

Daniel Pitt:

Scaffolding of Constitutional Rhetoric: An Analysis of Conservative Manifestos from Major to Johnson

Abstract

This paper analyses eight Conservative Party General Election manifestos from John Major to Boris Johnson in relation to the rhetoric and discourse utilised to express the party's constitutional policies and positions.

Why manifestos? Manifestos provide the most systematic source of official policy proposals. Moreover, their textual emphasis can establish the tone and themes that a party intends to campaign on during an election. Manifestos also represent the way a party leader plans to present themselves and their party's policies to the public.

The question for this paper is how has the Conservative Party rhetorically scaffolded their constitutional positions and policies in their manifestos from Major to Johnson?

The main findings from the analysis of the manifestos are; (1) drawing on the Aristotelian triptych of ethos (the person), pathos (use of emotion) and logos (use of logic), the Conservative Party's manifestos, were pathos driven that demonstrated their disapproval of their rival parties' constitutional policies. For example, Conservatives were utilising terms such as 'vandalised', 'perverted', and 'extremely damaging' about other parties' constitutional policies. (2) There was no consistent macro-level use of headings across the manifestos where the constitutional policies were elucidated; (3) from John Major's You can only be sure with the Conservatives manifesto (1997), there was a marked change in constitutional rhetoric. This change in rhetoric was a move away from a more conventional constitutional rhetoric, such as 'constitution' and 'parliament' to an all-encompassing term i.e. 'democracy', with the exception of Cameron's 2010 manifesto, which utilised the term 'politics'.