poland
iwona.swiatczak-wasilewska@ug.edu.pl