Foreword

The study of political communication, discourse, and propaganda has become increasingly important in understanding how political actors influence public opinion, shape national identities, and mobilize support. The four articles in this issue contribute to this field by examining different aspects of political language, media representation, and the strategic use of communication by political actors. These articles collectively explore how language, metaphors, and propaganda are employed to construct political realities, influence public perception, and achieve strategic goals.

Equivocation, or the intentional use of vague and ambiguous language, is a common tactic employed by politicians in interviews and public debates. Bull's study on *Equivocation in Political Communication: The Art of Not Answering Questions* examines the extent to which British political leaders equivocate during televised interviews and Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs). He introduces the concept of "reply-rate," which measures the proportion of questions that politicians answer directly. His findings reveal that politicians often avoid giving direct answers, with reply-rates as low as 11% in some cases. By analyzing the techniques of equivocation, Bull provides a framework for identifying when and how politicians avoid answering questions, offering insights into the strategic use of language in political discourse. Bull identifies 43 different techniques of equivocation, ranging from ignoring the question altogether to attacking the question or the interviewer. These strategies allow politicians to control the narrative, avoid controversial topics, and present themselves in a favorable light without committing to specific positions. The article also highlights the role of personalization in political communication, where politicians direct attention to the interviewer personally, either through flattery, criticism, or other forms of personal engagement. This tactic can be particularly effective in deflecting difficult questions and shaping public perception of the politician's character.

In their article on *Metaphors and Political Discourse: The Case of European Integration in Ukraine,* Polegkyi and De Landtsheer focus on the discourse surrounding European integration in Ukraine. Polegkyi and De Landtsheer analyze the metaphors employed in Ukrainian newspapers between 2005 and 2010, showes how they can shape public perception and influence political behavior. They find that the European Union is often depicted as a "house" or "fortress," with Ukraine positioned as an outsider knocking on the door. This metaphor reflects the tension between the desire for integration and the perception of exclusion from Europe. Polegkyi and De Landtsheer identify several key metaphors in the discourse, including the EU as a "closed club," a "fortress," and a "dream." These metaphors shape how Ukrainians perceive their relationship with Europe, often emphasizing the difficulty of gaining entry and the exclusivity of the EU. The metaphor of the "path" or "journey" is also prominent, symbolizing the long and arduous process of European integration. These metaphors not only reflect the political realities of Ukraine's relationship with the EU but also influence public opinion by framing the issue in specific ways. By analyzing the metaphors used in Ukrainian media, Polegkyi and De Landtsheer provide insights into the ways in which political issues are framed and understood, offering a valuable perspective on the role of language in shaping national identity and political aspirations.

In their article on *ISIS Propaganda: Adapting Messages for Different Audiences* Onur Sultan and Ismail Aslan analyze ISIS magazines published in English, French, and Turkish, using a combination of computational and qualitative methods to measure the similarity between articles and identify thematic differences, showing how the group uses language and imagery to

recruit supporters and spread its ideology. The authors find that ISIS is highly skilled at producing unique propaganda content for different audiences, rather than simply translating the same material into multiple languages. For example, the English-language magazine *Dabiq* focuses on themes such as state-building, ideology, and jurisprudence, while the Turkish-language magazine *Konstantiniyye* emphasizes jihad and heroism. These differences reflect the group's strategic efforts to appeal to the specific concerns and values of each target audience.The authors also highlight the role of metaphors in ISIS propaganda, noting that the group uses metaphors of "home," "family," and "journey" to create a sense of belonging and purpose among its followers. These metaphors are tailored to the cultural and linguistic context of each audience, reinforcing the group's message and encouraging support for its cause.

This special issue is completed with a review of two books about the implications of AI in the social landscape. Before that, however, Richard D. Anderson, Jr., in his article on *Voicing Politics*, critiques the book authors' conclusions, arguing that the observed differences in responses are not due to grammatical features of the languages but rather to the unspoken context that respondents bring to the survey questions. The book *Voicing Politics: How Language Shapes Public Opinion* by Efrén Pérez and Margit Tavits, through a series of experiments involving bilingual speakers of Estonian and Russian, demonstrates that the grammatical features of a language—such as gender markers or the expression of futurity—can shape how individuals respond to political questions. Anderson highlights the limitations of survey research in controlling for context, suggesting that the variability in responses is more likely due to the different cultural and historical contexts associated with each language rather than the linguistic structures themselves. This debate underscores the complexity of disentangling the effects of language from the broader socio-cultural context in which it is used. The implications of this research are profound for political science, particularly in understanding how linguistic structures might influence political behavior and attitudes. If language indeed shapes political beliefs, as Pérez and Tavits suggest, then political campaigns and public policy initiatives could be tailored to the linguistic characteristics of target populations. However, Anderson's critique serves as a cautionary note, reminding researchers of the importance of context in interpreting survey data and the potential pitfalls of attributing causal effects to linguistic features alone.

In conclusion, four articles in this special issue, together, provide a comprehensive overview of the role of language, metaphors, and propaganda in political communication. From the influence of linguistic structures on political attitudes to the strategic use of equivocation by politicians, these studies highlight the complex ways in which language shapes political realities. The analysis of metaphors in Ukrainian media and ISIS propaganda further underscores the power of language to frame political issues and influence public perception. As political communication continues to evolve in the digital age, these studies offer valuable insights into the ways in which language and media are used to achieve political goals. By understanding the strategies and techniques employed by political actors, we can better navigate the complex landscape of political discourse and make informed decisions as citizens.