Observatorio (OBS*)

Received: 2025-09-22 | **Accepted:** 2026-04-20 | **Published:** 2026-04-29 | **DOI:** 10.15847/OBS20262755

From Riorda to SDED: a multimodal model for political communication

Pablo Agustin Artero Abellan

Department of English Linguistics and Literature

Complutense University of Madrid

Madrid, Spain

Abstract

This article revisits and extends Mario Riorda's influential triadic model of political communication—discourse, emotion, and strategy—by proposing a fourth, under-theorized dimension: delivery. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature in prosody, political performance, and multimodal discourse analysis, the article introduces the SDED model (Strategy, Discourse, Emotion, Delivery) to capture the embodied and vocal dynamics of contemporary political messaging. Through critical engagement with three of Riorda's major works and comparative illustrations from Latin America and beyond, the analysis demonstrates how delivery—prosody, tone, vocal charisma—operates as a strategic resource in the construction of credibility, affective resonance, and populist appeal. The article further considers how synthetic speech, algorithmic dissemination, and platform-native vocality reshape the performative landscape of political leadership. By situating the SDED model within global debates on mediatization, legitimacy, and affective publics, this contribution advocates for a multimodal approach to political communication that better reflects the complex interplay of content, emotion, and embodiment in the current era.

Keywords: political communication, Mario Riorda, multimodal discourse, prosody and delivery, populist performance.

1. Introduction

In contemporary political communication, the interplay between discourse, affect, and strategic intent has become central to how political authority is constructed and understood. Among the most influential theorists working at this intersection in Latin America is Mario Riorda, whose publications blend academic rigor with the experiential insights of a practitioner. His model, grounded in discourse, emotion, and strategy, has informed both theoretical approaches and campaign praxis across the region.

This review essay critically assesses three of Riorda's most impactful works – *Comunicación gubernamental en acción* (Riorda & Rincón, 2016), *¡Ey, las ideologías existen!* (Riorda & Farré, 2012), and *Cualquiera tiene un plan hasta que te pegan en la cara* (Bentolila & Riorda, 2020) – and argues for an extension of his model to account for the performative and prosodic dimensions of political communication. While Riorda's contributions map the terrain of narrative construction, emotional framing, and adaptive messaging, they remain predominantly text-centric. In an era defined by audiovisual media, algorithmic amplification, and populist performance, this limitation constrains the explanatory power of his otherwise rich framework.

The remainder of this article outlines Riorda's model, evaluates its empirical grounding, and proposes a fourth dimension: delivery. Vocal charisma, prosodic framing, and embodied performance are not peripheral to political messaging but integral to its reception and impact. This argument is substantiated through engagement with interdisciplinary literature in discourse analysis, voice studies, populism research, and communication theory. Our goal is to place Riorda's Latin American theorization into conversation with global

debates about performativity and multimodal communication, thereby advancing an enriched conceptual vocabulary for political analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Political Communication as Narrative Strategy: Discourse, Myth, and Strategy in *Comunicación gubernamental en acción*

In *Comunicación gubernamental en acción* (Riorda & Rincón, 2016), the authors curate a collection of case studies that examine how Latin American governments construct legitimizing narratives through presidential communication. Rather than treating communication as a linear transmission of information, the volume positions it as a discursive battlefield where symbolic legitimacy is won or lost. The analytical focus is on presidential myth-making: leaders craft "narratives of governance" that transform abstract power into emotionally resonant storylines — the savior, the redeemer, the reformer, the protector.

The strength of this volume lies in its granular analysis of diverse contexts: Bolivia's Evo Morales, Brazil's Lula da Silva, Argentina's Kirchner administrations, and Colombia's contrasting narratives under Uribe and Santos. These chapters support the argument that effective governance often depends not on technocratic clarity, but on narrative coherence. Riorda and Rincón argue that such myths are not merely rhetorical flourishes, but strategic instruments that anchor political identity and public expectation.

Importantly, the book challenges the illusion of post-ideological governance. Its analysis of recurring discursive archetypes—nation-as-family, leadership-as-sacrifice—shows that ideological content is often embedded in affectively charged language. This underscores Riorda's broader thesis: discourse and emotion cannot be disentangled from political strategy.

However, from a critical perspective, the book's limitation is its relatively unexamined acceptance of strategic narrative as a necessity. While acknowledging the risks of over-simplification, it stops short of interrogating the power asymmetries such narratives produce. The volume could benefit from deeper engagement with critical discourse theory (e.g., Fairclough, van Dijk) on how narratives naturalize authority and marginalize dissent. Moreover, there is limited exploration of delivery and performance — the *how* of speech — despite the book's emphasis on *what* is said.

Internationally, this work aligns with research on narrative leadership (Gabriel, 2000), but it diverges by privileging empirical regional case studies over broader theoretical synthesis. Its primary value is thus not in innovation of theory, but in contextualization: it documents how narrative operates as a form of soft power in Latin American presidential systems.

In sum, *Comunicación gubernamental en acción* solidifies Riorda's position as a leading thinker in Latin American political discourse. It presents political communication as mythopoetic governance — where storytelling becomes strategy — and sets the stage for further theoretical integration with studies of performance and vocality in later sections.

2.2. Ideology, Emotion, and Campaign Framing — Revisiting *¡Ey, las ideologías existen!*

Published in 2012, *¡Ey, las ideologías* existen*!* (Riorda & Farré, 2012) emerged at a time when political communication scholarship was heavily influenced by the narrative of post-ideology — a vision of modern campaigns as data-driven, emotion-lite spectacles devoid of substantive ideological content. Riorda and colleagues decisively challenged this view, providing empirical evidence from 18 Latin American presidential campaigns to argue that ideological language not only persisted, but continued to serve as a strategic and affective anchor in electoral discourse.

The book's methodological strength lies in its systematic discourse analysis of campaign speeches across diverse contexts, making it one of the first large-scale comparative studies of Latin American electoral communication. Campaign messages were coded for ideological markers — appeals to justice, freedom, markets, equality — and the results showed that both left- and right-leaning candidates continued to frame their messages in ideologically loaded terms. These findings countered the "marketing-only" thesis and helped reposition Latin America within global debates about the role of ideology in postmodern politics.

What distinguishes this work is its treatment of ideology not as abstract doctrine, but as emotionally embedded narrative. Candidates did not merely invoke ideological themes; they did so through emotionally resonant frames — stories of injustice, renewal, national pride, or fear of decline. In doing so, the book implicitly demonstrates the mechanisms of emotional framing (Clifford, 2019; Nabi, 2003), where affect is used to moralize political choices. The enduring salience of ideological discourse thus stems from its ability to tap into identity, memory, and emotional worldview — factors increasingly understood as central to political persuasion.

However, from a critical perspective, the book's conceptual framework remains underdeveloped in two areas. First, while it acknowledges the emotional valence of ideology, it stops short of theorizing how affect functions rhetorically and psychologically. There is little engagement with affect theory, moral psychology, or framing effects literature, which could have situated the findings in a richer interdisciplinary landscape (e.g., Lakoff, 2016; Marcus et al., 2000). As such, the analysis identifies patterns but underexplores mechanisms.

Second, and more important for this essay's integrative argument, the book treats discourse as essentially textual. There is no discussion of how ideology is performed vocally or embodied — how tone of voice, delivery, and prosody may inflect the emotional charge of ideological messages. This omission mirrors a broader blind spot in political discourse analysis: the neglect of prosodic and paralinguistic features in favor of lexical and thematic content. If, as Riorda shows, ideological discourse is emotionally framed, then its oral realization — intonation, emphasis, rhythm — should be central to analysis.

Internationally, the work contributes to reassessing ideology in the context of political marketing. Its findings resonate with recent literature on the strategic use of values in campaigns (Enke, 2020; Thompson, 2018), the rhetorical packaging of populist identity (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), and the emotional intensity of political polarization (Amsalem, 2019; Asker & Dinas, 2019; Prinz, 2021; Renström et al., 2023). Yet the book is more empirical than theoretical — a strength in terms of documentation, but a missed opportunity in terms of conceptual contribution. Its most valuable legacy may be that it re-legitimized the study of ideology in Latin American political communication and set the empirical stage for exploring how ideologically framed messages operate emotionally and performatively.

For future research, *¡Ey, las ideologías existen!* (Riorda & Farré, 2012) suggests several lines of inquiry: how emotional ideologies are vocalized; whether right-wing and left-wing ideological frames differ prosodically; and how affective tonality varies across cultural-linguistic contexts. These questions could form the basis of interdisciplinary studies that combine discourse analysis, voice studies, and political psychology — precisely the type of extension this essay advocates.

In short, *¡Ey, las ideologías existen!* (Riorda & Farré, 2012) remains a landmark in regional discourse studies. It dismantles the myth of post-ideological politics and repositions ideology as an emotional and strategic resource. Yet it also invites — and requires — a deeper theorization of how ideology is felt, voiced, and embodied. Only then can the communicative power of ideological language in the age of populism, affective polarization, and performative leadership be fully comprehended.

2.3. Crisis, Vulnerability, and Strategic Adaptation — Reading *Cualquiera tiene un plan hasta que te pegan en la cara*

With *Cualquiera tiene un plan hasta que te pegan en la cara* (Bentolila & Riorda, 2020), Mario Riorda transitions from the structured world of campaign and government narratives into the volatile terrain of crisis communication. Co-authored with Silvia Bentolila, this work reflects a thematic and epistemological shift: it brings the emotional and psychological experiences of leaders and publics to the fore and challenges the assumption that strategy is synonymous with control.

At its core, the book posits that crises rupture not only political routines but also communicative assumptions. Drawing on examples such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors conceptualize crisis as a breakdown of narrative coherence — a moment when leaders lose the ability to rely on pre-scripted messaging and are forced to communicate in real-time, under stress, and often without clear facts. The titular metaphor ("everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face") encapsulates this premise: strategy must become adaptive, not rigid.

One of the book's contributions is its interdisciplinary orientation. It integrates insights from psychiatry, cognitive science, and organizational learning to argue that leaders must first manage their own emotional states before managing the public's. In this sense, Riorda moves beyond the instrumental view of communication and toward an ethos of reflective leadership. His call for humility, vulnerability, and learning-centered communication marks a notable departure from the performative certainties that characterize much of populist rhetoric.

Critically, *Cualquiera tiene un plan…* (Bentolila & Riorda, 2020) redefines strategic communication as a process of self-regulation and improvisation. Rather than presenting a toolkit of crisis-response tactics, it proposes that authenticity — including the public acknowledgment of uncertainty — can be a more effective communicative resource than projection of mastery. The book, therefore, aligns with recent leadership theory that frames crisis as a test not of control, but of resilience and relational credibility (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009).

However, from the perspective of critical discourse and performance studies, several gaps remain. Most notably, while the book champions emotional intelligence and psychological awareness, it remains largely text-bound in its examples. There is little attention to how voice, tone, pacing, or bodily comportment — key performative aspects — influence the credibility or effectiveness of crisis communication. This is

particularly important in televised or social media contexts, where the *sound* and *sight* of vulnerability can either humanize a leader or trigger perceptions of weakness, depending on how it is performed.

Moreover, the book assumes a normative preference for empathetic, honest leadership but does not sufficiently account for the political costs of such an approach in polarized environments. Populist leaders often eschew displays of vulnerability, instead doubling down on certitude and deflection. In these contexts, emotional authenticity may not translate into strategic advantage. This raises a tension: while Riorda advocates for communicative openness, political reality may reward the opposite — a dynamic that could be explored more deeply through comparative discourse-performance studies.

The book also tends to universalize its psychological assumptions. Although it references Latin American cases, its generalizations about human behavior under crisis occasionally lean on decontextualized models of cognition and stress. A more grounded discursive analysis — examining, for instance, how fear or denial is linguistically and vocally constructed in different cultural-political contexts — would have added critical depth.

Nonetheless, the book's reframing of communication as *learning under pressure* is both timely and theoretically generative. It invites scholars to consider crisis not as a deviation from normality but as a communicative condition with its own genres, affects, and performative norms. This resonates with current work on the "discursive institutionalization of crisis" (Wodak, 2015), which views crisis narratives as both constructed and consequential.

For this essay's broader argument, *Cualquiera tiene un plan…* provides a crucial hinge. It reveals that emotional credibility and adaptive messaging are central to strategic success in times of rupture. But it also suggests that such credibility is not purely verbal or cognitive — it is performed through tone, rhythm, gesture, and embodied stance. Integrating Riorda's insights with research on vocal prosody and political vulnerability (Hirschberg & Rosenberg, 2005; Partington, 2025) offers a fuller model: one where crisis communication is not only about saying the right things, but sounding and appearing trustworthy when the script breaks down.

In short, *Cualquiera tiene un plan…* (Bentolila & Riorda, 2020) enriches Riorda's earlier work by foregrounding human fallibility and communicative adaptation. It expands the emotional dimension of his triad and nudges political communication scholarship toward a more relational and performative paradigm. However, to fulfill that promise, future work must move beyond psychological theory and engage more fully with the embodied realities of crisis talk — where voice, silence, and gesture may matter as much as message.

2.4. From Discourse to Performance — Extending Riorda's Framework into a Multimodal Model

Across his major works, Mario Riorda conceptualizes political communication as a triadic process grounded in discourse, emotion, and strategy. He examines how leaders construct narrative legitimacy in Comunicación gubernamental en acción (Riorda & Rincón, 2016), frame ideology through emotional appeal in ¡Ey, las ideologías existen! (Riorda & Farré, 2012), and adapt strategically in contexts of crisis and uncertainty in Cualquiera tiene un plan… (Bentolila & Riorda, 2020). This model is both analytically productive and empirically grounded. However, as Sections 1–3 have argued, Riorda's framework remains

text-centric and under-theorized in terms of performance, especially the prosodic and vocal dimensions of political charisma. In an era increasingly shaped by audiovisual media and populist spectacle, this omission limits its explanatory power.

To address this, an extension of Riorda's model into a multimodal framework of political communication that integrates prosody, vocal delivery, and embodied performance is put forth. This addition not only aligns with global research trends but also addresses key blind spots in Riorda's otherwise rich contributions.

2.4.1 Leadership, Charisma, and Vocal Performance

Riorda's emphasis on narrative and emotion implicitly touches on leadership charisma, but stops short of analyzing how charisma is vocally and performatively constructed. Classic work by Weber (1978) defines charisma as an attribution made by followers who perceive a leader as possessing extraordinary qualities. Contemporary research (Antonakis et al., 2016; Hirschberg & Rosenberg, 2005) extends this to speech delivery: charismatic leaders modulate tone, emphasize rhythm, and strategically pace their speech to convey conviction, warmth, or urgency.

Prosodic analysis reveals that pitch variation, speaking rate, volume control, and pausing patterns significantly affect how audiences evaluate credibility and emotional authenticity. For instance, Hirschberg & Rosenberg (2005) found that listeners consistently rated speeches with greater pitch range and vocal intensity as more charismatic. Riorda's frameworks could benefit from engaging with such findings, especially since many Latin American leaders deploy distinctive vocal styles to construct ideological authority — from Chávez's fiery crescendos to AMLO's paternal monotone.

In this context, political communication becomes not only a matter of *what is said*, but *how it is vocally embodied*. Integrating prosodic analysis would allow scholars and practitioners to measure and train the strategic delivery of discourse — an area already exploited in campaign coaching and media training, but underexamined in academic literature.

2.4.2 Emotional Framing and Prosodic Realization

Riorda convincingly argues that ideology functions affectively, but does not theorize how emotions are vocally performed. Yet a growing body of work shows that emotional resonance is often triggered by paralinguistic cues — vocal tension, pitch modulation, breathing patterns — which shape how political messages are interpreted (Gobl & Ni Chasaide, 2003; Partington, 2025). Emotional framing is not only about word choice, but about the auditory texture of discourse. In populist contexts, this becomes even more pronounced: leaders use vocal aggression, irony, or exaggeration to dramatize opposition and moralize identity.

For example, Donald Trump's vocal style — including abrupt pauses, hyperbolic stress, and off-script interjections — was shown to activate populist perceptions of authenticity, even when his content violated norms (Partington, 2025). In this sense, vocal delivery itself becomes a political act: it signals alignment with "the people" or defiance against "the elite." Riorda's work on emotion and strategy could be sharpened by recognizing prosody as the interface between affective intent and audience perception.

2.4.3 Populist Style and Embodied Communication

Recent scholarship frames populism not just as discourse or ideology, but as style — a way of performing politics through language, tone, and presence (Moffitt, 2016). This performative turn aligns closely with Riorda's insistence on the strategic dimension of communication, but also goes beyond it. A populist leader does not merely *use* strategy; they *embody* it. Their tone may signal transgression (e.g., Bolsonaro's aggression), solidarity (e.g., Morales's calm collectivity), or urgency (e.g., Bukele's rapid-fire online messages). In each case, vocal and visual performance fuses with discourse and emotion to create a political identity.

Integrating this performative dimension would allow Riorda's model to better account for populist success across different media. It would also enable comparative analysis between elite-technocratic and populist-charismatic styles, not only in content but in sonic and visual form. The goal is not to abandon Riorda's triad, but to complete it — by recognizing that strategy is not only planned, but enacted through performance; that emotion is not only framed, but felt through the voice.

3. Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative, theory-building review design informed by critical discourse analysis, performance studies, and multimodal communication theory. Rather than presenting an original empirical dataset, it offers a critical synthesis of Mario Riorda's major works and places them in dialogue with broader scholarship on political communication, populism, vocality, and mediatized leadership. The comparative discussions of AMLO, Trump, and Bukele are therefore used as heuristic illustrations rather than full-scale case studies. Their function is to demonstrate how the proposed SDED framework may be applied analytically to concrete political figures by showing how strategy, discourse, emotion, and delivery interact in distinct communicative styles. This approach makes it possible to clarify the conceptual contribution of the model while preserving the article's primary aim as a theoretical intervention.

4. Results

4.1. Toward a 4D Model of Political Communication

In light of these insights, the *4D political communication model* was first designed and then customized into SDED, a framework grounded in:

1. *Strategy* (intentionality, adaptation, targeting)
2. *Discourse* (content, narrative, ideology)
3. *Emotion* (framing, affect, identity appeal)
4. *Delivery* (prosody, vocal charisma, embodied style)

This model retains Riorda's original insights while enhancing their analytical reach and empirical testability. It allows for multimodal discourse analysis that includes text, tone, gesture, and context — and thus better

reflects the lived realities of 21st-century political communication. It also opens new pathways for applied work, such as training political actors in prosodic awareness or analyzing leadership perception through acoustic and visual metrics.

4.2. Clarifying Emotion and Delivery

For analytical purposes, emotion and delivery should be distinguished, even though they frequently interact in practice. Emotion refers to the affective framing of discourse: the way messages are oriented toward fear, hope, indignation, reassurance, enthusiasm, or moral urgency. Delivery, by contrast, refers to the vocal and embodied realization of that framing through pitch, rhythm, intensity, pause structure, voice quality, gesture, and bodily presence. Put differently, emotion concerns what affective orientation is being constructed, whereas delivery concerns how that orientation is made perceptible and persuasive in performance. This distinction makes it possible to preserve the autonomy of both dimensions while also explaining why they are so often experienced together in political speech.

4.3. Comparative Illustrations of Vocal and Performative Leadership

To underscore the relevance of delivery as an analytical category in political communication, it is instructive to examine how different leaders embody strategic discourse through prosody and vocal style. Three cases—Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), Donald Trump, and Nayib Bukele—offer contrasting yet complementary illustrations of how vocal performance, tone, and rhythm shape public perception and political alignment.

4.3.1 AMLO: Calm Vocality and Moral Stewardship

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, President of Mexico, is notable for his deliberate, measured vocal style. His speeches are characterized by a slow delivery, minimal pitch variation, and frequent pauses. Rather than employing dynamic oratory, AMLO projects calm authority, paternal reassurance, and moral seriousness. This vocal approach aligns with his populist ethos of austerity and "republican virtue," and it serves to reinforce his ideological positioning as the moral conscience of the nation.

From a prosodic standpoint, AMLO's tone operates as a strategic resource. The absence of vocal dynamism can be interpreted not as a communicative flaw, but as an intentional rejection of spectacle. In a media environment saturated with sensationalism, the slow tempo and monotonous pitch become markers of authenticity and humility. This illustrates that vocal charisma is not always synonymous with intensity or variation; it can also be constructed through vocal restraint and ethical performativity.

From an SDED perspective, AMLO's communicative style may be read as a strategic effort to project moral steadiness rather than spectacular charisma. His discourse privileges ethical positioning and national responsibility, his emotional framing is built around reassurance and seriousness, and his delivery reinforces those effects through restraint, slowness, and low prosodic volatility. The case therefore shows that delivery does not need to be highly dramatic in order to be politically effective; it may instead function as a vehicle of credibility through controlled austerity.

4.3.2 Donald Trump: Rhythmic Disruption and Populist Intensity

In sharp contrast, Donald Trump's vocal performance is defined by rhythmic irregularity, emphatic stress, and paralinguistic improvisation. Trump frequently departs from scripted speech, using repetition, sudden

shifts in tone, and exaggerated phrasing. His prosodic unpredictability is amplified by abrupt pauses, off-topic digressions, and audience interaction during live rallies. These features combine to produce a style that breaks with institutional norms of political speech.

This disruption, far from undermining his credibility among supporters, enhances his populist persona. Trump's vocal delivery signals emotional directness, outsider authenticity, and resistance to elite communication protocols. Partington (2025) argues that this unpredictability contributes to a perception of "genuineness" that resonates with anti-establishment sentiments. In this case, prosody is not a neutral feature but a political act—one that embodies opposition, assertiveness, and affective mobilization.

From an SDED perspective, Trump's style demonstrates a different configuration of the model: a strategy of anti-elite authenticity, a discourse structured around antagonism and simplification, an emotional framing centered on grievance, urgency, and defiance, and a delivery marked by disfluency, emphasis, and prosodic unpredictability. In this case, delivery intensifies both discourse and emotion, helping transform rhetorical confrontation into a felt performance of outsider credibility.

4.3.3 Nayib Bukele: Digital Speed and Ironized Authority

Nayib Bukele, the President of El Salvador, represents a hybrid form of leadership that blends audiovisual mastery with social media populism. His speeches—whether broadcasted, streamed, or tweeted—are often fast-paced, punctuated by informal language, and stylized for digital circulation. Bukele's prosody reflects urgency and directness; he often uses clipped sentences and rising intonation to project momentum and modernity.

Unlike AMLO's seriousness or Trump's bombast, Bukele frequently employs humor, irony, and playful mockery. His vocal tone shifts between professional articulation and colloquial intimacy, allowing him to speak simultaneously as a statesman and a peer. This flexibility enables him to address different constituencies without abandoning the affective coherence of his brand. In digital contexts, such tonal shifts are magnified; short vocal clips become shareable artifacts that reinforce his performative agility.

The case of Bukele underscores the importance of studying delivery not just in formal oratory, but across platforms. Vocal performance must be understood in its mediatized form—how it is recorded, transmitted, clipped, and remixed. Bukele's communication strategy shows that charisma is increasingly constructed through platform-native forms of vocal style, combining traditional rhetoric with algorithmic optimization.

From an SDED perspective, Bukele's communicative profile combines a strategy of digital personalization with a discourse of efficiency, modernity, and executive control. Its emotional framing oscillates between confidence, urgency, and ironic informality, while delivery operationalizes those effects through speed, tonal flexibility, and platform-adapted presence. The case illustrates how delivery can function not only as embodied speech, but also as a mediatized resource calibrated for circulation in digitally accelerated environments.

4.3.4 Implications for Multimodal Political Analysis

These three cases illustrate how political delivery varies across cultural, ideological, and technological contexts. While AMLO builds trust through prosodic minimalism, Trump performs authenticity through disfluency, and Bukele constructs versatility through tonal hybridity. Each model reflects a different

configuration of discourse, emotion, strategy, and delivery—precisely the four components outlined in the proposed 4D model.

By examining these leaders' vocal performances, it becomes evident that delivery cannot be treated as secondary to message content. Instead, it serves as a semiotic layer that mediates the emotional, ideological, and strategic dimensions of political communication. These observations reinforce the argument that multimodal analysis, grounded in prosody and performance, is essential for understanding contemporary leadership.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Extensions and Applied Dimensions of the *4D Model*

The 4D model proposed in this essay—discourse, emotion, strategy, and delivery—offers a framework that aligns with current transformations in political communication, both theoretically and practically. Recent developments in political science, media studies, and communication training underscore the urgency of integrating performance and prosody into the analysis of leadership and rhetorical persuasion.

5.1.1 From Text to Texture: Voice and Credibility in Political Contexts

Traditional models of political rhetoric have prioritized textual content: slogans, arguments, policy claims. Yet credibility is rarely secured through semantic density alone. As communication theory increasingly acknowledges, how a message is delivered—its prosodic texture, tonal calibration, pacing, and vocal affect—plays a decisive role in how it is received and interpreted. Research on charismatic speech (Antonakis et al., 2016; Hirschberg & Rosenberg, 2005) demonstrates that voice modulation is not only a stylistic choice but a strategic act that directly influences perceptions of competence, warmth, and trust.

In multilingual and multicultural contexts, the salience of delivery is even more pronounced. Affective resonance and vocal intensity are filtered through culturally specific norms regarding expressiveness, politeness, and emotional display. This invites further refinement of the 4D model to incorporate sociophonetic variation and cultural expectations, especially when analyzing leaders from diverse linguistic and regional backgrounds. The model's applicability across contexts requires sensitivity to how tone and delivery are encoded with meaning differently across audiences.

5.1.2 Delivery as a Strategic Resource in Communication Training

Beyond academic inquiry, the implications of delivery are evident in the field of political consulting and media coaching. Politicians and spokespeople are routinely trained in voice projection, body language, and performance techniques. These training practices rest on a pragmatic recognition that content alone does not secure engagement or persuasion. Strategic communicators are taught to vary pitch, use intentional pauses, and align vocal tone with emotional intent.

Despite this practical awareness, scholarly discourse has lagged in theorizing delivery as a component of political strategy. Riorda's model, while already attentive to emotional and discursive dynamics, can be extended to encompass this performative layer. Integrating delivery into analytical frameworks bridges the

gap between academic theorization and real-world practice. The 4D model, therefore, offers a more complete vocabulary for both explaining and designing political messaging in multimodal environments.

5.1.3 Gender and Racialized Dimensions of Vocal Performance

The strategic use of delivery must also be contextualized within broader power dynamics related to gender, race, and accent. Numerous studies have shown that vocal judgments are shaped not only by linguistic form but also by gendered and social stereotypes, which influence how leadership, credibility, and authority are perceived in public life (Bligh et al., 2012; Klofstad et al., 2012; Torre et al., 2024). Vocal registers that diverge from hegemonic norms—such as assertiveness in women or accented speech in minoritized speakers—are often perceived as less credible or more emotionally volatile, regardless of content. These biases reflect deep-seated cultural expectations about authority and civility, and they shape how delivery is both performed and received (Bligh et al., 2012; Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010; Torre et al., 2024).

In this sense, delivery operates not only as a rhetorical device but as a terrain of social judgment. Leaders must navigate not only communicative efficacy but also audience expectations about who is allowed to sound assertive, calm, humorous, or indignant. A fully realized 4D model of political communication must therefore account for the intersectional politics of voice and recognize how delivery becomes a site where structural inequalities are reproduced or contested.

5.1.4 Affective Politics and Embodied Communication

In the context of affective politics, delivery operates as an interface between internal affective states and external performance. The voice conveys not just rhetorical content but emotional availability, cognitive presence, and moral stance. Leaders perceived as emotionally attuned—capable of sounding empathetic, resolute, or outraged—are often seen as more credible, even if their message content is ambiguous. This suggests that the emotional reception of political speech is heavily dependent on delivery and vocalization.

Embodied communication further reinforces this insight. As theories of political aesthetics have shown, leadership is increasingly assessed not only through rational argumentation but through symbolic performance: gesture, vocality, posture, and audiovisual presence. These elements shape audience perception in both live and mediatized contexts. Delivery, in this sense, becomes a site of political labor—a performative practice through which authority is enacted, negotiated, and contested.

5.1.5 Linking Multimodality to Democratic Norms

Finally, expanding the analytical horizon to include delivery opens normative questions. If charisma and credibility are increasingly tied to vocal performance, does this create new exclusions based on speech pattern, accent, or neurodivergent vocality? How do gendered expectations of tone and style impact public reception of female leaders, whose vocal registers are often policed more heavily? These considerations invite critical reflection on the politics of voice, access, and representation in democratic systems.

A truly multimodal model of political communication must therefore not only describe delivery, but interrogate its implications for political legitimacy and public deliberation. The 4D framework, while analytical, can also serve as a critical tool to question which voices are heard, which are dismissed, and how communicative authority is distributed across social hierarchies.

5.2. Future Directions in Multimodal Political Communication

The integration of delivery into political communication theory opens avenues for future research that span disciplines, technologies, and normative concerns. As political messaging becomes increasingly audiovisual, platform-mediated, and algorithmically distributed, the role of vocal performance and prosody is likely to grow in both visibility and strategic relevance.

5.2.1 Synthetic Speech, AI, and the Automation of Delivery

Emerging technologies such as deepfakes, voice cloning, and AI-generated speech are reshaping what delivery means in political contexts. Synthetic voices can now replicate intonation, rhythm, and even emotional inflection with remarkable precision. While these developments offer accessibility benefits—such as voice synthesis for persons with disabilities—they also raise critical questions about trust, authenticity, and manipulation.

In political communication, delivery has traditionally been tied to the body: a leader's voice was presumed to be both personal and embodied. With AI-mediated prosody, this assumption no longer holds. Political figures can now delegate or simulate delivery, creating messages with pre-calibrated affective tones designed for microtargeting. The 4D model must adapt to account for these shifts. Delivery is no longer only a practice of speaking; it becomes a curatorial act of selecting and designing one's vocal persona.

5.2.2 Media Literacy and the Politics of Reception

As delivery becomes more central to how messages are experienced, critical media literacy must evolve accordingly. Citizens need tools not only to analyze content or detect bias, but to interpret tone, evaluate vocal cues, and distinguish between authentic and synthetic performance. Pedagogical approaches to civic education and communication studies should thus incorporate multimodal literacy: teaching students to listen for persuasive rhythm, strategic pausing, and the politics of tone.

This expansion also invites critical reflection on whose delivery styles are valorized or penalized. Research has shown that women, non-native speakers, and other socially marked speakers may face credibility penalties linked to vocal stereotypes, accent perception, and expectations about how authority should sound (Bligh et al., 2012; Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010; Torre et al., 2024). A normative engagement with the 4D model must therefore include attention to power asymmetries embedded in prosodic expectations, and how vocal norms shape access to credibility.

5.2.3 Cross-Cultural Variation and Comparative Research

Future work should also explore how delivery functions across different cultural-political environments. Vocal charisma in Scandinavia may rely on calmness and control; in Latin America, emotional expressiveness may serve a similar legitimizing function. Comparative prosodic research could illuminate how delivery strategies are shaped by local discursive traditions, media ecosystems, and cultural values.

Moreover, multilingual leadership contexts—such as the European Union or international diplomacy—offer unique opportunities to study how translation, accent, and code-switching influence perceived authority. Political leaders who speak across languages must calibrate delivery for varied audiences, balancing intelligibility, affect, and authenticity. This raises further questions about how delivery intersects with linguistic identity, translatability, and the politics of global leadership.

5.2.4 The Normative Stakes of Multimodal Authority

Finally, the inclusion of delivery in political communication theory reconfigures how legitimacy is understood. If vocal performance increasingly mediates trust, then leadership becomes as much an affective relationship as a rational contract. This insight challenges liberal-democratic ideals of deliberation based solely on argument, data, or policy coherence.

Critics may worry that emphasizing delivery encourages style over substance or empowers demagogic charisma. Yet ignoring delivery risks analytic blindness: it allows performative persuasion to operate without scrutiny. The goal is not to celebrate style, but to understand its role in shaping power, mobilization, and belonging.

In this light, the SDED Framework is not merely descriptive. It is a critical invitation: to analyze power as performed through voice; to listen as citizens, not just as readers; and to democratize communicative authority by recognizing its embodied, emotional, and vocal dimensions.

6. Conclusions

Mario Riorda's body of work remains one of the most coherent contributions to political communication theory in Latin America. His triadic model of discourse, emotion, and strategy is foundational for understanding narrative authority, ideological framing, and communicative adaptation. Yet, as political leadership becomes increasingly visual, vocal, and performative, the absence of delivery from this framework becomes more apparent.

Accordingly, this essay has proposed the expansion of Riorda's triad into a 4D model by incorporating delivery—that is, prosody, vocal charisma, and embodied style. This extension not only aligns with current research in multimodal discourse and populist communication but also addresses real-world transformations in how political speech is performed, mediated, and evaluated. Comparative illustrations from AMLO, Trump, and Bukele have shown that vocal delivery functions differently across cultural and ideological contexts, shaping public trust, emotional resonance, and perceived authenticity. The diversity of vocal strategies underscores the importance of prosody as a flexible, yet powerful, resource in political meaning-making.

Beyond comparative insights, the SDED Framework also speaks to future-oriented developments. As synthetic speech technologies and AI-driven performance tools proliferate, delivery becomes a domain of both strategic design and ethical concern. Leadership can now be mediated through curated affective templates, raising urgent questions about trust, manipulation, and the role of voice in democratic legitimacy. Political communication must therefore be analyzed not only as a textual or strategic endeavor, but as a fully embodied, multimodal, and technologically mediated performance.

Finally, the model invites both scholars and educators to reframe the study of political messaging. Media literacy, civic education, and critical discourse analysis should incorporate training in the interpretation of tone, rhythm, and affective signaling. By integrating delivery into theoretical frameworks, political communication research can better account for how authority is vocalized, how charisma is perceived, and how audiences experience leadership.

Riorda's insights offer a valuable foundation for this rethinking. The invitation is not only to extend his model, but to listen more closely—to the voices, cadences, and silences through which political meaning is performed in the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgements / Funding
The author received no financial support for this research.

Conflict of interest
The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethical statement
This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of scientific research and did not require additional ethics committee approval.

Declaration of AI usage
Generative AI tools were used in a limited editorial capacity during language refinement, structural reorganization, and revision of the manuscript. All conceptual development, source selection, analysis, interpretation, and final responsibility for the text remain with the author.

Data availability
No new empirical data were generated for this study. The article is based on published sources cited in the reference list.

Author contributions
The author is solely responsible for the conception, research, writing, and revision of this manuscript.

References

Amsalem, E. (2019). How Informative and persuasive is simple elite communication?: Effects on like-minded and polarized audiences. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *83*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfz001

Antonakis, J., Bastardoz, N., Jacquart, P., & Shamir, B. (2016). Charisma: An ill-defined and ill-measured gift. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, *3*(Volume 3, 2016), 293–319. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062305

Asker, D., & Dinas, E. (2019). Thinking fast and furious: Emotional intensity and opinion polarization in online media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 83* (3), 487-509. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfz042

Bentolila, S., & Riorda, M. (2020). *Cualquiera tiene un plan hasta que te pegan en la cara: Aprender de las crisis*. Paidós.

Bligh, M. C., Schlehofer, M. M., Casad, B. J., & Gaffney, A. M. (2012). Competent enough, but would you vote for her? Gender stereotypes and media influences on perceptions of women politicians. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *42*(3), 560–597. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2011.00781.x

Boin, A., Hart, P. 't, Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2017). *The Politics of Crisis Management*. Cambridge University Press.

Clifford, S. (2019). How emotional frames moralize and polarize political attitudes. *Political Psychology*, *40*(1), 75–91. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12507

Enke, B. (2020). Moral values and voting. *Journal of Political Economy*, *128*(10), 3679–3729. https://doi.org/10.1086/708857

Gabriel, Y. (2000). *Storytelling in Organizations: Facts, Fictions, and Fantasies: Facts, Fictions, and Fantasies*. OUP Oxford.

Gobl, C., & Ní Chasaide, A. (2003). The role of voice quality in communicating emotion, mood and attitude. *Speech Communication*, *40*(1), 189–212. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-6393(02)00082-1

Heifetz, R. A., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Harvard Business Press.

Hirschberg, J. B., & Rosenberg, A. (2005). Acoustic/prosodic and lexical correlates of charismatic speech. In Proceedings of Interspeech 2005 (pp. 513–516). ISCA. 10.21437/Interspeech.2005-329

Klofstad, C. A., Anderson, R. C., & Peters, S. (2012). Sounds like a winner: Voice pitch influences perception of leadership capacity in both men and women. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, *279*(1738), 2698–2704. https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2012.0311

Lakoff, G. (2016). *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. University of Chicago Press.

Lev-Ari, S., & Keysar, B. (2010). Why don't we believe non-native speakers? The influence of accent on credibility. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *46*(6), 1093–1096. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2010.05.025

Marcus, G. E., Neuman, W. R., & MacKuen, M. (2000). *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment*. University of Chicago Press.

Moffitt, B. (2016). *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. Stanford University Press.

Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Nabi, R. L. (2003). Exploring the framing effects of emotion: Do discrete emotions differentially influence information accessibility, information seeking, and policy preference? *Communication Research*, *30*(2), 224–247. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650202250881

Partington, A. (2025). *The Language of Persuasion in Politics and the Media: An Introduction*. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/The-Language-of-Persuasion-in-Politics-and-the-Media-An-Introduction/Partington/p/book/9781032648248

Prinz, J. (2021). Emotion and Political Polarization. In A. Falcato & S. Graça da Silva (Eds.), *The Politics of Emotional Shockwaves* (pp. 1–25). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56021-8_1

Renström, E. A., Bäck, H., & Carroll, R. (2023). Threats, emotions, and affective polarization. *Political Psychology*, *44*(6), 1337–1366. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12899

Riorda, M., & Farré, M. (2012). *Ey, las ideologías existen! : Comunicación política y campañas electorales en América Latina*. Austral Comunicación.

Riorda, M., & Rincón, O. (2016). *Comunicación gubernamental en acción: Narrativas presidenciales y mitos de gobierno*. Editorial Biblos.

Thompson, D. F. (2018). The political ethics of political campaigns. In *The Routledge Handbook of Ethics and Public Policy*. Routledge.

Torre, I., White, L., Goslin, J., & Knight, S. (2024). The irrepressible influence of vocal stereotypes on trust. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *77*(10), 1957–1966. https://doi.org/10.1177/17470218231211549

Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Univ of California Press.

Wodak, R. (2015). *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. SAGE.