

‘Let’s Reset and Finish Strong’: Analysis of Aristotle’s Persuasive Appeals in President Mahama’s Final Campaign Speech to Ghanaians during Election 2024

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Abstract

This study examines the use of Aristotle’s three persuasive appeals being ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and logos (logic) in the final campaign speech delivered by former President John Dramani Mahama at the National Democratic Congress (NDC) rally in Accra on 5th December 2024, two days before Ghana’s general elections. Employing a qualitative single case study design, the research conducts a content analysis of the speech transcript (48 sentences/phrases) using Ting’s (2018) framework for analysing Aristotelian appeals. The analysis reveals that all three appeals are present, with pathos being the most dominant (60% of instances), followed by ethos (27%) and logos (13%). Pathos is used to evoke urgency, fear of current economic hardships, hope for change, and empathy toward the youth and women. Ethos is mobilised through appeals to personal integrity, experienced leadership, and moral superiority over opponents. Logos appears through rational policy proposals such as the 24-hour economy and collective national responsibility. The study concludes that Mahama’s final campaign speech strategically prioritised emotional resonance to mobilise voters amid widespread frustration, contributing to his electoral victory. The findings affirm the continued relevance of Aristotelian rhetoric in contemporary African political discourse and offer practical insights for political speech-writing.

Keywords: Aristotle’s Persuasive Appeals; Ethos; Pathos; Logos; Political Campaign Speech; Ghana Election 2024; Rhetorical Analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

Politics is a struggle for power in order to put certain political, economic and social ideas into practice. In this process, language plays a crucial role for every political action carried out. Stobbs (2012) believed that political speeches are very cautiously written with lots of efforts. In the process of gaining power in a democratic nation is the need for elections which consist of campaigns that makes use of speeches which is also anchored on the use of language to communicate ideologies to the electorates (Nyako, 2013; Kyei et al., 2023). Elections serve as a diagnostic instrument for determining who holds political power in democratic systems (Mshvenieradze, 2020; Opeibi, 2009). The importance of language in human life and political elections cannot be underestimated. Chilton (2004:8) considers the indispensable role of language in politics and emphasises that political parties, during elections, give speeches all the time in view of convincing the electorates to give them power. Mensah (2014) explains that such speeches are yoked with a lot of persuasive elements since politicians need to be at their persuasive best in order to win votes leading to power. Persuasion is expounded as an effort to “influence a person’s beliefs, attitudes, intentions, motivations or behavior” (Gass & Seiter, 2010, p. 33). A politician’s ideology is occasionally expressed with clarity, but generally the profound ideology is concealed in rhetoric. The theories of applying effective rhetoric in speech and writing by Aristotle still stands and it is used in the analysis of speeches and writings. These Aristotle’s theories such as: the genres of rhetoric and the means of persuasion have on several occasions promoted the progress and development of rhetoric. Since then, rhetorical analysis following Aristotle’s three devices of persuasion especially has become the most widely used methods of rhetorical criticism or analysis and it is often a determinant for persuasive speaking (Zhiyong, 2016). Several names are given to this rhetorical persuasive device which are: ‘the three artistic proofs’ (Torto, 2020), “the triangle of persuasion” or ‘three modes of persuasion’ (Ting, 2018), or ‘the three pillars of persuasion’ (Beqiri, 2018). Others even add *kairos* to it and refer to it as ‘the four aristotelean persuasion appeal’. But the three main are: *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*. Akinwotu and Ogundele (2021) explain this as follows: *Ethos* relates to the ability of the speaker to exhibit a personal character which is realised in the credibility of his/her speech. *Pathos* deals with the power of the speaker to arouse the emotion of his/her audience, while *logos* reside in the power of the speaker to persuade by means of truth and sound argument. Akinwotu and Ogundele (2021) explain further that *ethos* deals with the personal character of the speaker, *pathos* puts the audience into a certain frame of mind and *logos* is by the proof provided by the words of the speech itself. In summary, *ethos* is about the speaker/writer and *pathos* is the audience and then *logos* is about the arrangement of the message. These three appeals to persuasion and also rhetorical theory for analysis has been employed by several researchers investigating theme of persuasion or a discourse of persuasion in different context. People have investigated speeches and writings using these persuasive appeals as theoretical frameworks (Afful et al., 2023; Asemayi & Alofah, 2015; Maruthai, 2020; Mensah, 2014; Torto, 2020; Waben, 2022; Wornyo, 2023; Zhiyong, 2016).

A speech could be used to persuade people into accepting a new idea, it could also be used to incite people into violence. For this reason, speeches are very important because they can be considered as one of the greatest tools of persuasion to make people take the right decisions and choices in their lives. Obeng (1997) states that politics is one vocation indispensably yoked with language/speeches since politicians need to be at their persuasive best in order to win votes leading to power. The political ideals upon which leaders intend to use this power to govern are depicted through their speeches. According to Nyako (2013), “the practice of politics is mainly anchored on speeches delivered by seekers of political power and directed at their supporters and society as a whole” (p. 1).

In the wake of the Ghanaian 2024 general elections were speeches upon speeches to win the votes of the people by the two leading political parties in Ghana: the incumbent New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC). One of such speech is the speech by President John Dramani Mahama at the final rally of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) on 5th December, 2024 at Accra. President John Dramani Mahama was the candidate for the NDC during the 2020 and 2024 elections. He has been a member of parliament, a minister, vice president and a former president of the nation seeking to regain power for the largest opposition party. The speech that was delivered two days to the general elections could have some persuasive elements in them and that is what this study seeks to find.

Using this theory of persuasion, Zhiyong (2016) did a linguistic analysis of David Cameron's address, drawing from Aristotle's three devices of persuasion. The study finds out that rhetorical use of language has been effectively implemented in Cameron's speech 'No going back'. The prime minister's speech was aimed at persuading the Scottish people to vote 'no' in a referendum which was proven by (ibid) to be very effective as the Scottish people voted 'no' during the referendum. A similar study in Ghana by Asemayi and Alofah (2015) revealed that rhetorical persuasion played a major role in the preparation and delivery of the 1957 independence speech which was tagged as one of the best speeches of the world by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. His educational background, the use of 'we....us' and his appeal to reasoning revealed ethos, pathos and logos respectively.

Away from political speeches, persuasive elements have been found in news editorials and advertisements. Wornyo (2023) examines the use of Aristotle's persuasive appeals in the editorials of the Daily Graphic newspaper published in Ghana using the Aristotle's persuasive appeal as the framework. Using 36 editorials, the study found all the three persuasive appeals in the editorials and concludes that the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic use the persuasive appeals to present the stance of the paper on issues of national concern and call on the citizenry for collective action towards unity and national development. The study reviewed above indicate the efficacy of the Aristotle's theory in both written and oral works to persuade people. There are several works on political speeches but one type of oral genre that has been described as a persuasive piece is political campaign speeches. Though political campaign speeches have been described as persuasive, not much studies have been done on them especially final campaign speeches at rallies.

This study investigates the use of logos, ethos and pathos in the final campaign rally of President John Mahama in the 2024 elections to persuade the electorates to vote for him. The study will highlights what political campaign speeches are and then analyze how the persuasive appeals are used in them. It will first, explain what political speeches are and how they have been studied. Secondly, the theoretical framework used for the analysis of the speech by President Mahama is outlined. The analysis and the results are then presented and how the appeals are used with their persuasive effects is discussed. The last section of the paper is the conclusion of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Campaign Speeches

Politics is famously defined by Harold Lasswell, a political scientist as "who gets what, when, and how," focusing on how resources, wealth, and values are divided in a society or state (cited

in Warren,1999). For the individual to get access to the distribution of this resources Warren (1999)adds that there will be the need to capture the political power of that state or nation.

In the process of capturing such power, politicians need to convince the electorates in democratic governance (Agyekum, 2004). They therefore engage in political campaigns. McNair (2011) explains political campaign as an organised, strategic and communicative effort by a candidate or political party to obtain political support and ultimately electoral victory.

This according to Edo and Afiong (2015) is carefully planned with the intention of achieving certain political aim. Key (1964) adds that election campaigns are a systemic manipulation of the general population’s thinking. Parties and candidates employ techniques and strategies to express their love for the people in order to win their support for governing them. These speeches that are given to convince the voters in the process is campaign speeches (Benoit, 2006).

A politician’s ideology is occasionally expressed with clarity, but generally the profound ideology is concealed in rhetoric in this context campaign speeches. Pre-election campaign discourse differs from other discourses by the following: during pre-election periods the discourses of politicians and the disposition of their personality are the subjects of the greatest attention. Presidential candidates persuade electorate in validity of his/her position and make the audience to move to his/her favorite decision or action for supporting the candidate in future. Agyekum (2004) adds that campaigners speak positively about themselves, their party’s ideologies or their government and their better policies, but they say negative things about their opponents and their policies, and how they worsened or can worsen their people’s living conditions. This is what the content of most political campaign messages are about. In giving more details about the content of political campaign speeches, Agyekum (2004) further adds that aspirants often make references to the “negative present”, a “bad past” and promise a “positive future” for the electorate. This is in line with the overall principle of the Ideological Square of positive self-representation and negative other-representation” by Van Dijk’s (1997:30). Leeuwen and Wodak (1999:96) referred this as deletion, rearrangement, substitution and addition. Where the bad deeds of their members are rearranged, deleted or substituted but that of the opponent are added on.

It is well noted that during political campaigns, the electorate pays more attention to negative information than to similarly extreme positive information, negative information may also have a backlash effect due to factors like lack of source credibility (Jasperson & Fan, 2002) and so politicians are very careful in what they do during this pre election campaign period. Campaign speeches are also made up of rhetorical devices like persuasion, apologies, disclaimers, irony, hyperboles, emphatic expressions, humour and “charismatic” voicing. In a study by Addy and Ofori (2020) on the campaign speech of an opposition leader, Nana Akufo-Addo, at the manifesto launch of his party, found that the content was mainly to create identity and solidarity with the electorate, with the aim of persuading them to accept and support his ideas and ultimately vote for him. Opeibi (2017) explains that the whole process of electioneering campaign is to communicate the intent of the political aspirant to the electorates using different persuasive techniques to persuade their minds and votes. Agyekum (2004) however indicated that the content of such speeches changes when the presidential candidate is in power. They rather persuade the masses to resist a change, stick to their existing allegiances, and continue with an established voting pattern. This brings to the fore a dilemma famously articulated by Niccolò Machiavelli, who argued that rulers must "learn how not to be

good" to maintain authority (Chen, 2025). This often put the politician in the bad light making it difficult for people to marry political power and morality (Rotberg, 2014).

Globally, political campaign communication is fundamentally persuasive, with candidates strategically deploying rhetorical devices such as emotional appeals, humour, irony, hyperbole, disclaimers and charismatic voicing to shape voter perceptions and mobilise electoral support. Research shows that negative information can attract greater attention than equally strong positive information, although its persuasive effect may be weakened by concerns about source credibility (Jasperson & Fan, 2002), making the strategic construction of campaign messages particularly important. Studies applying Aristotle's rhetorical framework demonstrate that ethos, pathos and logos remain central to political persuasion across contexts: Ghazani (2016), for example, found that George W. Bush and Barack Obama employed all three appeals, with ethos and logos particularly prominent, while Waben (2022) observed greater reliance on pathos in Donald Trump's campaign speeches and ethos in Hillary Clinton's when he looked at rhetorical appeal in President Trump and Hilary Clinton campaign speeches..

Similarly, Mshvenieradze (2013) also studied the phenomenon of the three elements of argumentative persuasion: Logos, Ethos, and Pathos in pre-election campaign speeches by Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy. It came to light that Nicolas Sarkozy appealed to ethos more in his speeches than Jacques Chirac, who mostly employed phrases that expressed emotions which is pathos.

In Ghana, political campaign discourse has likewise been examined from linguistic and rhetorical perspectives, with studies showing that campaign speeches seek to construct identity, solidarity and voter support (Addy & Ofori, 2020; Agyekum, 2004; Djabatey, 2013; Obeng, 2000), while other scholarship has examined concession speeches (Mwinwelle et al., 2019), inaugural speeches (Adjei-Fobi, 2011), Independence Day addresses (Mensah, 2008, 2014), State of the Nation Addresses (Dadugblor, 2016), farewell speeches (Adjei & Ewusi-Mensah, 2016) and campaign songs (Asempasah, 2024).

Although these studies establish the persuasive and rhetorical character of Ghanaian political communication as illustrated by Obeng (1997), the literature remains limited in systematically applying Aristotle's ethos, pathos and logos to contemporary Ghanaian presidential campaign discourse, particularly the final campaign rally speech of an opposition presidential candidate who subsequently won the election; this study therefore addresses this gap by analysing John Dramani Mahama's final campaign speech during Ghana's 2024 presidential election through Aristotle's three persuasive appeals.

Theoretical Framework

Aristotle's rhetoric of persuasion which involves ethos, logos and pathos is the framework for this work because it focuses on the way language is used to persuade target audience successfully. Unfortunately, Aristotle himself did not specify particular procedures for the analysis of persuasive communication. For that matter, it behooves on the researcher to look for his/her own framework from literature (Simons, 1990) to help situate the work and also answer the research questions. The Ting's (2018) framework of the three Aristotelian persuasive appeals was arrived at. This was picked because of its comprehensive and simplistic nature and also because it has been used in other work (Hamam, 2021) and proved to be effective. These three Aristotelian persuasive appeals are: Logos (logical reasoning), pathos (human emotions) and ethos (human character).

Pathos: Aristotle defines pathos as the affective or emotional appeals that present persuasive messages to move an audience to action (Aristotle, 1991). A good orator considers the audience's social status, age and other features to touch on their emotions (Amossy, 2000). Thus, when a reader responds to a writer's emotional appeals, it demonstrates a certain level of intelligence which can lead to persuasion (Fortenbaugh, 1975). Aristotle recognized the fact that, while introducing the pathos mode of proof, is often the choice of language that affects the audience's emotional response, and emotional appeal that can effectively be used to enhance an argument. Other research says pathos is a focus on the audience so to improve on this before a speech or write up, audience analysis is very important. Ting's (2018) framework says in the analysis of pathos, the following can be looked: issues that deals with: feelings, needs, values, and desires, using emotive words and adjectives to manipulate feeling among others. Zhiyong (2016) says it is more about the audience and not the speaker.

Ethos: The impact of ethos is often called the argument's 'ethical appeal' or the 'appeal from credibility' (Maingueneau, 1993). The ethos of speakers is related to the awareness of their integrity vis-à-vis the trustworthiness of listeners, forming an important link when interacting (Higgins & Walker, 2012). Here a speaker or writer must project an impression to the reader that he/she is someone worth listening to, in other words making yourself as author into an authority. Aristotle (1991) calls Ethos the face of the orator which would impact on audience by words, in other words it is a "face created by the discourse". Amossy (2000) identifies two types of ethos: Preliminary Ethos and Discourse Ethos. Preliminary Ethos is what the audience know about the speaker (writer), in other words, what is known about speaker's authority, marital status and social status. Some orators attempt to ground on it and use such Ethos in their favor. This is often manipulated by speakers/writers if it would have problems for them. Discourse Ethos on the other hand is the Ethos created immediately for the specific situation and during the discourse (Amossy, 2000).

Audiences prefer to follow a speaker who shows respect for the audiences' interest. In general, ethos helps the speaker create a trustworthy image, making his speech more persuasive. It is through this that we can say a statement made was ethos. Amossy (2000) indicate that argumentation is successful when it appeals to the audience with solidarity, engagement and goodwill. For instance, if the speaker makes a statement that makes him/her one with the audience it appeals to the audience that the speaker has come to their level and that lays the ground for easy persuasion and that is similitude according to Hiddin & Walker (2014). Ting (2018) says it can have the following: appealing to similarities with their audience, showing deference or respect for the rights or the feeling of the target, using ingratiation, expertise, and self-criticism among other.

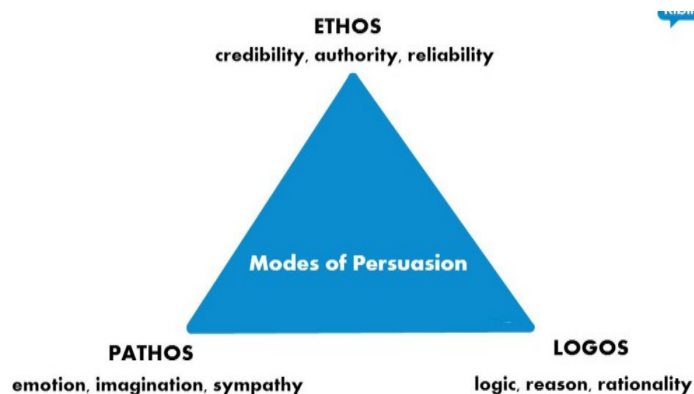


Figure 1: Diagrammatical representation of Aristotle's Rhetorical Theory

Logos: Logos means persuading by the use of reasoning which includes critical cognition, analytical skills, good memory, and purposeful behavior, which is the most important argumentation. According to McCarmack (2014), *Logos* seems to be the most widely promoted accepted, and sought after mode of proof in legal argument. Logos is contingent upon the depth of knowledge of the speaker and the methods efficiently used in forming judgments and motives and in demonstrating intelligence (Gabrielsen & Christiansen, 2010). It is vital that a speaker demonstrates reliability and candour when in conversation with others while indicating his or her knowledge of the topic under discussion. The following can be looked out for when searching for logos in a speech according to Ting's (2018) framework; argumentation, logic, warrants/justifications, claims, data, and evidence/examples, questioning and wondering among others.

Appeal	Definition	Indicators	Example
Pathos	Appeal to emotions	Mentioning the feelings, needs, values and desires of the target ¹ or themselves. Confessing, regretting and making pleas ² . Promising, praising, and thanking ² . Using emotive words and adjectives to manipulate feelings. Mentioning values and either their own or the target's emotional state in order to persuade.	Hi madam, did you get enough sleep last night? You look so tired but still you are the prettiest ever. What if you end class early today so that you can rest?
Logos	Appeal to reason	Using argumentation, logic, warrants/justification, claims, data and evidence/examples. Questioning and wondering ² . Using factual language when mentioning behaviours and actions in order to reason. May use linguistic links such as initially, later and finally for logical reasoning ³ .	Afternoon Dr, I think we should end class early today because the tutorial room is too hot. There is accumulation of carbon dioxide here which makes the temperature rise.
Ethos	Appeal to the credibility and trustworthiness of the speaker or the audience	<u>Positive sense</u> Appealing to their similarities with their audience ¹ . Showing deference or respect for the rights and feelings of the target ¹ . Using ingratiating, expertise and self-criticism ¹ .	We should end class early today because it would show that this note of persuasion has worked and indirectly shown that Dr XYZ's class of teaching us persuasiveness is very effective.

Figure 2: Ting's (2018) framework for analysing persuasive appeals based on Aristotle's three appeals

The aim of the study is to investigate the use of logos, ethos and pathos in the final campaign rally speech of President John Dramani Mahama in the 2024 elections.

Research Objective and Research Questions

Research Objective

The study sought to do the following:

1. To identify the Aristotle's persuasive appeal that was used the most in President John Dramani Mahama's final campaign speech and why.
2. To explore the persuasive effect of the three Aristotle's persuasive appeal in President John Dramani Mahama's final campaign speech.

Research Questions

In the light of the study, the following questions guided the research:

1. Which of the Aristotle's persuasive appeal was used the most in the speech and why?
2. How are the three Aristotle's persuasive appeals used in John Dramani Mahama's last campaign speech in election 2024?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This is a qualitative study which specifically used the single case study design. As Zainal (2007) posits, case study explores contemporary real-life situations through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Single case study involves the investigator selecting a single case (in this study, it is the final campaign speech of President John Dramani Mahama) and investigating it deeply in order to understand all possible aspects of the phenomenon based on the investigator's objective (in this case, to analyse the use of persuasive appeals and their impact on Ghanaians) through the Aristotle's three persuasive appeal (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2013). The target population was speeches delivered by John Dramani Mahama during election 2024.

Sampling Technique

The final campaign speech of President John Dramani Mahama during the 2024 elections was purposively selected for this study. Purposive sampling was employed because it is the only way through which the research questions could be answered thoroughly (Creswell, 2013). The speech was selected on purpose based on three major reasons: first, because of the landmark and historical nature of the elections 2024. The 2024 elections was very crucial because John Dramani Mahama was going for the third time as against Dr. Mahamoud Bawumia, incumbent vice President who was contesting on the ticket of the NPP for the first time. For President Mahama having been defeated twice in 2016 and 2020, another defeat might be the end of his political career. But for Dr. Bawumia that would be another four years for the NPP in government.

Again, the speech is the most current speech of the President in opposition before becoming president and so it has a lot of promise in terms of content. Then finally, the overwhelming win by the NDC two days after the speech was delivered. This raises the question of how was this done. It is therefore for political science and academic purposes a research of this nature is carried out on it to see the persuasive elements used and how they impacted on the electorates.

Qualitative content analysis was employed in the analysis of the text looking at the nature of data that will be used that is the President Mahama's final campaign speech (Yin, 2018). Specifically, Luo's (2023) five step content analysis of conducting document analysis were employed. That is, firstly, the content for analysis was identified (the final campaign speech of President Mahama, 2024) was obtained, second is the definition of units and categories which are sentences and phrases, also there is the codification and the explanation of the codes and thematisations were done based on Aristotle's framework by Ting (2018). Finally, the data was interpreted and conclusions were drawn.

Data Collection

The final campaign speech of President John Dramani Mahama of 19 minutes was downloaded from *myjoyonline* on 7th August, 2025 at 10:00pm. It is made up of fifteen (15) paragraphs, 77 sentences comprising of seven hundred and forty (740) words. The unit of analysis is the words, phrases and sentences. The downloaded speech was crosschecked with the video on youtube, transcribed with the turboscribe app, printed out, sentences numbered (77 sentences/phrases), read thoroughly and then manually analysed.

With the conventional approach to qualitative content analysis, the text was first read thoroughly, the video was also watched and listened to, then later the video and text were read and watched at the same time concurrently in order to have a general idea of their contents and to be familiar with the message delivered. Coding which is a major feature of qualitative content analysis was also employed. The coding was done on the hard copy of the transcript of the speech for easy analysis of the text. The text was put into three themes based on the Aristotle's elements of persuasive effect or proofs: Rational appeals (Logos), Credibility Appeals (Ethos) and Emotional Appeals (Pathos) (Wornyo, 2023) and labeled Lg, Et, and Pt respectively. The analysis was done based on Ting's (2018) framework detailed with examples.

In the collection of data manually, whenever any sentence is located in a paragraph and it portrays any of the appeals in relation to the Ting's (2018) framework, that portion or sentence or phrase would be numbered with the specific code; Example: Pt 1, Lg3 or Et 6, for the first pathos, the third logos or sixth ethos identified in the speech.

Summary of the Speech

This is the final campaign rally by the national democratic congress political party to climax and end the campaign. It was held on the 5th of December, 2024 at the.....There were a lot of speakers on that day but what caught attention and the headliness is that of the flagbearer, President John Dramani Mahama, the focus of this work.

The speaker (John Dramani Mahama) calls on Ghanaians, especially the youth, to embrace change in the upcoming election. He urges citizens to replace fear, poverty, and insecurity with hope, development, and safety. He presents the election as a defining moment for Ghana's future, emphasizing opportunities, prosperity, justice, and fairness.

Some commitments highlighted in the speech that he would employ to make life better for all if voted for on the 7th of December, 2024 included: establishing a 24-hour economy to create jobs, fighting inflation and making food affordable, running a lean government with fewer ministers and reduced spending, waging war on corruption through "Operation Return All Loot (ORAL)", empowering women through equality initiatives and a Women's Development Bank. Also, Mahama stressed integrity, accountability, and collective responsibility, promising leadership that prioritizes people over corruption. He appeals to voters to use their voices, resist electoral malpractice, and choose trustworthy leadership.

The speech ends with a strong call to action: vote for change, reset Ghana's democracy and economy, and build a better nation for present and future generations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: Which of the Aristotle’s persuasive appeal was employed the most in President John Mahama’s final campaign speech in the 2024 elections and why?

The analysis revealed that all three Aristotle’s persuasive appeals were present in the study. This confirms the studies of Agyekum (2004), Kushiator et al. (2023), Rockson (2023), Waben (2022), Zhiyong (2016) among others that persuasive elements are always present in political speeches to persuade the voters.

Pathos (appeal to emotions) had the most occurrences (29 at 60%), followed by ethos (13 occurrences at 27%) and then logos (6 occurrences at 13%). This means that the final speech of President John Dramani Mahama at the Suriya park in Madina for the 2024 elections was meant to touch on the emotions of the voters. The findings align with prior studies emphasizing the dominance of emotional appeals in African political communication (Kyei et al., 2023; Rockson, 2023; Torto, 2020; and Waben, 2022) that speakers often play on the emotions of people to convince them to move on a particular tangent; taking advantage of the lived experience of the people. It reveals that campaign speeches rely heavily on pathos to mobilise turnout in rural and urban communities. It however contradicts the study of Mensah (2014), Klinogo et al. (2020), who rather found logos, ethos and ethos as the most used in their research.

Table 1: Instances of the persuasive appeals in the study

SN	Appeal/themes	Instances	%
1	Appeal to Emotions (Pathos)	29	60
2	Appeal to Credibility (Ethos)	13	27
3	Appeal to Rational (logos)	6	13
	Total	48	100

Source: Authors’ fieldwork, 2025

Pathos dominates the speech to create emotional intensity through repetition, expression of hope, urgency, patriotism, and empowerment. It is crucial in this context where Ghanaians’ lived experiences of economic hardship, unemployment, and corruption are played on to evoke strong feelings. This was to resonate with frustration, aspirations, and the desire for change. Below are few extracts from the study to back this assertion:

1. “The time is now!” pt1
2. “The time to replace ...” pt2
3. “Replace fear with hope... replace cynicism with courage... replace poverty with development” pt4

Extract 1 (‘the time is now’) was repeated severally in this speech confirming the assertion of Addy and Ofori (2020) which revealed that political leaders employ a lot of rhetorical devices like pronouns and repetition in their campaign speeches to establish a bond and facilitate a closer engagement with the voters. This repetition is used to evoke urgency, hope, and create a sense of collective action among Ghanaians. It was used to address the youth, women and all that were of voting age on the need to go to the polls to cause a change now and not in the near future. It was all meant to achieve a compelling persuasive effect on the audience (Rockson, 2022).

Extract 2 appeals to emotions of frustration, fear, and aspiration that the people are experiencing and make it look bad so they wish they are out of it. Extract 3 then comes in to give hope to the voters, a promise of something better to come.

Research Question 2: How are the three Aristotle’s persuasive appeals used in President John Mahama’s final campaign speech in the 2024 elections?

The speaker employed all three Aristotle’s persuasive appeals, each achieving some amount of effect. The analysis brings out some sub-themes derived from each appeal to highlight the effects on the voters.

Appeal to Emotions of the Audience (Pathos)

Fear of Current Conditions

The speaker created a form of fear that is in line with the living conditions of the audience that will make them want a change. This resonates with Agyekum (2004) who illustrates that political power seekers would create certain fear in the living standard of the voters so they can reject the incumbent government but after offer them better conditions. The extract 4 is a n example of this assertion, where the voters were to choose between a Ghana now and a better one.

4. “...a choice between the Ghana we have and the Ghana we want...” pt9

5. “...the working people deserve decent, sustainable jobs...” pt11

The speaker taps into frustration and dissatisfaction with the present government, pushing voters to desire change. The use of words such as ‘decent, sustainable’ in the extract 5 appeal to the human sense and can easily persuade listeners by creating a sort of hope in the voters. This reveal that after Mahama painting a bad picture and making things look gloomy now reassure the people with those words of hope confirming Agyekum’s (2004) study on how politicians can dwell on the negatives of the opponents to make gains.

Empathy for the People of Ghana

Speakers according to Agyekum (2004) make use of empathy a lot to sway the voters. It is the reason for which an aspiring candidate will begin to do what the ordinary people do like farming, pounding fufu, boarding trotro cars among others which they do not do prior to the elections. Linguistically, this is also evident in the study of Kyei et al (2023) who indicated that Nana Akuffo Addo used this a lot to persuade the nation to understand him when there was economic down turn during one of his state of the nation address. This sub-theme can be seen in the extracts below:

6. “Our young people deserve...” pt10

7. “...Women and girls deserve...” pt13

The speaker here makes voters feel valued, and connects with the youth’s, women’s and girls’ emotions and ambitions. It is a direct talk to the youth, women and girls who happen to be in the majority in the country and votes from such people would definitely give the NDC power. The mentioning of these people is also to ensure inclusivity. It is an appeal to the people’s rights which have been denied them.

Expression of hope and optimism

The expression of hope is one of the sub themes that was generated from the main theme. It is also seen in extract 8 and 9 below:

8. “...We will be doing this for ourselves, our children, and generations to come.” pt27
9. “Replace fear with hope... replace cynicism with courage... replace poverty with development” pt13

This inspires hope, portraying voting as a path to a brighter future and generational progress. The use of words such as *fear*, *hope*, *cynicism*, *poverty* evokes emotions of frustration, fear, and aspiration. These things when touched on hard build some sort of hatred in the voter for the other party (opponents) but when it is words of happiness then it is joy for the speaker and that is where they get persuaded and vote for the candidate/speaker that is making them happy.

Appeal To Credibility/ Character Of Speaker(Ethos)

Ethos refers to persuasion based on the perceived credibility, character and trustworthiness of a speaker. Aristotle identifies intelligence, virtue and goodwill as important qualities through which speakers establish credibility and make their arguments persuasive (Higgins & Walker, 2012). In analysing Mahama’s ethos, however, this study goes beyond identifying statements that portray him positively by applying Amossy’s (2000) distinction between Preliminary/ prior Ethos and Discourse Ethos. Preliminary ethos refers to the credibility, reputation and public image that a speaker brings into a communicative situation before speaking, whereas discourse ethos concerns the character and credibility that the speaker constructs through the language, arguments and rhetorical choices made within the speech. This distinction is particularly relevant to Mahama because, as a former President and established political figure, he entered the 2024 campaign with an already existing political identity and public reputation. His final campaign speech therefore did not merely introduce him to the electorate; it also sought to reinforce, reshape or rehabilitate his existing credibility in the minds of voters.

The use of ethos in the study mirrors Klinogo et al.’s (2016) study of President Akuffo Addo’s state of the nation’s address where the research indicated that the president relied a lot on his credibility through some policies that he has implemented like the free SHS to deserve a second term in office.

The findings indicate that Mahama employed ethos(preliminary and discursive) through several interconnected strategies, including personal integrity and discipline, moral positioning and experienced leadership

Personal Integrity and Discipline of the Speaker

Mahama constructed an image of personal discipline and responsible leadership through explicit commitments concerning the size and conduct of his proposed government:

10. “I am committed to running the leanest government in our country’s history, with no more than 60 ministers...” (Et4)

This statement primarily represents Discourse Ethos because Mahama actively constructs an image of discipline, restraint and responsible stewardship through the commitment made in the speech. Although his previous experience as President contributes to his Preliminary Ethos,

the credibility of this particular claim is generated within the discourse through his stated willingness to impose limits on his own government. The rhetorical significance lies in the fact that he presents himself not merely as someone seeking political power, but as a leader prepared to exercise self-restraint once that power is obtained. The phrase “I am committed” further gives the statement the force of a personal pledge, thereby presenting the candidate as accountable for the promise he makes to the electorate.

Similarly, Mahama states:

11. “...I will make you all proud of the Ghana...” (Et7)

This statement also primarily constitutes Discourse Ethos, because the speaker is constructing a projected character of a leader who will restore or enhance national pride. The use of the first-person pronoun “I” places personal responsibility on the candidate, while “you all” establishes a direct relationship between the speaker and the electorate. Rather than relying solely on his previous presidential experience, Mahama uses the speech to project the character of a leader who is committed to producing an outcome that citizens can identify with and take pride in. At the same time, the statement indirectly activates his Preliminary Ethos, since the audience can interpret the promise against their prior knowledge of his earlier tenure in office. Thus, the statement illustrates how the two forms of ethos can operate simultaneously: his previous political identity provides the background against which the new promise is evaluated, while the promise itself constitutes a fresh construction of character within the speech.

Moral High Grounds over Opponents

Mahama also constructed credibility by presenting himself as morally distinct from his political opponents:

12. “...there is no use fighting for political power if we would come and commit the same atrocities...” (Et10)

This is predominantly an instance of Discourse Ethos because Mahama constructs a moral identity through his explicit rejection of wrongdoing and his presentation of political power as legitimate only when exercised responsibly. The expression “no use fighting for political power” also allows him to portray what Rotberg (2014) says about political leadership and morality that political leadership is a moral responsibility rather than simply an instrument for acquiring power. By distancing himself from the alleged failures and misconduct of the incumbent administration, he positions himself as a candidate capable of providing an ethical alternative.

At the same time, this rhetorical construction is interpreted through his Preliminary Ethos as a former President. His previous experience gives the audience an established basis upon which to assess his claim to responsible leadership. Consequently, Mahama is not creating his credibility from an entirely blank slate; rather, he is using the speech to consolidate his existing political reputation and strengthen a preferred image of himself as a morally responsible alternative to the incumbent government.

Credibility through experience leadership

Another important dimension of Mahama’s ethos is his presentation of experience and trustworthiness:

13. “Choose hardworking, experienced, and trustworthy leadership.” (Et12)

The reference to “experienced ...leadership ” from the extract above draws substantially on Mahama’s Preliminary Ethos because his previous service as President and his long-standing involvement in Ghanaian politics constitute part of the public identity he brought into the campaign. His experience therefore exists independently of the particular speech. By asking voters to choose “experienced” leadership, Mahama implicitly activates this established political identity and invites the electorate to associate the quality of experience with his candidacy.

However, the terms “hardworking” and “trustworthy” also contribute to Discourse Ethos because the speech actively constructs these characteristics as desirable attributes of the candidate and his proposed leadership. The statement therefore does more than remind voters that Mahama is experienced; it attempts to associate that experience with diligence and trustworthiness. In this sense, the speech transforms a biographical attribute into a rhetorical resource for persuasion. The candidate's previous experience provides the foundation, while the discourse seeks to attach particular moral qualities to that experience.

14. “...I will make you all proud of the Ghana...” Et7

15. “...there is no use fighting for political power if we would come and commit the same atrocities...” (Et10)

The use of inclusive pronouns such as “we,” “us” and “our” in the extracts 13 and 14 above further strengthens this construction of ethos. These expressions reduce the rhetorical distance between the candidate and the electorate by presenting the speaker and audience as members of a shared political and national community. Rather than positioning himself exclusively as a political leader speaking to passive voters, Mahama presents himself as part of a collective “we.” This contributes to the perception of goodwill, one of the qualities associated with Aristotelian credibility, because the speaker appears to share the concerns, values and aspirations of his audience.

Overall, the ethos identified in Mahama’s speech demonstrates that his credibility was constructed through an interaction between what he already represented to Ghanaian voters as former president and what he sought to represent through the final campaign speech as now a candidate. The speech consequently functioned not simply to remind voters of who Mahama was, but to strategically reinforce the kind of leader he wanted voters to perceive him to be at a decisive moment in the electoral campaign. This finding extends the application of Aristotle’s ethos by demonstrating that political credibility is both an inherited resource and an ongoing rhetorical construction: candidates enter electoral encounters with established reputations, but they must continually reproduce, defend or modify those reputations through discourse.

Appeal to Logic/reasoning of the Content (Logos)

Logos is explained as a speaker’s attempt to appeal to the logic or reason of the audience. Appealing to facts and logic by President Mahama was utilized to appeal to the conscience of the voters and to build their confidence. The use of rational appeal in this manner by the speaker is in line with the emphasis drawn by Mensah (2014) that speakers often appeal to the logical reasoning of the audience regularly to build a logical association with them in order to persuade them.

The following themes with examples from the speech further explain how President Mahama used logos.

Economic plan for better Ghana

This theme of economic plan that is to make life better for the people of Ghana is shown in the extract below. According to Campbell (1977), true persuasion depends on the capacity to conceptualize alternatives and to make judgment on which one is most consistent and valid. With the kind of economic plan put before the electorate by President Mahama, a commitment to implement the 24-hour economy that would bring the citizenry jobs – they definitely judge and compare the alternatives before making decisions.

16. “I am committed to building a stable, safe and viable 24-hour economy that creates opportunities for millions of jobs.” Lg2

The extract 15 gives voters a clear, rational policy that directly addresses unemployment to persuade them to vote for him.

Building Ghana together

This is another sub-theme derived from the study that appeals to the logical reasoning of the voters to be persuaded to vote for him. This theme can be seen in an example such as the one below:

17. “The vision to build the Ghana we want is a collective responsibility” Lg4

The speaker in this extract is trying to appeal to the conscience of the voters to help build the nation together to make it a better place. He acknowledges that building the nation is not the duty of only an individual or government but by the assistance of all.

Fairness in employment and markets

18. “...public servants deserve recognition for merit... Entrepreneurs deserve a free and fair market.” Lg1

The speaker, President Mahama, uses reason to show that policies are fair and inclusive for all groups, not just political elites. He assures the citizens through this that everyone will have a level playing field to do business or exist without any discrimination.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the deployment of Aristotle’s three persuasive appeals (ethos, pathos and logos) in the final campaign speech delivered by John Dramani Mahama at the NDC’s last rally in Accra two days before Ghana’s 2024 presidential election. Employing a single-case study design and qualitative content analysis, with Ting’s (2018) framework guiding the analysis, the study established that all three Aristotelian appeals were extensively deployed in the speech as part of a broader strategy of electoral persuasion. Pathos emerged as the dominant appeal, indicating a deliberate emphasis on emotional resonance, hope, urgency, collective identity and the electorate’s lived experiences, while ethos and logos provided complementary resources for establishing the candidate’s credibility and legitimising his policy claims. The findings suggest that the persuasive force of contemporary political campaign discourse does not necessarily depend on the equal distribution of rhetorical appeals; rather, candidates may

strategically privilege particular appeals in response to the political moment, the perceived concerns of the electorate and the communicative objectives of the campaign. The study consequently demonstrates the continuing relevance of Aristotelian rhetoric for understanding how political actors construct persuasive meanings within contemporary Ghanaian electoral discourse.

Beyond establishing the presence of ethos, pathos and logos, the findings have implications for the study and practice of political communication in Ghana. The dominance of pathos suggests that electoral persuasion warrants closer attention to the relationship between political emotion, credibility and policy reasoning, rather than treating campaign rhetoric simply as a vehicle for transmitting political information. Political communicators and speechwriters should therefore consider how emotional appeals are integrated with credible self-presentation and substantive policy arguments, since excessive reliance on emotion without corresponding ethos and logos may generate mobilisation without necessarily producing durable political trust. More broadly, the study calls for greater scholarly attention to the rhetorical architecture of decisive campaign moments, particularly final campaign speeches, where candidates attempt to consolidate political identity, reinforce credibility, frame the electoral choice and generate a sense of urgency immediately before voting.

Future research could extend this analysis comparatively by examining the final campaign speeches of presidential candidates across Ghanaian elections, parties and electoral outcomes to determine whether the predominance of particular Aristotelian appeals is associated with political context, party ideology, candidate positioning or electoral success.

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