

California State University Long Beach

Rhetorical Criticism Essay on “*Remarks by Vice President Harris on the Supreme Court
Decision to Overturn Roe V. Wade*”

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On June 24, 2022 the United States Supreme Court overturned the landmark decision of the right to have an abortion and contraception protections; *Roe V. Wade*. With this decision, the Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris came out with her remarks on the overturn in Illinois to show her concern on the overturn and attempt to persuade her audience in voting no on the new law. Kamala Harris exemplifies what a good rhetorical artifact contains through three different qualities. The first quality is that this artifact comes from an important rhetor. Harris holds a lot of power as Vice President and her opinion is valuable to many citizens. She is someone of importance in the United States. The second quality is that it discusses a significant idea that impacts a lot of women and families around the United States. This is a healthcare issue as millions of women will now no longer be able to gain access to healthcare and reproductive healthcare that they once had. With this law being stripped away, a lot of citizens around the United States will be affected negatively. The last quality is that it fits with a time and place that impacts intellectual ideological history. In 2022 the reality is citizens are practicing pre-marital sex. In order to practice safe sex they should have all the necessities available to them.

For this rhetorical artifact the researched questions I have established stem from Aristotle's critiques and his theory. According to Aristotle his definition of rhetoric is, "The faculty of discerning in any given situation the available means of persuasion." How could have Harris established more credibility in her speech? What ways could the speech have been more effective in order to achieve the objective? In what ways could Harris include more emotional appeals in order to persuade her audience? Lastly, what appeals were included and were these appeals effective? These questions are fundamentally rooted in Aristotle's rhetorical approach to

criticizing the text because they question if Harris effectively included the components of a rhetorical triangle; ethos, pathos, logos in order to persuade her audience.

In this essay, we argue that the artifact is not as persuasive as it could have been because it does not emphasize enough credibility while emphasizing more of an emotional appeal and this is disturbing to an Aristotelian perspective. This is important because the people of the United States had a very important decision to ponder on when the speech was given on if they would vote yes to the decision or no for their state. Although the United States Supreme Court overturned *Roe V. Wade* the citizens still have the opportunity to have their voices heard by voting for their choice to pass the law or not in the state they reside. Harris did not establish enough credibility and little emotional appeal in order to get her message across. In order to defend my argument, I have divided this essay into three sections. First, I will articulate the Aristotelian perspective as an appropriate way to analyze "*Remarks by Vice President Harris on the Supreme Court Decision to Overturn Roe V. Wade*" in order to provide backing for my central argument. Finally, I will provide a summary, advance implications to our rhetorical criticism, and conclude by addressing our research questions.

For an Aristotelian approach the rhetorical triangle is what is essential in a rhetorical artifact. The rhetorical triangle includes ethos, pathos and logos. For this artifact Harris is trying to convince her audience to vote no on this law and inform them on all issues that *Roe V. Wade* address.

Ethos is credibility. Credibility also includes three different dimensions. The first being sagacity, which is somebody's wisdom, whether they know what they are talking about. Sagacity includes three more concepts within it; phronesis, techne, and sophia. Phronesis deals with whether or not somebody can do something. Techne is the knowledge of artistic principles.

Sophia is philosophical wisdom. The other two dimensions are character and goodwill. Character means if someone is a good moral person. Lastly, goodwill is whether or not that person acts generously towards other people.

The second part of a rhetorical triangle is pathos. Pathos deals with an emotional appeal. Finally, Aristotle includes logos, which is logic in his rhetorical triangle. Aristotle believes that all of these concepts are vital when trying to persuade your audience and in an Aristoteian critic.

In this essay we are arguing that Harris does not establish credibility and does not give enough emotional appeal to persuade her audience. Aristotle's method assists in answering my research questions because when critiquing an artifact he is looking at the components of a rhetorical triangle. This method makes it clear that if the rhetor does not include enough elements of the rhetorical triangle then their message will not be received by their audience the way that they want it to. My research questions all pertain to the rhetorical triangle and the effectiveness they had for the rhetor and the audience. Therefore after reviewing the artifact, it can be easily identified what appeals worked and which ones did not work. Or the effectiveness each appeal had on the target audience.

There are several steps that an Aristotelian critic needs to take when reviewing an artifact. All of these steps will again align with the rhetorical triangle. The critic will first examine what ethos or credibility is involved in the artifact. The reason ethos will be examined first is because it is the most important part of a rhetorical triangle. Without ethos, then pathos and logos are irrelevant. The critic needs to be able to identify ethos because it deals with a lot of trust with the audience. If the audience feels like the rhetor does not know what they are talking about, or that they lack knowledge on the topic then there will be no trust involved.

After reviewing ethos and the critic has established the credibility, they will then look at pathos. Pathos deals with emotion. In any artifact the rhetor wants to draw in emotion from their target audience. Pathos is a powerful mode of persuasion. Many people make their decisions based on their emotional connection. However the critic will also look to see if the rhetor added too much pathos. An Aristotellian critic will try and look for a balance of pathos throughout the artifact.

Lastly the Aristotellian critic will observe how the rhetor included logos in their artifact. Logos are important because they deal with the evidence or the facts of the artifact. Logos assists the audience to understand what the rhetor is discussing. The critic will observe if the rhetor used logos effectively for the audience. The critic will observe what logical contents were included. There are several steps that I am going to take when observing "*Remarks by Vice President Harris on the Supreme Court Decision to Overturn Roe V. Wade.*" This is an artifact that is discussing a very controversial topic in the United States today. This means that Harris has a very large target audience when delivering her speech. Therefore the first step I am taking when examining this artifact is seeing what she is doing to reach that target audience.

I will then examine how she establishes credibility in her speech. Does she show that she is knowledgeable on Roe. V. Wade ? Does she know what she is talking about? How does she establish trust with her target audience? Does she contain the dimensions of credibility in her speech that are needed in ethos? Meaning does she have all the components of ethos; sagacity, character and goodwill.

Next I will examine how she includes pathos in her speech. This is a topic that can be very upsetting for several citizens in the United States. Does Harris draw in that audience

emotionally? Does she make any emotional connections with her argument? This is something that can be very effective in her power if she utilizes pathos correctly.

Finally I will examine how she includes logos in her artifact. Does she add any important facts or evidence to help her argument? What types of logical content does she add in order to persuade her audience? Is the evidence effective? I am examining if she helps give the audience an overall understanding on what this overturning will do for the citizens of the United States. All of the ways it affects them and how it will change their lives based on their state's decision where they live. These steps will help me answer my research questions because then I can clearly view how Harris utilized Aristotle's theory and how she effectively used them in order to persuade her target audience.

As stated in my first step I looked to see if Harris was trying to reach her target audience. The target audience is everyone that will be affected by the overturn of Roe V. Wade, mainly women and their families. She establishes this in her seventh paragraph as she states, "Millions of women in America will go to bed tonight without access to the healthcare..." (Harris 7). By starting with this in her artifact she is showing who her target audience is.

After viewing her target audience I then examine how she establishes credibility in her speech. Harris already holds some form of credibility being that she is the vice president. However on a topic dealt with health, she only knows so much.

When talking about what the overturn can do she states, "Think about it as the right for each person to make intimate decisions about heart and home; decisions about the right to start a family..." Harris repeatedly makes comments similar to this. Although these statements are truthful, she is not establishing ethos that she is knowledgeable on Roe V. Wade. However if a doctor was presenting, then they might be more knowledgeable and have a deeper explanation on

abortion and contraceptions and what they can do to your body in negative and positive ways. Another example that she states is, “This opinion also says, when your read it, that abortion is not deeply rooted in our nation’s history...” (Harris 10). Harris makes a point as to why the Supreme Court made their decision to overturn the landmark law with this statement. However it still does not make the audience aware that she is knowledgeable on what this right being stripped away will do for the audience. She does not make it clear that she knows what this right being stripped away can do for women and the choices they now have for their body. She makes a mediocre statement however this does not show any dimensions of credibility. There are no statements of proving that she contains sagacity, character nor goodwill. These are all vital when establishing credibility in a persuasive artifact and is something that she fails to prove. Although she is the vice president whose opinion is valuable for many citizens in the United States, I believe that she did not establish her credibility when discussing healthcare issues that the citizens will be affected by and that she shows any of the dimensions of credibility.

The second component I examined is the ways Harris utilizes pathos in her artifact. Harris states, “...I invite all people to stand together in defense of one of the most fundamental ideals and principles that for generations, for centuries, I believe, we have held dear, which is that fundamental principle about the importance of liberty — to stand for liberty, to stand for freedom, to stand for self-determination, and for the right to privacy” (Harris 14). This statement was made at the end of her speech forcing the audience to feel emotionally connected to Harris and her argument. The repetition of the phrase, “to stand for” creates a chilling tone that motivates her audience to stand for their rights and vote no on Roe V. Wade overturn.

She also adds, “...as the President said earlier today, with your vote, you can act, and you have the final word...So this is not over. God bless you. And God bless America ” (Harris

15-16). Harris ends her speech strong with another motivational statement. With this statement she is stating that the citizens have the power to change their fate. The citizens are the ones at the end of the day to determine how they want to dictate their future. This is also another emotional appeal because she included religion in her speech. By ending with the famous statement “God bless you. And God bless America” (Harris 16). Many citizens in the United States emotionally connect with this statement. Religion is something of emotional importance for a lot of people so this statement may affect them individually. Lastly with this statement she connects emotionally with her audience with the word “you”. The audience gets a moment of connection with Harris, making them feel like she is speaking to everyone in the United States individually. The audience feels like they have all the power, which is the goal that Harris is trying to conquer with this statement. Although Harris adds little pathos in her speech, it does not help her persuade her audience because she does not establish her credibility well and credibility is more important to a rhetorical critic.

The final examination that I looked for was Harris’s utilization of logos. Harris states, “This is the first time in the history of our nation that a constitutional right has been taken from the people of America. And what is that right? — some might ask. It’s the right to privacy.” (Harris 8). With a concerning topic like this, it is important that the citizens should know exactly what the overturn of *Roe V. Wade* means for them. Harris exemplifies this in this statement. In a simple sentence she shows what the overturn will do for the people of the U.S. This statement might have opened the eyes to the audience in a different way however Harris fails to add more logical content that could have assisted her in persuading her audience. Another statement that she added that includes is, “For nearly 50 years, we have talked about what *Roe v. Wade* protects. Today, as of right now, as of this minute, we can only talk about what *Roe v.*

Wade protected. Past tense.” (Harris 6). Harris includes another obvious factual statement however it is clear that her goal was to create a more emotional appeal. This statement might have emotionally connected a part of her audience but Harris fails again to specify facts of Roe V. Wade. She does not emphasize the crisis of what this overturn will do to people in the U.S. Harris also includes ,”And I had planned to speak about our strategy for improving care for pregnant women and mothers across our country. And as you know, on the way here, however, we learned that the United States Supreme Court had rendered its decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization.” (Harris 5). Given that her speech was seven minutes long she did not exemplify any real data or evidence to help her argument. The simple statements she included were not something that an Aristotellian method would use. If Harris utilized more logical content with evidence than she could have built her argument to be stronger than it was. Harris adds little to no factual, logical content in her speech which is disturbing to an Aristotellien perspective.

Overall in this essay we have discussed how Vice President Harris has failed to fully exemplify an Aristotellian method in her speech. After reviewing her artifact it has shown that Harris’s goal in persuading her audience is to emphasis an emotional appeal utilizing pathos however she fails to persuade her audience in an Aristotellian perspective because she lacks in establishing her credibility through all the components and dimensions of ethos and giving little to no audience driven logical content; logos. My analysis showed that she deems herself to be not fully knowledgeable of the overturn of Roe V. Wade and what it means for the people of the United States. She lacks in proving that she has factual content that will assist in her argument. She establishes an emotional appeal more than her credibility however in an Aristotellian perspective this is disturbing since establishing credibility is the most important of the rhetorical

triangle since the audience must believe that the rhetor is trustworthy of the information being presented to them rather than trying to persuade them emotionally.

The future critics that use my perspective can learn that in any persuasive artifact is it important to view the components of the rhetorical triangle and in a deeper level what Aristotle looked for when given any artifact. The analysis that I have conducted teaches from an Aristotellian perspective one must first and always establish their credibility before including an emotional appeal and logic. Showing that the rhetor is knowledgeable and gaining the trust of their audience is the most important idea in an Aristotellian perspective. This concept was the most disturbing in my artifact. Due to Harris being the Vice President of the United States she shows that she holds power when discussing her opinions on important issues in our country however her name can only help her to persuade her audience so much. In order to persuade her audience in an Aristotellian perspective she must prove that she exemplifies all the dimensions of credibility including sagacity, character and goodwill to persuade her audience.

Harris could have established more credibility by showing that she is more knowledgeable on the overturn of Roe V. Wade. The speech could have been more effective by proving to her audience that she has credibility in Roe V. Wade. Harris could have included more emotional appeal with more motivational terms. All appeals from the rhetorical triangle included however establishing her credibility and including more logic would have helped relay her message and concern on the overturn of Roe V. Wade.

Reference

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