

**Book Review: Ofer Feldman *The Rhetoric of Political Leadership: Logic and Emotion in Public Discourse*<sup>1</sup>**

**Ching-Hsing Wang<sup>2</sup>**  
**National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan**

Edited by  
**Ofer Feldman**



**The Rhetoric of  
Political Leadership**  
Logic and Emotion in Public Discourse



Ofer Feldman (2020). *The Rhetoric of Political Leadership: Logic and Emotion in Public Discourse*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing. pp. 264.

---

<sup>1</sup> The eBook version is priced from £22/\$31 from Google Play, ebooks.com and other eBook vendors, while in print the book can be ordered from the Edward Elgar Publishing website.

<sup>2</sup> All correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ching-Hsing Wang, at No. 1, University Road, Department of Political Science, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan City, 701, Taiwan or by e-mail at [chinghsing@gs.ncku.edu.tw](mailto:chinghsing@gs.ncku.edu.tw).

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion that aims to influence the listeners' opinions, decisions, or behaviors. Political actors such as politicians, candidates, and political parties have employed different rhetorical strategies – namely political rhetoric – to construct persuasive explanations and arguments in an effort to convince the public to side with them. In particular, the rapid development of technology and social media has made political figures and social groups with excellent rhetorical skills able to successfully mobilize masses of people, which might drive the emergence of populist movements observed around the world. Therefore, there is a pressing need to understand the causes and consequences of political rhetoric. While a vast number of studies have examined the topic of political rhetoric, this book represents the latest attempt to comprehensively investigate the rational and emotional attributes of political rhetoric and what effects they have on the public sphere and political process. This book centers on two pivotal aspects: the first aspect considers the nature, content, and style of the rhetorical strategies used by politicians or candidates for political office in election campaigns, parliamentary debates, and televised interviews. The second aspect focuses on the impact of rhetoric. While empirical analysis in this book suggests that the effect of political rhetoric might be limited, it is noted that the effectiveness of rhetoric in the political sphere depends on the nature and the style of the speech as well as the level of trust and beliefs shared by the political speaker and the audience.

This book addresses the topic of political rhetoric in the broad geographic areas. The analysis includes not only Western societies (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Australia, and Canada) but also traditional societies (China and Japan) and transitional societies (Israel and Brazil). Consequently, this book could provide us with a more complete picture of political rhetoric under different contexts and might be used as a reference to learn political rhetoric from a comparative perspective. The chapters in this book address various issues relevant to political rhetoric, including rhetoric intelligences, invited behavior, political public relations, moral rhetoric, and artificial intelligence and make theoretical and methodological contributions to the study of political rhetoric. This book is organized into three sections: (1) persuasive leadership; (2) evoking behavior; and (3) social media discourse.

The first section consists of four chapters that examine the style of rhetoric employed by candidates or political leaders using cross-national cases. Chapter 2 looks at how political leaders and aspiring political leaders use gender and emotion to mobilize the public in their discourse and argues that politicians' gender might influence their ability to mobilize some specific feelings. That is, male candidates attempt to mobilize forms of protective masculinity, whereas female candidates may seek to mobilize alternative forms of protective femininity. Chapter 3 defines the four most important Rhetoric Intelligences (RI) for effective political rhetoric. That is, systematic, practical, emotional, and creative intelligences together generate the SPECTrum of RI theory and the Personal Communication Profile model. Using Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's and U.S. President Barack Obama's United Nations speeches in 2009-2012 for empirical analysis, it is suggested that more evidence from international and local leaders from different countries, regimes, time periods, and languages and from various media platforms is needed to understand the effectiveness of political rhetoric. Chapter 4 makes a scientific analysis of Chinese President Xi Jinping's governance philosophy with Python software technology that divides Xi's speeches into eight fields: diplomacy, society, culture, politics, economy, party building, ecology, and national defense. The analysis further reveals the key sentences in Xi's speeches and his unique language style. The final chapter in the first section (Chapter 5) discusses the French state of emergency in 2015-2017. Based on speeches delivered by the French President François Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls during this period, it is argued that the 2015 and 2016 terrorist attacks in France have established conditions for the French government to seek theoretical and material efforts to ensure its legitimacy and functionality.

The second section includes five chapters related to evoking behavior meaning that political relations between politicians and people should be understood as invitations and responses, and politicians make use of the norms associated with invitations to pursue their interests. Chapter 6 uses the original concept of Invited Behavior to deeply examine the strategies of the American party leaders and activists and the motivations and choices of voters during the 2016 election campaign. It is suggested that the interactions among competing leaders, parties, and supporters create a new conceptual framework for understanding how electoral strategies are

formulated and individual vote choices are influenced. Chapter 7 employs the Political Public Relations techniques to analyze the inauguration speeches of U.S. President Donald Trump in 2017 and Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2018. The analysis involves examining the speakers' textual tone in the speech, facial expressions and body language, techniques used to evoke emotions, and the effect of such technique on the audience's reactions. Chapter 8 inquires how decision makers and public officials handle a variety of questions posed to them during broadcast political interviews in Japan. Specifically, this chapter points out two key features at the center of televised political interviews in Japan: (1) there is a high rate of equivocation in replies demonstrated by all the interviewed politicians and (2) the culture influences the tone and content of the questions that interviewers ask and how they respond to the interviewees' replies. Chapter 9 explores how British political parties used moral appeals in political advertising during the period between the 1983 and 2017 general elections. The main findings demonstrate that moral rhetoric is part of British political advertising, and the use of moral appeals differs between elections. It is shown that among nine target elections, the 2017 general election had the highest use of moral rhetoric. The last chapter in the second section (Chapter 10) evaluates how the smiles of candidates in campaign posters affected vote share in Japan's 2017 lower house election. While the empirical results on the relationship between smiling and electoral support are consistent with previous research in Japan, this chapter provides new evidence suggesting that the relationship between smiling and vote share depends on the number of candidates running in each single-member district.

The third section comprises three chapters that address the role of social media in political rhetoric. Chapter 11 investigates how the rhetoric used by a right-wing populist politician, Geert Wilders, on Twitter affects the electorate in the Netherlands. The results from an in-depth qualitative content analysis of Wilders' Twitter feed demonstrate that he unsurprisingly presents a right-wing populist communication style on Twitter. Furthermore, an online survey experiment shows that populist communication is the most persuasive for people who feel relatively deprived. Chapter 12 analyzes how Facebook was used as a venue for negative campaigning in the 2014 Brazilian presidential election. Based on content analysis and discourse analysis, it is found that the two most competitive candidates – Dilma Rousseff and Aécio Neves –

prefer to use emotional rhetoric first, followed by the source credibility appeals, both of which represent the main tone of negative campaigns on Facebook in the 2014 Brazilian presidential election. However, it is difficult to confirm whether the use of negative campaign posts influence candidates' performance in the polls, suggesting that negative campaigns might have heterogeneous effects on different candidates. The final chapter (Chapter 13) of this book examines whether social media could provide a direct link between the public and politicians. Based on data collected from parliamentary assistants in Israel and a public opinion survey, the results show that discourse with a human agent is still much more attractive and preferable for the public compared to the use of non-human machines. Moreover, although social media are designed to facilitate direct communication and a "chatbot" could mimic the human agent's pattern of thinking and communication styles, the public still prefers human contact, casting doubt on the use of artificial intelligence technology in political communication.

Overall, this book provides new insight into the study of political rhetoric and addresses a variety of questions at the center of contemporary political communication using different theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches. Furthermore, empirical analyses performed in this book involve different types of countries, which could serve as a starting point for interested readers to understand the determinants and effects of political rhetoric in a specific country.

### **Biographical Note**

**Ching-Hsing Wang** is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at National Cheng Kung University in Taiwan. His research interests include research methods, political behavior, political psychology, public opinion, and Asian politics. He has published articles in such scholarly journals as *Electoral Studies*, *International Political Science Review*, *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *Party Politics*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Taiwanese Political Science Review*, *The Social Science Journal*, and so on.

He can be reached at No. 1, University Road, Department of Political Science, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan City, 701, Taiwan or by e-mail at [chinghsing@gs.ncku.edu.tw](mailto:chinghsing@gs.ncku.edu.tw).