

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysing the Rhetoric of Dr. Mahathir's International Speeches on Corruption

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ABSTRACT - Political speeches are instrumental in shaping public discourse, influencing opinion, and legitimising reform. Despite substantial research on political rhetoric, limited scholarly attention has been given to how Malaysian leaders construct anti-corruption narratives in international contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining the rhetorical strategies employed by Dr. Mahathir during his second tenure as Prime Minister of Malaysia with a focus on speeches themed around corruption. The study aims to (1) explore sub-themes that emerge from the discourse on corruption and (2) identify the use of rhetorical appeals in Dr. Mahathir's international speeches. Using a qualitative approach supported by elements of descriptive analysis, four speeches were analysed through both thematic and rhetorical lenses. The data comprised 7136 words and 390 sentences. Three sub-themes were identified, which were (1) government and governance in relation to Islamic values and political reform, (2) youth empowerment through ethical leadership, and (3) institutional integrity and recognition of anti-corruption efforts. The analysis revealed a predominant use of *logos* across all speeches except for one speech where *pathos* was more prominent. Dr. Mahathir positioned himself as a visionary reformist by contrasting the corruption of "old Malaysia" with the ideals of "New Malaysia". This study contributes to the understanding of how rhetorical strategies frame political leadership and anti-corruption discourse. Future research could explore comparative perspectives across global leaders to examine how rhetoric shapes public opinion and influences policy responses to corruption.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Political speeches are a central medium through which leaders communicate visions, influence public opinion, and mobilise support (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2000). Defined as formal spoken expressions delivered by political actors, these speeches function as symbolic and strategic acts in national and international contexts. They typically reflect the values of the speaker, address pressing national issues, and attempt to shape public perception and policy direction. Key characteristics include persuasive language, repetition, emotive appeals, and structured arguments aimed at legitimising leadership or reform initiatives (Charteris-Black, 2011; Ilie, 2019). A critical element underpinning political speech is rhetoric or the strategic use of language to persuade or influence an audience. Rhetoric shapes the effectiveness of political communication particularly when leaders address complex and contentious issues such as corruption. Aristotle's classical framework defines rhetorical effectiveness in terms of *ethos* (credibility), *pathos* (emotional appeal), and *logos* (logical reasoning). These rhetorical strategies are pivotal in helping leaders justify reform measures, restore public trust, and engage domestic and international stakeholders.

Corruption, defined as the giving or receiving of valuable rewards such as money, gifts or favours in exchange for actions related to official responsibilities (MACC, 2024), presents profound challenges for democratic institutions, economic development, and social justice (Retnasari, 2021; Saha & Sen, 2021; Hassan, 2022). In Malaysia, various policy initiatives and institutional reforms such as the National Integrity Plan, Government Transformation Programme, and National Anti-Corruption Plan have been introduced to address these challenges (Muhamad & Gani, 2020; Abas Azmi & Zainudin, 2021). However, the 2018 change in government saw Dr. Mahathir Mohamad led the Pakatan Harapan coalition to defeat an administration widely regarded as kleptocratic. This transition was viewed both in Malaysia and internationally as a decisive moral and political stand against corruption (Welsh, 2018; Wright & Hope, 2018). Malaysia also provides a pertinent context as major corruption scandals such as 1MDB and FELDA have attracted global attention and driven significant political change. Dr. Mahathir's leadership placed Malaysia at the centre of worldwide anti-corruption discourse with his speeches serving as a focal point for examining the interplay of rhetoric and reform narratives.

Rhetoric is frequently employed by political leaders to frame corruption as a national threat that undermines democratic institutions, hinders economic development, and erodes social justice (Retnasari, 2021; Stephenson, 2015). The communication of anti-corruption messages on international platforms serves to enhance a leader's credibility and demonstrates political commitment to transparency and reform. Despite ongoing public and scholarly interest in Malaysia's anti-corruption efforts, there remains a lack of rhetorical analysis regarding how Malaysian political leaders, particularly Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, articulate anti-corruption themes in international speeches. The problem this study addresses is the gap in understanding the rhetorical strategies specifically the use of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* employed by Dr. Mahathir in communicating corruption-related issues on the global stage. The aim of this study is to investigate the rhetorical strategies used by Malaysia's seventh Prime Minister in his international speeches concerning corruption.

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The specific objectives are (a) to explore sub-themes that emerge in the analysis of corruption as the main theme and (b) to identify the use of rhetorical appeals such as ethos, pathos, and logos in Dr. Mahathir’s international speeches on corruption.

1.1 Analysis of Politicians’ Speeches

Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad is the only Malaysian Prime Minister to have served two non-consecutive terms, first from 1981 to 2003 and again from 2018 to 2020. In his first tenure, he led the ruling party. While in 2018, he led the *Pakatan Harapan* coalition to victory over an administration widely viewed as kleptocratic (Laignee, 2018; Anisah & Anuradha, 2018). Despite the political realignments, Dr. Mahathir’s speeches have received scholarly attention for their treatment of topics such as Muslim identity (Lau & Wongchestha, 2020), Malaysia’s foreign policy positioning (Gerstl, 2020), and anti-war narratives (Shukry, 2013). However, few studies have specifically analysed his rhetoric on corruption especially during his second premiership.

Anti-corruption rhetoric is shaped by the political, cultural, and institutional contexts of each country. In Indonesia, President Sukarno’s introduction of Pancasila principles was aimed at reinforcing government loyalty and grounding anti-corruption values among officials (Retnasari, 2021). In the Philippines, Quijano and Bulusan (2020) found that presidential speeches frequently utilised logical appeals to mobilise the public against corruption. Beyond Southeast Asia, the use of rhetorical strategies to address corruption and other critical issues is a recurring feature in political communication. Hassan (2020) analysed Pakistani President Imran Khan’s populist rhetoric that showed how corruption was positioned as a central enemy of reform. Ogunmuyiwa and Antia (2020) demonstrated that Nigerian presidential speeches consistently included corruption as a recurring theme. Yet, the Nigerian presidential speeches often avoided direct attribution of blame by relying on logical appeals to foster understanding. Similarly, Ogunmuyiwa (2015) found that Independence Day speeches in Nigeria strategically evaded accountability for corruption by opting instead for generalised calls for integrity.

Studies from Vietnam and Myanmar highlight how rhetoric is shaped by political structures. My Nhat and Thu Hien (2023) examined anti-corruption speeches by top Vietnamese officials and found that their discourses were influenced by the leaders’ authoritative roles and the country’s socio-political context. The limited depiction of explicit adversaries in these speeches reflects the dynamics of Vietnam’s single-party system. In the United States, Prafitri and Nasir (2023) conducted a rhetorical analysis of Donald Trump’s campaign, victory, and inauguration speeches. Their findings showed a greater reliance on pathos particularly when addressing corruption at international borders. In contrast to other leaders who emphasised logical reasoning, Trump’s rhetorical approach prioritised emotional connection with the audience.

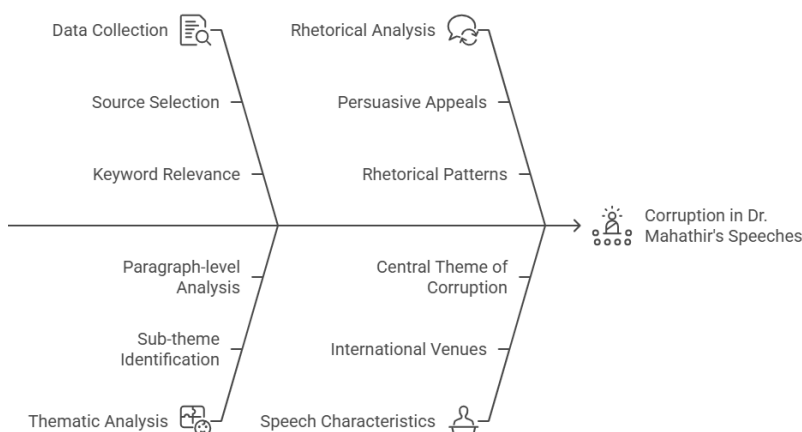
Across these studies, a common pattern emerges. Political leaders employ rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos in varying degrees to connect with audiences and frame critical issues. The focus and explicitness of anti-corruption themes differ according to political context. Some leaders opt for direct confrontation, while others employ evasive strategies. Despite the growing body of research, there is still limited analysis of how Dr. Mahathir used narratives on international platforms through rhetorical strategies during his second term. It underlines the significance of this study, which aims to systematically examine the use of rhetorical appeals in Dr. Mahathir’s international speeches on corruption.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach supported by descriptive analysis was employed to elicit data for this study. The methodological choice enables an exploration of rhetorical strategies which offer deeper insights into how persuasive appeals operate in political discourse. Thematic analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework. Meanwhile, rhetorical analysis drew on Aristotle’s persuasive appeals and was further defined by contemporary scholars (Mshvenieradze, 2013; Alkhirbash, 2016; Ting, 2018). This approach strengthens the study’s capacity to uncover rhetorical patterns and contextual meanings. Figure 1 reveals the research design of the study.

Figure 1

Research design



2.1 Data Collection

Google Search was used to identify Dr. Mahathir's international speeches related to corruption during his second tenure as Malaysia's Prime Minister. Only speeches sourced from official portals such as the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) were selected as primary sources. The keywords "corrupt," "corruption," and "anti-corruption" ensured relevance to the topic. From the full set of 21 collected speeches, only four speeches were chosen based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) delivered at international venues, (2) directly addressed corruption as a central theme, and (3) had accessible full transcripts in English. Speeches that mentioned corruption only tangentially or were addressed to domestic audiences were excluded. Table 1 shows the selected speeches of the study.

Table 1

Speeches of the study

No	Title	Word Token	Sentence Token	Venue	Date	Web Address
1.	Government and governance in the Islamic world	2845	147	Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies	24 September 2018	https://dbook.penerangan.gov.my/dbook/dmdocuments/koleksi_ucapan_pm_2018/-files/basic-html/page118.html
2.	General debate of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)	2265	162	UN General Headquarter, New York	28 September 2018	https://dbook.penerangan.gov.my/dbook/dmdocuments/koleksi_ucapan_pm_2018/-mobile/index.html#p=128
3.	Al-Sharq 5 th Annual Conference 2019	1216	52	Hilton Hotel, Kuala Lumpur	1 May 2019	https://www.pmo.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Media-Copy-Keynote-Address-by-YAB-PM-at-the-Al-Sharq-Youth-5th-Annual-Conference-2019-on-1-May-2019.pdf
4.	Perdana International Anti-Corruption Champion Foundation Malaysia (PIACCF)	810	29	Marriott Hotel, Kuala Lumpur	11 February 2020	https://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=-mahathir2&id=4555
Total		7136	390			

A small dataset is considered sufficient for this study because it enables a detailed and context-sensitive analysis of each speech. The goal is to uncover rhetorical patterns rather than to generalise across a broad population. Due to the limited duration of Dr. Mahathir's second term, only a small number of his international speeches specifically addressing corruption were available from official sources. Therefore, the four speeches included in this study represent the complete set of relevant speeches on this topic during his second tenure, which made the dataset appropriate and comprehensive for the study's objectives.

Venue selection is significant because the setting of each speech such as an international summit or global forum directly shapes the composition, expectations, and cultural backgrounds of the audience. These factors influence the rhetorical strategies that Dr. Mahathir employed. By analysing speeches delivered in varied international venues, the study can examine how Dr. Mahathir adapted his rhetorical appeals to suit different audiences, objectives, and contexts.

2.2 Data Analysis

The thematic analysis of the study was adopted by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis procedure began by familiarising with the collected data of Dr. Mahathir's international speeches. Upon reading and rereading Dr. Mahathir's speeches, initial thoughts and ideas were documented to ensure understanding of the content's scope and depth. It was aimed at immersing in the speeches and becoming familiar with their intricate details. Since the analysis was theoretically grounded and focused on identifying sub-themes related to corruption, a meticulous examination was pivotal.

The core aspect of this analysis was to identify and categorise sub-themes that reflected the key issues of corruption as discussed by Dr. Mahathir in his international speeches. The unit of analysis for identifying these themes and sub-themes was at the paragraph level. Various codes were initially employed to identify potential sub-themes and organised relevant data excerpts under the respective theme. During the review of sub-themes, a comprehensive analysis was undertaken to ensure thorough examination and validation. Each sub-theme underwent scrutiny to ascertain its consistency and alignment with the research objectives. This process involved revisiting coded data excerpts associated with each sub-theme to confirm their relevance to the research objectives. Additionally, the interrelationships among different sub-themes were explored to understand their interconnectedness.

Table 2 reflects the rhetorical analysis framework. In Dr. Mahathir's speeches on corruption, the rhetorical analysis of ethos considered how he presented himself as a trustworthy and credible figure by drawing on his personal integrity, leadership experience, or ethical principles to bolster his persuasive appeal. Pathos examined how he employed emotive language, vivid imagery, or compelling narratives to connect with the audience on an emotional level such as by highlighting the detrimental impact of corruption on society or invoking a sense of moral outrage. Logos assessed the coherence of his arguments, the use of factual evidence, and the logical structure of his discourse to evaluate the persuasiveness of his corruption rhetoric.

Table 2

Rhetorical analysis framework

Appeal	Definition	Indicators	Examples
*Ethos	Invoke the trustworthiness, reliability and integrity of the speaker or the listeners	<p><i>Positive sense:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighting commonalities with the audience • Demonstrating regard and consideration for the rights and emotions of the intended group • Employing flattery, showcasing knowledge, and practicing self-reflection • Denoting good sense, good moral character and goodwill 	<p><i>A year had passed, and I am happy to state that we have managed to overcome the worst of the legacies of chaos we inherited (*ethos).</i></p>
*Pathos	Appeal to emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referring to the emotions, requirements, principles, and aspirations of the subject or oneself • Admitting, expressing remorse, and appealing • Assuring, complementing, and expressing gratitude • Employing emotionally charged terms and descriptors to influence emotions • Discussing principles and the emotional state of either themselves or the subject in order to persuade 	<p><i>In fact, they were so impressive they are letting a lot of European countries felt they need to copy from the Muslim governance system (*pathos).</i></p>
*Logos	Appeal to reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employing reasoning, rationale, supporting statements, assertions, statistics, and illustrative instances • Could be reflected via the speaker's reasons, facts, enthymemes, examples, rhetorical questions, statistics, statements from authorities as proofs, syllogism • Inquiring and pondering • Utilising objective terminology to describe behaviours and actions for rationality • Potentially using transitional phrases like "initially," "subsequently," and "in conclusion" to structure logical thought 	<p><i>This foundation will be responsible for the International Anti-Corruption Champion Fund and complement the aspirations of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) (*logos).</i></p>

**Source of information: Mshvenieradze, 2013; Alkhirbash, 2016; Ting, 2022*

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the analysis was carried out thematically and via rhetorical analysis. The excerpts were taken from the four international speeches that were related to corruption. The first part of the findings employed thematic analysis to reveal the sub-themes and followed by its rhetorical analysis.

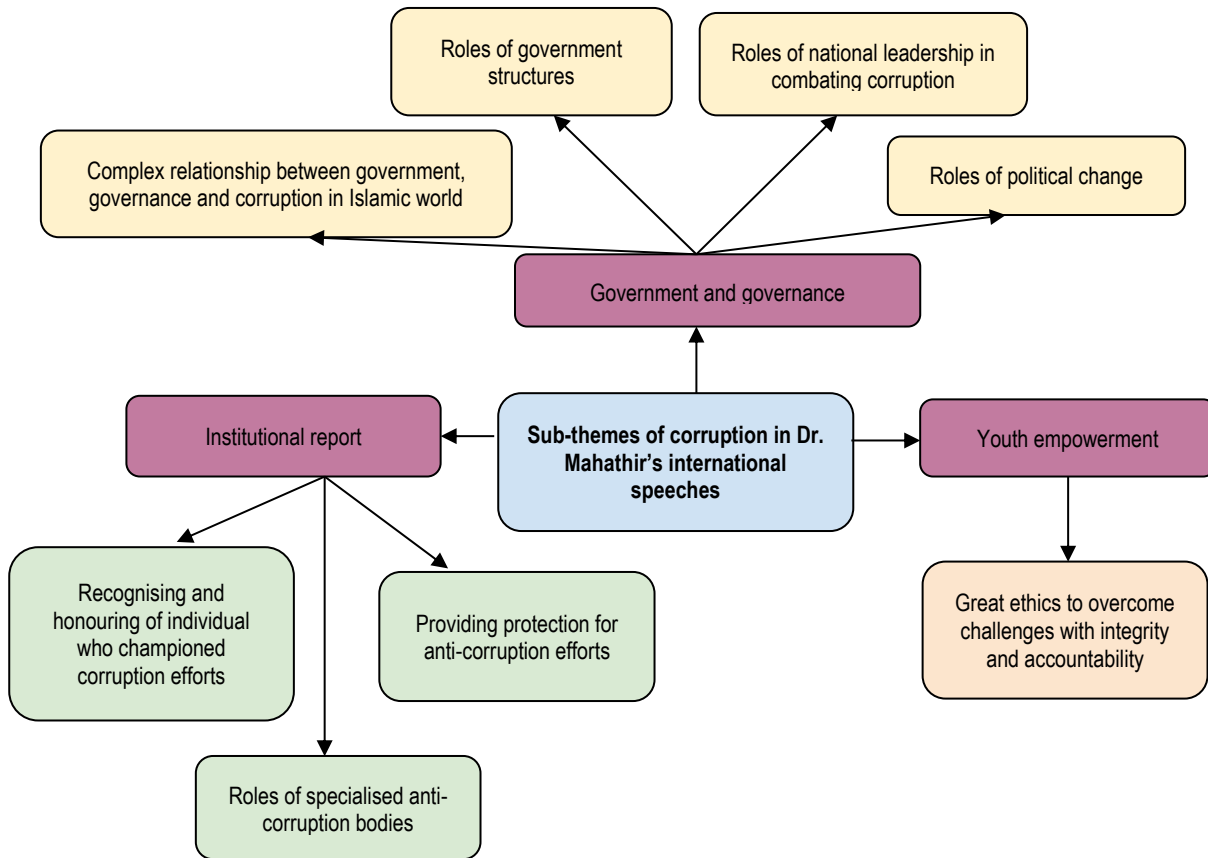
3.1 Thematic analysis

Based on the thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2008), excerpts that discussed corruption issues were being analysed to investigate the sub-themes. Figure 2 reveals the main theme of corruption was categorised into three sub-themes which were government and governance, youth empowerment and institutional report. The first sub-theme of government and governance discussed (1) complex relationship between government, governance, and corruption in the Islamic world, (2) roles of governance

structures, (3) roles of national leadership in combating corruption, and (4) roles of political change. The second sub-theme of youth empowerment revealed (1) empowering youth with great ethics and (2) overcoming challenges with integrity and accountability. The third sub-theme of institutional report dealt with (1) recognition and honouring of individuals who championed corruption efforts, (2) roles of specialised anti-corruption bodies, and (3) providing protection for anti-corruption efforts.

Figure 2

Sub-themes of corruption in Dr. Mahathir's international speeches



The sub-theme of government and governance discussed the complex relationship between government, governance, and corruption in the Islamic world. The historical perspective on governance in Islamic states was acknowledged by the successes and failures in providing good governance. Resonating absolute power could lead to corruption, Wijaya (2022) also believed corruption as inseparable from power. Those in power were considered as “Self” while the rest was the “Other”. The evolution of governance systems particularly the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy was considered as a response to corruption. The discourse surrounding governance reforms and anti-corruption efforts in both Islamic and non-Islamic contexts was evidenced in Table 3.

Table 3

Excerpt 1 on absolute power and corruption

- 1 Of course, **as you say**, absolute power corrupts and **corrupts absolutely** (*pathos). Invariably, this happens in
- 2 most of Islamic states (*logos). It **doesn't mean that they don't provide good governance** all the time (*logos).
- 3 There have been rulers in Islamic states who have **done a great deal for their country** who have led their country
- 4 to prominence until at one time, of course, the **Muslims appeared to be the most successful people** in terms of
- 5 governance of their countries (*logos). They were **strong**, and they were able to **conquer their neighbours**
- 6 (*logos). They were able to provide for the development of their countries (*logos). In fact, they were **so impressive**
- 7 they are letting a lot **European countries felt they need to copy** from the Muslim governance system (*pathos).
- 8 And so therefore sometime **around 15th century, Europeans began to study Islamic** way of governance and
- 9 development (*logos).

(International Speech 1, 24 September 2018)

As shown in Table 3 (excerpt 1), Dr. Mahathir began by emphasising the intrinsic link between absolute power and corruption (lines 1–2) by employing pathos to highlight the emotional weight of this observation. Then, he adopted a rational and evidence-based approach by acknowledging the successes and failures of governance in Islamic states (lines 3–5) by using logos to demonstrate a balanced and historical perspective. This dual approach signalled credibility and self-reflection to build trust with an audience that valued transparency. In lines 5–7, Dr. Mahathir highlighted the achievements of past Muslim rulers by highlighting their strength and ability to lead their countries to development and regional prominence. The frequent use of logos (lines 4–6) appealed to reason and

empirical success by aligning his message with universal criteria for good governance. Simultaneously, he invoked pathos (line 8) to evoke a sense of pride and shared identity to reinforce the emotional connection with his audience. Dr. Mahathir also contrasted the “*Self*” (Muslim rulers) with the “*Other*” (Europeans) in lines 6–9 by pointing to a period when European countries began to learn from Islamic governance. This rhetorical move elevated the historical significance of Islamic governance. By strategically combining logos and pathos, Dr. Mahathir framed corruption as a challenge shared across societies (lines 1–3) while asserting that Islamic governance had provided valuable models for the world (lines 8–9). This allowed him to position Malaysia and the Islamic world as credible contributors to global governance discourse.

In excerpt 2, the roles of governance structures in addressing corruption were also discussed in the sub-themes of government and governance. When rulers have sole control over the country's revenue and resources, Dr. Mahathir believed they may become corrupt which leads to the deterioration of governance and development efforts. Delegitimisation of autocracy occurred by transitioning to a democratic system of government as a potential solution to corruption. It illustrated the importance of institutional reforms and accountability mechanisms in mitigating corruption as said in Table 4.

Table 4

Excerpt 2 on revenue, rulers and corruption

-
- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Revenue of the country belongs to the ruler and it is up to him to be generous to pay for the administration and development of the country (*logos). And as I said just now invariably , they become corrupt (*pathos). So, the |
| 2 | answer to that is to change system of government and they found that system must be the democratic system |
| 3 | and they were urged to overthrow their rulers and set up a democratic government (*logos). |
| 4 | |

(International Speech 1, 24 September 2018)

In Table 4 of excerpt 2, Dr. Mahathir began by describing how historically national revenue belonged to the ruler who was responsible for funding the administration and development of the country (line 1). The use of logos established a rational and systemic explanation of governance practices. Then, he highlighted the tendency for rulers to become corrupt over time (line 2) by invoking an emotional response to the inevitability such system. Dr. Mahathir explained that the solution identified by societies was to transform their system of government by urging the adoption of democracy and the removal of corrupt rulers (lines 3–4). He employed logos to reinforce systemic change was necessary for sustainable governance rather than reliance on individual morality.

The sub-theme of government and governance also discussed the roles of political change to address corruption and to foster good governance. Excerpt 3 in Table 5 highlights the significance of democratic processes in addressing corruption and restoring public trust in government institutions.

Table 5

Excerpt 3 on democratic change and the “New Malaysia”

-
- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | A new Malaysia emerged after the 14th General Election in May this year (*pathos). Malaysians decided to change their government, which had been in power for 61 years , since independence (*pathos). We did this |
| 2 | because the immediate past Government indulged in the politics of hatred, of racial and religious bigotry , as |
| 3 | well as widespread corruption (*pathos). The process of change was achieved democratically, without violence |
| 4 | or loss of lives (*pathos). Malaysians want a new Malaysia that upholds the principles of fairness, good |
| 5 | governance, integrity and the rule of law (*pathos). They want a Malaysia that is a friend to all and enemy of none |
| 6 | (*pathos). A Malaysia that remains neutral and non-aligned (*pathos). A Malaysia that detests and abhors wars |
| 7 | and violence (*pathos). They also want a Malaysia that will speak its mind on what is right and wrong, without |
| 8 | fear or favour (*pathos). A new Malaysia that believes in co-operation based on mutual respect, for mutual |
| 9 | gain (*pathos). The new Malaysia that offers a partnership based on our philosophy of “prosper-ty-neighbour” |
| 10 | (*pathos). |
| 11 | |

(International Speech 2, 28 September 2018)

Table 5 (excerpt 3) demonstrates Dr. Mahathir was evoking the momentous nature of Malaysia's political transformation following the 14th General Election (line 1). By referencing the end of 61 years of uninterrupted rule (lines 1–2), he foregrounded the emotional significance of the electorate's decision and reinforced a sense of historic achievement. Dr. Mahathir explained that the change was motivated by widespread discontent over the previous government's corruption, racial and religious bigotry, and divisive politics (lines 2–4). The emphasis on “*widespread corruption*” and “*politics of hatred*” invoked strong negative emotions to arouse the audience's feelings with the necessity for change.

He also emphasised that this transformation was accomplished democratically and peacefully (lines 4–5). The vision for the “*new Malaysia*” (lines 5–11) relied extensively on pathos to inspire hope, unity, and national pride. Dr. Mahathir listed values such as fairness, integrity, neutrality, opposition to violence, and mutual respect (lines 5–11) to frame the nation's new identity in inspirational terms. The emotional appeal was intended to unify Malaysians around shared values and to assure the international audience of Malaysia's constructive role in global affairs. Critically, Dr. Mahathir's reliance on pathos functioned to build solidarity, instill optimism, and

legitimise the new government and its reform agenda. By articulating a collective vision grounded in emotional and ethical appeals, he strengthened trust in leadership and fostered public confidence during a pivotal democratic transition.

The role of national leadership in combating corruption was also revealed in the sub-theme of government and governance. Dr. Mahathir highlighted Malaysia's resistance to corruption by having a proactive stance through the introduction of the Perdana International Anti-Corruption Champion Foundation Malaysia (PIACCF). Government-led initiatives and policies in tackling corruption were concrete actions taken by Malaysia to address the issue. It conveyed a message of support and solidarity to the officers of the Anti-Corruption Agency. Excerpt 4 in Table 6 expresses Malaysia's intolerance towards corruption and its determination to eradicate it from society.

Table 6

Excerpt 4 on national leadership against corruption

-
- 1 I am **proud** to say that **Malaysia** has taken a **leading role** in addressing this matter, starting with the
 - 2 **introduction of the Foundation** (*pathos). I **sincerely hope** that **our contribution** will **send the message** to
 - 3 **all the officers** of the **Anti-Corruption Agency** that the **Government of Malaysia** is **with you** all the way
 - 4 (*pathos). And it should also **send the message** to the **corrupt** and **corruptors** that **we do not want you in**
 - 5 **our midst** (*pathos).

(International Speech 4, 11 February 2020)

As shown in Table 6 (excerpt 4), Dr. Mahathir relied heavily on pathos to inspire collective resolve and foster national unity. He began by expressing pride in Malaysia's proactive stance against corruption and highlighted the symbolic significance of launching a new foundation (lines 1-2). The appeal to pride and shared achievement was intended to boost morale and signal progress in "new Malaysia". Dr. Mahathir moved to articulate a strong and emotionally charged message of solidarity by assuring officers of the Anti-Corruption Agency that "the Government of Malaysia is with you all the way" (line 4). This strategy recognised the efforts of anti-corruption actors and built trust by positioning the government as an active ally in reform. Critically, Dr. Mahathir also directed his message towards "the corrupt and corruptors" emphatically stating that "we do not want you in our midst" (line 5). This public denunciation used emotional appeal to create social distance from wrongdoers. Dr. Mahathir also strengthened the emotional connection between the government, anti-corruption authorities, and the public. This approach was important in the context of Malaysia's ongoing political reforms, as it fostered trust, galvanised support and reinforced a unified commitment to integrity.

By framing corruption as a national disease, the sub-theme of youth empowerment emphasised cultivating strong ethics and overcoming challenges with integrity and accountability. Embracing diversity and inclusivity was highlighted as an antidote to corruption by fostering a sense of belonging and collective responsibility among the youth as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Excerpt 5 on youth, values and national diversity

-
- 1 If the youths choose to put aside their ideals and values in favour of all that **is corrupt and evil**, nations will **fail and**
 - 2 **crumble** (*pathos). And these too, **sadly, we have witnessed** as well (*pathos). Before I digress, I would like to
 - 3 welcome all of you to **Malaysia**, a nation where the **citizenry takes pride in its diversity** (*logos). It is **multi-**
 - 4 **cultural, multi-lingual, multi-racial, and multi-religious** (*logos). Our tagline "**Malaysia Truly Asia**" is our way of
 - 5 saying that you **do not have to travel throughout Asia** to discover **their diversity, suffice a trip to Malaysia** and
 - 6 **you will have it all** in one (*logos). At the rate **Malaysia have accepted requests for residency from people**
 - 7 **from other parts of the world** especially from the West, the tagline Malaysia Truly Asia may be too narrow a
 - 8 description as **we have turned global** (*logos).

(International Speech 3, 1 May 2019)

As illustrated in Table 7 (excerpt 5), Dr. Mahathir began by employing pathos in warning that abandoning ideals and values in favour of "corrupt and evil" practices would cause nations to "fail and crumble" (line 1). This use of pathos created a sense of urgency and reflected the moral consequences of corruption. He further reinforced this emotional appeal by referencing real-world examples (line 2) through shared memory with the audience. Transitioning from emotional appeal to rational persuasion, Dr. Mahathir shifted the focus to Malaysia's diversity and global identity. He highlighted the nation's multicultural, multilingual, and multiracial fabric (line 3) by using empirical evidence and observable characteristics to instill a sense of pride and legitimacy. The claim in line 5 further positioned Malaysia as a microcosm of Asia's diversity. By referencing Malaysia's acceptance of residency requests from people around the world (lines 5-7), Dr. Mahathir revealed the country's global appeal and openness. This rational justification served to counter any negative perceptions while supporting the positive national image promoted by the tagline "Malaysia Truly Asia." Dr. Mahathir's rhetorical strategy was to combine emotional resonance with factual credibility. Firstly, he mobilised pathos to signal the dangers of moral decline. Then, he used logos to celebrate Malaysia's strengths. The dual approach helped to build trust, unify the audience, and reinforce the nation's values.

Providing protection for anti-corruption efforts was revealed in the sub-themes of institutional support. The establishment of PIACCF and its roles in supporting anti-corruption officers who face risks and persecution in the line of duty was the essence of Dr.

Mahathir's speech. The importance of institutional mechanisms reflected the need for comprehensive support systems as evidenced in Table 8.

Table 8

Excerpt 6 on institutional protection for anti-corruption officers

1 It is **indeed a significant occasion** today as **we gather to launch** the **Perdana International Anti-Corruption**
 2 **Champion Foundation** or **PIACCF** (*logos). This **foundation** will be **responsible** for the **International Anti-**
 3 **Corruption Champion Fund** and **complement** the **aspirations** of the **United Nations Convention Against**
 4 **Corruption (UNCAC)** (*logos). What makes this **fund special** and at the same time important is because it acts as a
 5 **support system for anti-corruption officers** who had been **victimised** and **subjected to persecution** in the line of
 6 duty (*logos). **We know** that **combatting** and **exposing corruption** are very **dangerous** and the **world** have
 7 **witnessed** many of those who **attempted to do so, paid dearly**, even with **their lives** (*pathos).

(International Speech 4, 11 February 2020)

As shown in Table 8 (excerpt 6), Dr. Mahathir grounded his remarks in logos by highlighting the launch of the Perdana International Anti-Corruption Champion Foundation (PIACCF) and its alignment with international standards such as the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) (lines 2–3). He reinforced the legitimacy and seriousness of Malaysia's anti-corruption efforts. Dr. Mahathir further explained the fund's unique role as a support system for anti-corruption officers who have faced victimisation and persecution in their duties (line 5). This rational explanation was meant to assure the fund's purpose and necessity. Dr. Mahathir also interwove pathos into his narrative by acknowledging the personal risks and sacrifices made by those combatting corruption (line 7). It invoked empathy and a sense of moral urgency by elevating the stakes of anti-corruption work beyond policy to matters of life and death. Consequently, Dr. Mahathir had constructed a credible and emotionally compelling argument. The rhetorical strategy humanised the anti-corruption struggle and fostered solidarity among stakeholders.

Another sub-theme of institutional support was recognising and honouring individuals who championed corruption efforts. Such recognition served as a powerful incentive in inspiring others to uphold ethical standards and actively participate in combating corruption. By showcasing positive role models, institutions can instill a sense of responsibility and dedication among their members as reflected in Table 9.

Table 9

Excerpt 7 on honouring Anti-Corruption Champions

1 Tonight, **we** are here to **honour two (2) brave officers** who **paid heavy prices** in their efforts to combat corruption
 2 (*pathos). They will be **recipients** of the **Perdana International Anti-Corruption Champion 2020 Award** (*logos). The
 3 **first recipient** is **Mr. Anthony Kevin Morais**; a highly regarded Senior Deputy Public Prosecutor of Malaysia who was
 4 murdered in 2015 while investigating a corruption scandal (*logos). The **second recipient** is **Mr. Novel Baswedan**; an
 5 officer of the Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK), Indonesia (*logos). During one of his investigations in **June 2016**,
 6 he had **acid thrown** at him, **leaving him partially blind** (*logos). Indeed, there are many other **brave officers** who had
 7 **suffered** in **upholding their integrity** (*logos). To them, the **awards to Mr. Morais and Mr. Baswedan symbolise** our
 8 **appreciation** to all of them (*logos).

(International Speech 4, 11 February 2020)

As shown in Table 9 (excerpt 7), Dr. Mahathir opened with a strong appeal to pathos by honouring "two brave officers who paid heavy prices" in the fight against corruption (line 1). The emotional framing was designed to evoke empathy and to highlight the personal risks faced by anti-corruption champions. Then, he shifted to logos by providing specific details about the recipients of the Perdana International Anti-Corruption Champion 2020 Award of Mr. Anthony Kevin Morais and Mr. Novel Baswedan (lines 3–6). The mention of Mr. Morais's murder (line 5) and Mr. Baswedan's partial blindness following an acid attack (line 6) provided factual evidence of the dangers involved in upholding integrity. Dr. Mahathir used these real-life examples to denote the value of sacrifice and dedication in anti-corruption work (lines 6–7). By linking the awards to broader appreciation for all who serve with integrity, he reinforced the legitimacy of anti-corruption efforts and fostered collective respect for these individuals (line 8).

The sub-theme of institutional support highlighted the role of specialised anti-corruption bodies in prevention, coordination, and education. UNCAC provisions emphasise the need for such bodies to provide expertise and resources. As shown in excerpt 8 (Table 10), Dr. Mahathir stressed that institutional autonomy and integrity ensure freedom from external pressures in anti-corruption efforts.

As presented in Table 10 (excerpt 8), Dr. Mahathir anchored his argument in logos by referencing the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) as a foundational global framework (line 1). By highlighting UNCAC's emphasis on the need for specialised anti-corruption bodies, and its focus on prevention, coordination, and education (lines 2–3), Dr. Mahathir demonstrated Malaysia's alignment with internationally recognised standards and practices. The rationale for granting anti-corruption agencies independence and ensuring their operations are free from undue influence (lines 4–6) served as a logical justification for policy reforms. It reinforced the message that effective anti-corruption efforts require institutional autonomy and adherence to legal principles. The

appeal to universally accepted standards strengthened the credibility of Malaysia's anti-corruption initiatives. Through this logos-driven approach, Dr. Mahathir framed Malaysia's anti-corruption policies as legitimate and necessary for effective governance.

Table 10

Excerpt 8 on the roles of Specialised Anti-Corruption Bodies

1 In 2003, the **United Nations Conventions Against Corruption (UNCAC)** became the first **global treaty** to
 2 **recognise** the **need** for **Specialised Anti-Corruption Bodies**, that will **focus** on **Prevention, Coordination** and
 3 **Education** in relation to **Corruption**, and to **investigate** and **prosecute corruption** (*logos). It **requires** that the **ACA**
 4 be **granted** the **necessary independence**, in accordance with the **fundamental principles** of the **legal systems** of
 5 the **state party**, to be able to **carry out** their **functions effectively** and **without any undue influence** (*logos)
 (International Speech 4, 11 February 2020)

Additionally, Dr. Mahathir highlighted the Jakarta Statement's guidance on the "Necessary Independence" of anti-corruption agencies by stressing international collaboration to establish clear principles. Key values include apolitical stance, impartiality, integrity, and competence, with accountable leadership emphasised in excerpt 9 of Table 11.

Table 11

Excerpt 9 on the Jakarta Principles of Anti-Corruption Agencies

1 Consequently, in 2012, **Anti-Corruption Experts of the UN** and **other organisations** including the **Komisi**
 2 **Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK)** had **introduced** and **endorsed** the **Jakarta Statement** on **Principles for Anti-**
 3 **Corruption Agencies** which **set out 16 principles** providing a **detailed guidance** on the **United Nations**
 4 **Conventions Against Corruption** concept of "**Necessary Independence**" of an **anti-corruption body** (*logos). **One**
 5 **of the 16 principles** introduced in the Jakarta Principle is on the **appointment of the Chief Commissioner**, which
 6 stated that the **ACA's heads shall be appointed through a process that ensured his or her apolitical stance,**
 7 **impartiality, neutrality, integrity and competence** (*logos).
 (International Speech 4, 11 February 2020)

As demonstrated in Table 11 (excerpt 9), Dr. Mahathir grounded his argument in logos by referencing international collaboration and standards for anti-corruption agencies. He cited the endorsement of the Jakarta Statement on Principles for Anti-Corruption Agencies by the UN, KPK (Indonesia) and other organisations (lines 1–3) by positioning Malaysia's efforts within a global context. By detailing that the Jakarta Statement set out 16 principles including the "Necessary Independence" of anti-corruption bodies (line 4), Dr. Mahathir provided logical justification for institutional reforms. He also highlighted the principle that agency heads should be appointed through processes ensuring apolitical stance, impartiality, integrity, and competence (lines 5–7). He emphasised the importance of transparent and merit-based leadership. This logos-driven approach was a strategic move to build trust with both domestic and international audiences by aligning Malaysia's anti-corruption initiatives with global best practices.

The findings of this study reveal that Dr. Mahathir's international speeches on corruption during his second tenure as Prime Minister strategically employed both logos and pathos to enhance credibility, foster trust, and mobilise support. Through the use of rational arguments anchored in international frameworks and emotional appeals highlighting sacrifice and national pride, Dr. Mahathir effectively framed anti-corruption as a shared moral and developmental imperative. His rhetorical strategies reinforced Malaysia's commitment to reform and good governance to strengthen policy communication and trust-building among domestic and international audiences. These findings highlight the vital role of rhetoric in shaping political discourse in transitional democracies.

3.2 Rhetorical Analysis

The next part of the analysis would reveal the rhetorical analysis of Dr. Mahathir's international speeches on the theme of corruption. Table 12 presents the frequency distribution for ethos, pathos, and logos in his speeches.

Table 12

Rhetorical analysis

No	Title	Ethos Freq	Ethos %	Pathos Freq	Pathos %	Logos Freq	Logos %
1	Government and Governance in the Islamic World	3	2.04	17	11.56	127	86.40
2	General Debate of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)	12	7.40	95	58.64	55	33.96
3	Al-Sharq 5 th Annual Conference 2019	2	3.84	25	48.08	25	48.08
4	Perdana International Anti-Corruption Champion Foundation Malaysia (PIACCF)	2	6.90	9	31.03	18	62.07
	Total	19	4.85	146	37.43	225	57.69

The rhetorical analysis in Table 12 revealed that Dr. Mahathir adapted his persuasive strategies to enhance the credibility of his anti-corruption agenda. In the first speech, logos dominated at 86.40% which reflected a strong reliance on rational arguments, facts, and evidence to focus on governance within the Islamic world. The heavy emphasis on logos denoted Dr. Mahathir's intent to frame corruption as a systemic and institutional challenge that required logical and evidence-based solutions. Pathos (n=11.56%) and ethos (n=2.04%) were lower which indicated a preference for logical persuasion over emotional or character appeals in establishing credibility and addressing corruption as a governance issue.

The second speech shifted the emphasis with pathos as the highest appeal at 58.64%. It revealed the need to emotionally connect with a diverse international audience on the urgent moral crisis of corruption. Logos followed at 33.96% while ethos was the lowest at 7.4%. It highlighted a strategy that foregrounded moral urgency, shared values, and collective suffering under corrupt regimes. The rhetorical approach aimed to galvanise global solidarity and support for Malaysia's anti-corruption reforms by humanising the issue and appealing to ethical responsibility.

In the third speech, Dr. Mahathir balanced appeals of logos and pathos equally prominent at 48.08% while ethos remained minimal at 3.84%. The balance revealed engagement with corruption's multifaceted nature by addressing it as a rational policy challenge and a social-ethical concern. The combination of appeals effectively targeted the need for both practical action and emotional commitment to combat corruption.

The fourth speech presented logos as the highest appeal at 62.07%, followed by pathos at 31.03% and ethos at 6.90%. The emphasis on logos reinforced the roles of specialised institutions and systemic reforms in effectively tackling corruption. Pathos supported this fact by invoking a moral imperative while ethos revealed the importance of accountable leadership in anti-corruption efforts. This speech reflected a strategic focus on legitimising Malaysia's anti-corruption agenda through a blend of expertise and ethical responsibility.

This pattern reflected Dr. Mahathir's rhetorical approach was context-sensitive and tailored to strengthen trust in transitional Malaysia. In international forums, he used pathos to engage and mobilise support to recognise the power of emotion to bridge cultural and political divides. In technical or policy-focused settings, he prioritised logos to build credibility and reassure stakeholders of Malaysia's commitment to reform. Furthermore, his consistent highlighting of institutional reforms, anti-corruption frameworks, and youth empowerment indicated an agenda that went beyond short-term political gain. By foregrounding systemic solutions and values-driven leadership, Dr. Mahathir positioned Malaysia as a responsible and forward-thinking democracy. His rhetorical framing reinforced Malaysia's legitimacy on the world stage and contributed to shaping a narrative of integrity, collaboration, and hope.

In summary, the analysis demonstrated that Dr. Mahathir's strategic deployment of rhetorical appeals was integral to his leadership style and reform agenda. His speeches were crafted to build trust, foster collective identity, and legitimise difficult policy changes. It revealed the vital role of rhetoric as a powerful tool for nation-building and sustainable democratic transition.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study reflects how rhetorical strategies can effectively communicate anti-corruption messages in the context of political leadership. By focusing on Dr. Mahathir's international speeches, the analysis illustrated the power of rhetoric in shaping public discourse on governance, institutional integrity, and ethical leadership. Although the study has limitations such as the limited number of speeches analysed and the absence of public opinion data, it still contributes to the understanding of how political figures use persuasion to address complex issues like corruption, mobilise support, and foster accountability. These findings are crucial in recognising the roles of rhetoric in advancing anti-corruption initiatives and promoting transparent governance. Future research should explore the impact of such rhetorical strategies on public opinion and policy changes.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Sheela Faizura Nik Fauzi (Investigation; Formal Analysis; Writing - original draft)

Ting Su Hie (Methodology; Conceptualisation; Validation; Writing - review and editing)

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