

Power and Persuasion: A Systematic Literature Review on the Persuasive Impact of Political Speech Acts

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.102100063>

Received: 09 July 2026; Accepted: 14 July 2026; Published: 24 July 2026

ABSTRACT

This study systematically examined the persuasive impact of speech acts in political speeches. This was to understand the influence of such speeches in shaping public opinion, social realities, and political authority. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) utilised the Web of Science (WoS) and SCOPUS databases, guided by a number of specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. A final sample of 13 articles were identified and analysed. The findings further supported past scholars' assertion that speech acts are powerful persuasive tools which are predominantly used to achieve various effects. As such, politicians were reported to use commissive, assertive, and declarative acts (apart from other pragmatic tools such as mitigators, disclaimers, and politeness strategies) to convey commitments, foster unity, assert authority, and maintain credibility. The use of these acts has allowed politicians to manage their public image while resonating with their audiences. Despite the powerful persuasion, speech acts, if manipulated through fallacies, incivility, or deceptive illocutionary acts, can severely damage long-term political trust and legitimacy. Therefore, speech acts must be employed prudently by politicians as the effectiveness of these persuasive tools is closely tied to audience interpretation. Misuse of speech acts can erode public trust.

Keywords: Persuasion, politicians' speeches, speech acts, pragmatics, systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Political discourse is a specialised form of communication which means to achieve particular political objectives, of which include persuasion, propaganda, and the acquisition or maintenance of power. From the lens of linguistic and pragmatic perspectives, discourse analysis centres around strategic use of language not just to construct meaning but also influence audiences and shape social realities (Latif, 2017; Angermuller, 2015; Simburger, 2017; El-dali, 2019). Therefore, political discourse is not just a mere medium of communication as it is a powerful mechanism through which political actors negotiate authority, legitimacy, and public perception.

Political discourse employs various speech acts to strategically arrive at communicative and political goals including assertives (when presenting facts or claims), directives (when encouraging or urging audiences towards specific actions), and expressives (when conveying emotions and attitudes). These speech acts essentially function as persuasive tools shaping public opinion and influencing policy directions (Bakhriddinova & Ismatova, 2025; Mardiana et al., 2025; Bahrn et al., 2024). These masterful, deliberate speech acts underscore the pragmatic dimension of political dimension: meaning is closely linked to intention, audience reception, and sociopolitical context.

In such a dimension, political speeches are a central component of political communication due to their role in (i) determining public understanding and (ii) advancing political agendas. This is done by invoking shared

beliefs, values, and ideologies which align audiences with political speakers' objectives (Shkvorchenko, 2020; Hudkins, 2015). Not only that, political speeches also serve propagandistic and persuasive purposes through the promotion of ideologies, legitimisation of policies, and mobilisation of public support. With narratives carefully crafted, political leaders establish systems of values and ideas which resonate with the public before reinforcing political legitimacy (Kotenko et al., 2023; Shkvorchenko, 2020).

Public understanding of political issues is shaped through framing strategies when speakers emphasise certain aspects of issues while minimising others, thereby directing audience interpretation and perception (Gervais, 2023). Political speeches also tend to be emotionally loaded as speakers often appeal to emotions (such as optimism, hope, fear, or anxiety) to mobilise, persuade, or pacify audiences (Ziarani & Mirkooshesh, 2025; Efat et al., 2023). To legitimise authority and policies, political leaders often invoke collective identities while also presenting themselves as advocating the people's interests (Bahrn et al., 2024; Latif, 2017; Hudkins, 2015).

Through linguistic and pragmatic approaches, this study on political discourse intends to reveal the complex ways in which language and communication strategies are utilised to influence audiences, shape public opinion, and sustain political power. This is done by examining the persuasive impact of speech acts on politicians' speeches, which are generally recognised for their critical role in political narratives and political actors' communicative and leadership styles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech Acts

Speech acts are the fundamental units of communication which allow speakers to perform actions through the use of language including asserting, questioning, commanding, promising, or expressing emotions and attitudes. Introduced by Austin (1975) and later expanded by Searle (1979), speech acts classify such actions into five principal categories of (i) assertives which convey information or describe reality when presenting facts or beliefs, (ii) directives which encourage or compel listeners to perform actions like requests and commands, (iii) commissives which involve commitments to future actions such as promises or vows, (iv) expressives which communicate emotions, feelings, or attitudes through the acts of thanking or apologising, and (v) declaratives which bring about changes in external situations such as declaring war or pronouncing a marriage.

Within political discourse, speech act theory provides a comprehensive framework that puts forth language as a tool of persuasion, manipulation, and ideological influence. By examining the types, patterns, and sequences of speech acts in political speeches, past studies were able to uncover the rhetorical strategies and sociopolitical implications embedded within political communication (Bakhriddinova & Ismatova, 2025; Liu & Ali Huddin, 2025; Bahrn et al., 2024; Haroon et al., 2020; Koussouhon & Dadjo, 2016). This highlights the strategic use of language by political actors to shape public perception, establish authority, and reinforce political objectives.

In political speeches, assertive acts project credibility, confidence, and authority thereby strengthening speakers' ethos. Commissive acts foster public trust by signaling commitments to future actions and policy directions (Liu & Ali Huddin, 2025; Hamad et al., 2022; Zitha et al., 2026). Directives, when combined with assertives and expressives, establish authority apart from creating emotional connections with audiences (Al-Shboul et al., 2024; Haroon et al., 2020). However, variations in the use of commissives and acknowledgement strategies within political speeches may reflect shifts in political agendas, communication strategies, or broader public sentiment (Haroon et al., 2020). For example, Joe Biden's speeches demonstrate assertives and commissives which are strategically used to emphasise credibility, trustworthiness, and leadership (Al-Shboul et al., 2024; Strukowska, 2024).

Overall, in the study of political discourse, speech act theory is a valuable analytical tool enabling researchers to identify the communicative intentions, persuasive strategies, and potential effects underlying political

communication. The intricate relationship between language, power, and audience influence can be examined more systematically and comprehensively through this framework.

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine how politicians persuade through speech acts, the study conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) of the relevant literature published on two (2) databases namely Web of Science (WoS) and SCOPUS.

To guide the search of the literature, the study put forth a number of inclusion and exclusion criteria including public year, language, type of access, and type of documents. This is to ensure that entries to be selected were relevant, current, and accessible, having gone through a peer-review process.

Table 1 below summarises the criteria set out by the study.

Table 1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Inclusion Criterion	Exclusion Criterion
Publication Year	Published within the last 5 years to reflect currency	Published more than 5 years ago
Language	Written in English, to ensure the accuracy of the review	Written in other languages
Type of Access	Open access, for the retrieval of the articles	Closed access
Type of Document	Journal (articles)	Other than articles

To facilitate the selection of the literature, the study used the following search terms. This was to ensure that relevant literature that fit the scope of the study can be identified.

Table 2 Search terms used

Database	Search Term
Web of Science (WoS)	"Politicians' speeches" OR "Political discourse AND "Speech acts" OR "Political speech acts"
SCOPUS	"Politicians' speeches" OR "Political discourse" AND "Speech acts" OR "Political speech acts"

Guided by the criteria and search terms identified, the study then identified seven (7) entries on Web of Science (WoS) and nine (9) entries on SCOPUS. Upon comparing the records, one (1) duplicate was found and removed, leaving only six (6) and nine (9) records on the respective databases.

Table 3 Identified articles

Database	Articles Identified	Access Date
Web of Science (WoS)	6 records	Mac 17th, 2025
SCOPUS	9 records	Mac 17th, 2025

To further narrow down the selection of the articles, the study then conducted a deeper review by looking into not just the abstracts but also the entire journal articles. This was to ensure that all records were relevant to the scope or the research objective of the study.

Upon the process, one (1) article from SCOPUS was removed as it was not fully written in English- its inclusion, therefore, may impede the review process. One (1) record from the same database was also removed as it was written in another document format.

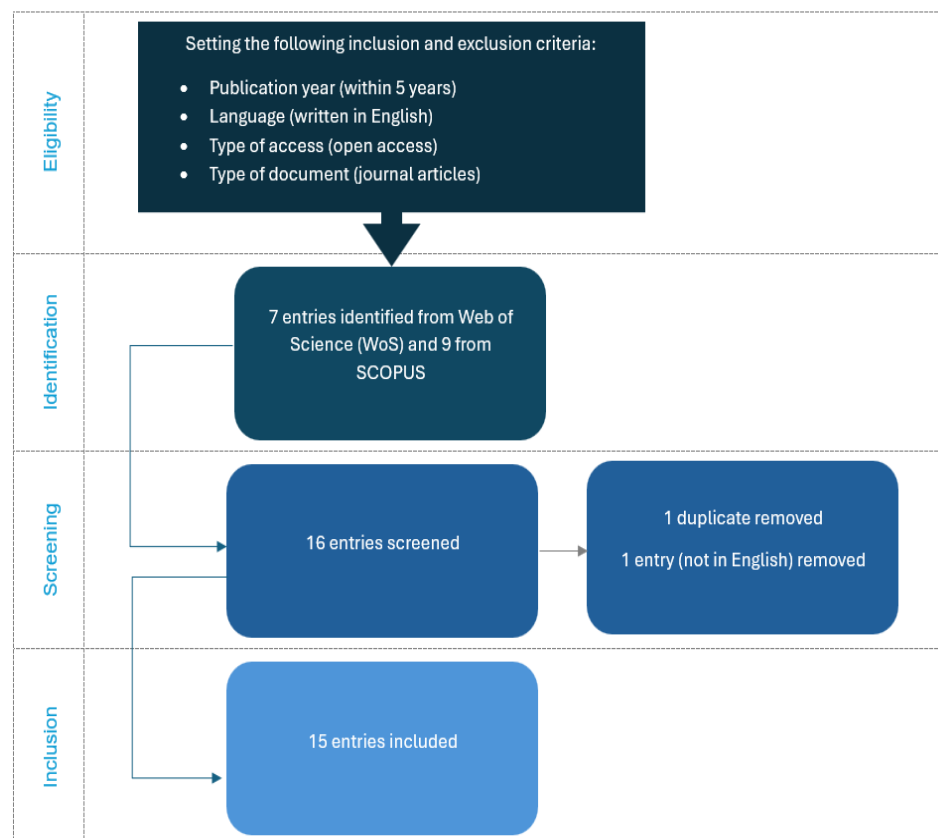
As a result, the study arrived at the following final samples- six (6) from Web of Science (WoS) and seven (7) from SCOPUS. As presented in the table below, a total of 13 records were identified for the systematic review.

Table 4 Final samples of selected articles

Database	Articles Selected
Web of Science (WoS)	6 records
SCOPUS	7 records

Figure 1 below summarises the process of identifying, screening, and inclusion of the 13 entries from the databases.

Figure 1 Identification and inclusion process of the entries



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section reviews the 13 articles identified and selected from the two (2) databases. The literature revolved around various political events and actors from across the globe, mainly the United States and the United Kingdom. Speech acts were observed within a wide array of scenarios, from televised election debates and news interviews to parliamentary sessions, presidential victory speeches, and royal national addresses. Table 5 below presents the summary of the articles.

Table 5 Overview of the selected articles

Author(s)	Article Title	Methods	Country/ Region	Political Context
Alharbi (2018)	Towards a Performative Theory of Solidarity Discourse	- Methodological Approach: Theoretical model development - Sample: Selected speeches from the 2016 AIPAC Conference by seven American politicians	USA	Lobbying Conference (AIPAC)
Alinezhad & Nemati (2019)	Divulging Power of Words-Personal Pronouns and Speech Acts in Political Speeches	- Methodological Approach: Pragmatic analysis - Sample: 24 speeches by UN representatives from China, UAE, UK, and USA (2012-2017)	International (China, UAE, UK, USA)	UN General Assembly Sessions
Astiandani et al. (2022)	Speech Acts and Language Styles of Biden's Victory Speech for Promoting Peace Values	- Methodological Approach: Qualitative research design - Sample: Biden's victory speech in Wilmington, Delaware on November 7, 2020	USA	Presidential Victory/Acceptance Speech
Ayeomoni & Akinkuolere (2012)	A Pragmatic Analysis of Victory and Inaugural Speeches of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua	- Methodological Approach: Speech Act theory analysis (Austin and Searle) - Sample: Victory and Inaugural speeches of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua	Nigeria	Presidential Victory and Inaugural Speeches
Dayter (2021)	Dealing with Interactionally Risky Speech Acts in Simultaneous Interpreting: The Case of Self-Praise	- Methodological Approach: Exploratory study with literature review - Sample: Self-praise in Russian and English political discourse	Russia & International	Interpreted Political Conferences
Dhayef & Fadhil (2024)	Disclaiming in the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Questions (Pmqs) Sessions: A Pragmatic Perspective	- Methodological Approach: Qualitative and quantitative analysis - Sample: Disclaiming language in Boris Johnson's PMQs sessions	United Kingdom	Parliamentary Debates (Prime Minister's Questions)
Goovaerts & Turkenburg (2023)	How Contextual Features Shape Incivility over Time: An Analysis of the Evolution and Determinants of Political Incivility in	- Methodological Approach: Quantitative content analysis - Sample: 4,102 speech acts in 24 Belgian televised election debates (1985-2019)	Belgium	Televised Election Debates

	Televised Election Debates (1985-2019)			
Hamad et al. (2022)	Complex Speech Act as a Performance of Fallacies in Nouri Al-Maliki's Political Speeches	- Methodological Approach: Textual analysis using pragma-dialectical approach - Sample: Ten political speeches of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki	Iraq	Prime Ministerial Public Addresses
Hamo & Kampf (2023)	But Then Again, Too Few to Mention: Negotiating Regret in Israeli and American News Interviews	- Methodological Approach: Contrastive pragmatic analysis - Sample: Questions of regret in Israeli and American news interviews (2010-2020)	Israel & USA	Political News Interviews
Khater et al. (2024)	Pragmatic Analysis of King Abdullah's Speech: Exploring Speech Acts and Societal Context	- Methodological Approach: Pragmatic and rhetorical analysis - Sample: King Abdullah II's 'Address to the Nation on the 25th Accession to the Throne Day'	Jordan	Royal National Address (Accession to the Throne Day)
Kravchenko et al. (2023)	The Topos of "Precaution" in the German Discourse on Assistance to Ukraine: Iconic Reproduction through Linguistics and Pragmatics; [O Topos Da "Precaução" No Discurso Alemão Sobre A Assistência À Ucrânia: Reprodução Icônica Por Meio Da Linguística E Da Pragmática]	- Methodological Approach: Linguistic and pragmatic analysis - Sample: Mitigators in the discourse on assistance to Ukraine	Germany	Public and Parliamentary Discourse (Assistance to Ukraine)
Mardiana et al. (2025)	Speech Act of Political Figures In The Discourse of Educational Development: An Interpersonal Pragmatic Approach	- Methodological Approach: Interpersonal pragmatics analysis - Sample: 66 public utterances from Commission X of the Indonesian House of Representatives (2019-2024)	Indonesia	Parliamentary Hearings (House of Representatives)
Roberts (2023)	How to Do Things with Deepfakes	- Methodological Approach: Theoretical analysis - Sample: Distinction between two types of deepfakes and their deceptive strategies	Global	Digital Political Communication

Based on the systematic review of the 13 articles, it was found that speech acts are a powerful tool to enhance politicians' persuasion in their speeches. Through the systematic review, the findings revealed that speech acts were frequently used to reflect politicians' commitment and promises apart from being a promising approach to persuading their audience. Other than that, speech acts were also used by politicians to show sincerity, respect, and consideration for the people. Other persuasive impacts of speech acts reported by the articles include to foster unity or inclusion and shared purpose, assert authority, maintain credibility, and indicate accountability. This was done through the use of various types of speech acts.

However, despite the fact that speech acts can greatly enhance politicians' persuasive power, a number of articles have also acknowledged the potential drawbacks of speech acts. This suggests that politicians must be prudent and careful in their use of speech acts upon persuading their intended audience. Some obstacles that dampen the persuasive power of speech acts, reported by the literature, include audience interpretation and the complexity of said acts. Other than that, negative speech acts, though can be a great persuasive tool, can also impact the people's trust for politicians.

The following table summarises the persuasive impact that politicians can achieve through incorporating speech acts in their speeches or discourses.

Table 6 Persuasive impact of speech acts reported by the selected articles

Author(s)	Persuasive Impact
Alharbi (2018)	Solidarity discourse, which comprises speech acts such as identifying, asserting, regrouping, and committing, helps politicians build a sense of unity and shared purpose among their audience.
Alinezhad & Nemati (2019)	The use of personal pronouns combined with commissive and declarative speech acts helps politicians create a sense of inclusion and commitment.
Astiandani et al. (2022)	Commissive speech acts, along with language styles like parallelism and repetition, help Biden convey promises and commitments, promoting peace and persuading the audience of his intentions.
Ayeomoni & Akinkulere (2012)	The study shows that assertive and directive speech acts are predominant, helping the politician assert authority and persuade the audience of their sincerity and commitment.
Dayter (2021)	Self-praise as a speech act can enhance a politician's image, but its effectiveness depends on the intensity and interpretation, which can either strengthen or weaken the persuasive impact.
Dhayef & Fadhil (2024)	Disclaimers, as a form of speech act, help politicians like Boris Johnson manage responsibility and knowledge, influencing public perception and maintaining credibility during spontaneous interactions.
Goovaerts & Turkenburg (2023)	The use of incivility, as a speech act in televised election debates, is influenced by factors such as populism, incumbency, gender, and debate topics. Incivility can grab citizens' attention, stimulate debate, and get points across, but it also has adverse effects on political trust and legitimacy.
Hamad et al. (2022)	The study highlights how complex speech acts, including fallacies, can manipulate and persuade the audience by creating arguments that seem logical but are inherently flawed.
Hamo & Kampf	Questions of regret are used to demand accountability or elicit emotional responses. The expression of regret can influence public perception by showing accountability and

(2023)	emotional engagement, which can enhance the persuasive impact of the politician
Khater et al. (2024)	The use of implicature, politeness strategies, and other pragmatic components in speech acts helps King Abdullah deliver messages that resonate with the audience, enhancing persuasion.
Kravchenko et al. (2023)	Mitigators in speech acts, such as hedges and shields, help politicians manage responsibility and assertiveness, influencing public perception and maintaining credibility.
Mardiana et al. (2025)	Politeness and strategic use of speech acts (through the use of irony and hyperbole) can enhance the persuasive impact by making the politician appear respectful and considerate
Roberts (2023)	Deepfakes can manipulate actions by using illocutionary speech acts like requests, commands, and warnings, which can deceive and persuade the audience to act in certain ways.

As depicted in Table 6, the persuasive impact of speech acts in political speeches is multi-faceted as it functions to build unity, strategically manage a politician's public image, and sometimes manipulate audiences. Politicians frequently rely on commissive, assertive, and declarative acts, alongside solidarity discourse, to foster a shared sense of purpose and convey sincerity to successfully establish authority and outline commitments (Alharbi, 2018; Alinezhad & Nemati, 2019; Astiandani et al., 2022; Ayeomoni & Akinkuolere, 2012). Not only that, public figures also employ pragmatic tools (such as mitigators, disclaimers, politeness strategies, expressions of regret, and calculated self-praise) to manage their credibility and accountability (Dayter, 2021; Dhayef & Fadhil, 2024; Hamo & Kampf, 2023; Khater et al., 2024; Kravchenko et al., 2023; Mardiana et al., 2025): this helps them navigate spontaneous interactions while resonating with their audience. Conversely, such pragmatic tools can also manipulate perception to deploy logical fallacies, incivility in debates, and deceptive illocutionary acts via deepfakes (Goovaerts & Turkenburg, 2023; Hamad et al., 2022; Roberts, 2023): the use of these tools ultimately risks damaging long-term political trust and legitimacy.

It is observed however that persuasive power of speech acts is deeply intertwined with the cultural and sociopolitical contexts. In more high-context cultures which are consensus oriented, indirect speech acts are frequently leveraged to resonate with specific societal norms. In Jordanian and Indonesian contexts for instance, implicature was indicated to be strategically used (apart from the use of irony and strict politeness strategy) to project consideration and respect. This was so public figures do not appear overtly aggressive thereby solidifying their persuasion. Conversely, in Belgium and in the UK where political events are highly mediatised, more interactionally risky speech acts were found to be deployed frequently. As such, calculated incivility, disclaimers, and direct assertives were used to command attention apart from stimulating debate and managing accountability on the spot. Therefore, these findings suggest that pragmatic tools including speech acts are highly reflective of cultural differences as they may be decoded differently: reinforcing a speech act deemed highly persuasive in one cultural setting could potentially erode political trust in another.

CONCLUSION

The systematic literature review highlights the role of speech acts as powerful multi-faceted mechanisms for persuasive political discourse. By strategically deploying various speech acts particularly commissive, assertive, and declarative acts, politicians can effectively convey commitments, assert authority, and foster a shared sense of purpose with their electorate. Integrating pragmatic tools such as mitigators, politeness strategies, and calculated expressions of regret enables public figures not only to manage their public image but also maintain credibility and navigate spontaneous or risky interactions.

The findings however also indicate significant drawbacks and risks which are associated with the complex nature of these linguistic tools. For instance, negative or manipulative speech acts (through the use of logical

fallacies, political incivility in debates, and manipulative illocutionary acts via deepfakes) are shown to successfully capture audience attention and manipulate perceptions. However, in the long run, they can threaten to undermine long-term political trust and democratic legitimacy.

Consequently, extreme prudence must be exercised by politicians in their communication strategies. The persuasive efficacy of speech acts is not absolute as it heavily relies on audience interpretation and the broader sociopolitical context. Therefore, to influence public opinion while maintaining ethical legitimacy and public trust, it is essential for political actors to master the complex dynamics of speech acts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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