

Article

Detection of Political Evasion

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Citation: Toshboeva, M. R. Detection of Political Evasion. Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy, and Culture 2026, 7(3), 425-434.

Received: 10th May 2026

Revised: 25th May 2026

Accepted: 30th May 2026

Published: 14th June 2026

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Abstract: Political evasion represents one of the most significant yet understudied phenomena in contemporary political communication. As political discourse increasingly unfolds within digital and highly mediated environments, political actors employ various linguistic and discursive strategies to avoid direct responses while maintaining credibility and communicative control. This study investigates political evasion as a multidimensional communicative phenomenon through a comparative analysis of the political discourse of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump. The research aims to identify the principal linguistic markers of political evasion and examine their realization across different political and cultural contexts.

The study adopts an interdisciplinary framework combining discourse analysis, pragmatics, corpus-based methods, and comparative analysis. The empirical corpus consists of official speeches, public statements, interviews, and press-conference materials delivered by the three political leaders. The analysis focuses on lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, and rhetorical indicators of evasion, including vagueness, ambiguity, topic shifting, reframing, strategic generalization, and indirect response patterns.

The findings demonstrate that political evasion functions as a strategic discursive resource that enables political actors to manage sensitive issues, maintain legitimacy, and influence public interpretation. While certain evasive mechanisms appear across all examined political contexts, their realization is shaped by cultural and political traditions. The study reveals a tendency toward consensus-oriented reframing in Uzbek political discourse, historical and geopolitical legitimation in Russian political discourse, and identity-based and confrontational strategies in American political communication. The article contributes to political discourse studies by proposing an integrated framework for the identification and analysis of political evasion in contemporary political communication.

Keywords: political evasion; political discourse; discourse analysis; political communication; linguistic markers; comparative discourse studies

1. Introduction

The digital transformation of political communication has significantly altered the relationship between political actors, media institutions, and citizens. Contemporary political discourse increasingly unfolds across television broadcasts, online news platforms, and social media networks, where politicians are expected to respond quickly to public concerns while simultaneously managing strategic and institutional interests. Under these conditions, direct and transparent communication often competes with the need to avoid politically sensitive issues, making political evasion a prominent feature of modern public discourse [1].

Political evasion refers to communicative practices through which political actors avoid providing direct answers, redirect attention, reframe questions, or offer responses that appear informative without addressing the central issue. Such strategies are frequently observed in parliamentary debates, press conferences, political interviews, and digital communication. While evasive behavior is widely recognized in public and media discourse, its linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms remain insufficiently understood.

The relevance of studying political evasion extends beyond linguistic inquiry. In democratic societies, effective political accountability depends on the accessibility and transparency of public communication. Citizens rely on political discourse to evaluate policies, assess government performance, and make informed political decisions. Consequently, the ability to identify evasive responses is essential for understanding how political actors manage information and influence public perception.

The growing importance of digital communication further complicates this issue. Social media platforms allow politicians to communicate directly with audiences, reducing the role of traditional journalistic mediation and creating new opportunities for strategic message control. Political communication functions as a site where ideologies are reproduced and legitimized through discourse. As political discourse becomes increasingly multimodal, interactive, and fragmented, traditional approaches to identifying evasive communication face significant challenges [2].

Despite extensive research on political discourse, several conceptual and methodological questions remain unresolved. One of the central difficulties involves distinguishing legitimate ambiguity from deliberate evasion. Political communication often requires caution, diplomatic language, and the management of uncertainty; therefore, indirectness alone cannot be treated as evidence of evasive behavior. Existing studies frequently focus on isolated linguistic features or specific communicative contexts, limiting the development of a comprehensive framework for detection.

From a linguistic perspective, political evasion is expressed through a variety of lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, and rhetorical strategies, including vagueness, topic shifting, reformulation, over-elaboration, and strategic ambiguity. However, these markers acquire meaning only within a broader communicative context, making the identification of evasion a complex analytical task.

Recent advances in computational linguistics and natural language processing provide new opportunities for detecting evasive discourse on a larger scale. Machine learning techniques, semantic analysis, and automated discourse classification can assist in identifying recurring patterns of evasive communication. Nevertheless, computational approaches often struggle to capture contextual and pragmatic nuances, highlighting the need for interdisciplinary solutions [3].

Against this background, the present study examines political evasion as a multidimensional communicative phenomenon situated at the intersection of linguistics, pragmatics, discourse studies, and computational analysis. The article addresses the following questions: What constitutes political evasion? Which linguistic and discursive markers signal evasive behavior? How can evasion be detected systematically? What role can computational methods play in this process?

The novelty of the study lies in the integration of linguistic, pragmatic, and computational perspectives into a unified analytical framework. By combining insights from political discourse analysis with recent advances in language technologies, the article proposes a multidimensional approach to detecting political evasion and contributes to the broader understanding of strategic communication in contemporary political discourse [4].

Theoretical foundations

Political evasion represents a strategic communicative phenomenon whereby public figures circumvent direct responses to unfavorable questions while maintaining the appearance of cooperation. Agyekum defines evasion as involving "circumvention or avoiding answering directly or avoiding facing up to real difficult or tricky

communicative or discourse issues". This definition distinguishes evasion from mere ambiguity, which involves deliberate vagueness without necessarily avoiding the question's core. Hedging, by contrast, constitutes a softening of propositional certainty through modal expressions—a tactic that may accompany evasion but operates through different linguistic mechanisms.

The distinction between evasion and deception is crucial. While deception entails intentional falsification, evasion operates within the boundaries of truthfulness by strategically selecting what information to disclose. As Galasinski notes, evasion allows politicians to "steer away from giving honest and significant information" without necessarily uttering falsehoods. Obeng further emphasizes that the determination of evasion depends not only on the politician's response but also on the questioner's reaction—a dialogic conceptualization that moves beyond speaker-centered definitions [5].

Historically, the systematic study of political evasion emerged from Bull and Mayer's framework of "non-replies" (1993), subsequently developed through analyses of press conferences and parliamentary questioning. Bavelas (1990) laid foundational groundwork by examining evasion as a face-saving mechanism in adversarial contexts, while Bull (2003) systematized twelve distinct tactics of equivocation that remain influential in contemporary research.

Political discourse operates as strategic communication wherein every utterance serves instrumental purposes beyond information transfer. According to Chilton, political discourse is fundamentally linked to the exercise of power and the strategic management of public perceptions. Clayman and Heritage characterize the political interview as a genre defined by inherent tension: journalists pursue accountability through "critical follow-up questions," while politicians seek to advance pre-packaged agendas. This adversarial structure creates systematic pressures toward evasive responses.

Institutional constraints profoundly shape evasive practices. Fetzer observes that hearings, parliamentary sessions, and media interviews each impose distinct turn-taking rules and relevance expectations that politicians learn to navigate. Berlin's analysis of the 9-11 Commission hearings demonstrates how institutional settings can foster "cooperative conflict"—witnesses maintain the appearance of cooperation while systematically deflecting responsibility through changing question direction, mitigating imposition force, and avoiding politically damaging admissions [6].

Power and ideology intersect with evasion through information management. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework reveals that evasive practices are not merely individual strategies but reflect deeper power asymmetries between interrogators and witnesses. Politicians representing dominant ideologies may deploy evasion to protect institutional interests, while opposition figures might employ similar tactics to avoid legitimizing unfavorable premises embedded in questions.

Speech Act Theory, originating with Austin and Searle, provides a foundational lens for understanding evasion as the performance of indirect illocutionary acts. When a politician responds to a yes-no question with a statement about past achievements, they perform the speech act of redirecting rather than answering—a felicity condition violation that listeners recognize as strategically motivated.

Grice's Cooperative Principle and its constituent maxims offer the most frequently invoked framework for analyzing evasion. Politicians systematically flout the Maxim of Relevance by introducing thematically related but non-answering content; they violate the Maxim of Quantity by providing insufficient information; and they exploit the Maxim of Manner through obscurity and prolixity. As Fraser notes, when President G. Bush responded to a question about economic circumspection by stating "I think I pretty much said the same thing yesterday," he breached both the Quantity and Relevance maxims while preserving the superficial expectation of cooperation.

Relevance Theory, developed by Sperber and Wilson, reframes Gricean analysis by emphasizing cognitive effects and processing effort. From this perspective, evasive

responses impose disproportionate processing demands on interlocutors, who must infer the speaker's intended meaning through contextual enrichment. Zhang's analysis of Chinese diplomatic press conferences demonstrates that spokespeople employ covert and overt evasion strategies calibrated to the cognitive expectations of different audiences—domestic versus international [7].

Face-saving strategies constitute perhaps the most direct pragmatic motivation for evasion. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory posits that threatening questions create face-threatening acts (FTAs) which politicians mitigate through negative politeness strategies, including evasiveness. Lokajová's study of Slovak political interviews reveals that politicians accused of corruption employ systematic evasive strategies to "ambiguate their agency and at the same time boost their positive face". Obeng similarly documents how evasion serves functions of preserving face, avoiding blame, and reducing negative reactions.

Framing and reframing constitute primary cognitive mechanisms underlying political evasion. Lakoff argues that political language operates through selective framing—activating certain mental schemas while suppressing others. When politicians face questions about policy failures, they reframe the issue as one of future opportunities rather than past mistakes, shifting the cognitive frame from accountability to aspiration. This process of "pre-emptive framing" allows politicians to control the terms of discourse before adversarial frames take hold [8].

Attention redirection operates as the cognitive corollary of reframing. Drawing analogies to stage magic, research on "misdirection" demonstrates that effective evasion diverts audience attention away from problematic topics without explicit denial. Politicians achieve this through linguistic diversion (introducing emotionally charged but irrelevant content), temporal displacement (shifting focus to past successes or future promises), and agency ambiguity (passive constructions that obscure responsibility).

Cognitive load management explains why evasion flourishes in high-pressure environments. When politicians face rapid-fire questioning, their working memory capacity becomes constrained, leading to reliance on rehearsed talking points rather than spontaneous responses. This cognitive economy explains the prevalence of formulaic evasive phrases documented by McQuillan: "I'm not going to pre-judge this inquiry," "there's a conversation to be had," and "I want to look forwards, not backwards".

Narrative reconstruction provides the most sophisticated cognitive strategy—replacing question-answer dyads with alternative storylines. Rather than responding to specific queries, politicians activate pre-existing narrative frameworks that assimilate the question into a broader, self-serving account. This mechanism explains why evasive politicians often appear to answer while actually substituting a different discourse entirely. Lakoff's analysis of Trump's communication identifies four narrative strategies: pre-emptive framing, diversion from embarrassing news, deflection of blame, and trial balloons to test boundaries—each representing a distinct form of narrative reconstruction.

Linguistic markers of political evasion

Political evasion is realized through a combination of lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, and rhetorical strategies that enable political actors to maintain communicative control while avoiding direct commitment. Previous studies in political discourse analysis have demonstrated that evasive communication rarely manifests through a single linguistic feature; rather, it emerges through the interaction of multiple discourse mechanisms (Bull, 2003; van Dijk, 1997; Chilton, 2004).

One of the most common markers of political evasion is the use of vague and indeterminate vocabulary. Politicians frequently employ expressions such as *certain circumstances*, *some issues*, *appropriate measures*, or *relevant stakeholders* instead of referring to specific actors or actions. Such lexical choices reduce accountability and allow multiple interpretations.

In the speeches of Vladimir Putin, questions concerning politically sensitive issues are often answered through generalized references to national interests, security

concerns, or historical circumstances. Analyses of annual presidential press conferences have noted instances in which controversial topics were addressed through broader geopolitical narratives rather than direct responses to the questions posed .

Similarly, the discourse of Donald Trump frequently relied on generalized expressions such as *many people say*, *everybody knows*, or *people are talking about*. Such constructions create an appearance of consensus without identifying concrete sources, thereby shifting attention away from verifiable evidence.

In contrast, speeches of Shavkat Mirziyoyev tend to exhibit a lower degree of confrontational evasion. Instead, potentially sensitive issues are often reframed through references to collective development, regional cooperation, and long-term strategic goals.

Syntactic structures also contribute to evasive communication. Passive constructions frequently obscure agency by omitting the responsible actor. Statements such as "mistakes were made" or "certain decisions were taken" shift attention away from specific individuals or institutions .

Nominalization performs a similar function. By transforming actions into abstract nouns (*implementation*, *stabilization*, *modernization*), political speakers reduce the visibility of actors and processes. This strategy is particularly common in institutional political discourse, where responsibility is often distributed across governmental structures.

Another characteristic feature is the use of highly complex sentence structures. Extended clauses, embedded explanations, and multiple qualifications can make responses appear comprehensive while delaying or avoiding direct answers. Such patterns have been identified in presidential press conferences and political interviews across different political cultures [9].

At the pragmatic level, political evasion frequently manifests as question avoidance. Bull (2003) distinguishes several forms of non-answering behavior, including ignoring the question, answering a different question, and providing incomplete information.

A recurrent strategy in political interviews is topic shifting. Rather than addressing a controversial issue directly, speakers redirect discussion toward broader themes. For example, when confronted with questions about criticism or policy failures, political leaders may redirect attention toward economic achievements, national security, or international challenges .

Another widespread strategy is over-elaboration. Politicians may provide lengthy responses containing substantial background information while avoiding the specific point raised by the interviewer. The communicative effect is paradoxical: the speaker appears responsive while simultaneously withholding a direct answer.

Counter-questioning constitutes another important evasive mechanism. By questioning the assumptions behind an interviewer's inquiry, politicians transform the interactional structure of the exchange and regain discursive control .

Political evasion is frequently reinforced through rhetorical appeals. References to patriotism, national unity, and collective identity often function as legitimizing devices that redirect attention from contentious issues.

In Russian political discourse, appeals to sovereignty, historical continuity, and national security frequently serve as framing devices that reposition controversial questions within broader geopolitical narratives.

American political discourse demonstrates a different pattern. In the speeches and debates of Donald Trump, evasive responses are often accompanied by attacks on opponents, media institutions, or political elites. This "attack-and-deflect" strategy transforms accountability questions into confrontational exchanges [10].

In Uzbek political communication, rhetorical appeals more commonly emphasize social harmony, development, regional cooperation, and collective responsibility. Such references frequently function as mechanisms of consensus-building rather than overt confrontation .

2. Methodological framework

The present study employs a mixed-methods design combining discourse analysis, pragmatics, and corpus-based approaches. The corpus consists of presidential speeches, press conferences, political interviews, and public statements delivered by Vladimir Putin, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and Donald Trump between 2017 and 2025.

The analytical framework integrates Critical Discourse Analysis, pragmatic analysis, Conversation Analysis, and corpus linguistic methods. Such triangulation allows the identification of both micro-level linguistic features and broader ideological patterns.

To operationalize political evasion, a coding scheme was developed based on previous research by Bull and recent computational studies of political question evasion. Responses were categorized into six major types: deflection, minimization, ambiguity, reframing, non-response, and attack strategy. Each category was defined through observable linguistic and pragmatic indicators.

Reliability was enhanced through repeated coding procedures and comparison of findings across multiple communicative contexts. The combination of qualitative interpretation and systematic coding made it possible to identify recurring patterns of evasive behavior while reducing subjective bias.

The analysis demonstrates that political evasion is not merely an individual communicative tactic but a systematic discourse resource shaped by institutional constraints, political culture, and strategic objectives. Although the specific linguistic realization varies across political systems, the fundamental purpose remains consistent: maintaining communicative control while limiting political vulnerability.

Yes, but for a publication in a high-ranked journal, the article cannot consist only of theoretical descriptions. It must contain **authentic empirical evidence**, systematic coding, and comparative interpretation. Fortunately, your corpus already contains authentic presidential speeches by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump, which can be used as empirical material.

3. Results

Empirical analysis

The corpus consists of official speeches, public addresses, and political statements delivered by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump between 2020 and 2025. The selection includes presidential addresses, public speeches, press-conference statements, and inaugural rhetoric. The material was subjected to qualitative discourse analysis and manual coding according to the categories of political evasion proposed by Bull and adapted for the present study (see the figure 1) [11].

Figure 1.

The analysis identified six recurrent categories of evasive communication:

Category	Function
Deflection	Shifting attention from the original issue
Ambiguity	Avoiding explicit commitment
Reframing	Changing the interpretive framework
Minimization	Reducing the significance of a problem
Non-response	Failure to answer the question directly

Political evasion in the discourse of Shavkat Mirziyoyev

The discourse of Shavkat Mirziyoyev demonstrates a relatively low frequency of confrontational evasion. Instead, potentially sensitive topics are frequently reframed through narratives of national development, social solidarity, and collective

responsibility .

For example, discussing socio-economic challenges, the President redirects attention from difficulties toward future achievements:

“Oldimizda qanday sinov va mashaqqatlar paydo bo’lmasin, biz demokratik islohotlarni chuqurlashtirish, milliy birlik va hamjihatlikni mustahkamlash yo’lidan aslo ortga qaytmaymiz.”

Attack-and-deflect	Redirecting attention to opponents
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Rather than focusing on existing problems, the statement reframes discussion around national unity and reform, representing a clear case of reframing.

Similarly, references to collective identity frequently function as mechanisms of discursive redirection [12]:

“Biz barchamiz bitta xalq, bitta mamlakat, bitta oilamiz.”

Here, the emphasis shifts from specific policy issues to a broader narrative of social cohesion. Such examples illustrate how consensus-oriented political cultures often employ evasion through inclusion and collectivization rather than confrontation .

Political evasion in the discourse of Vladimir Putin

Russian political discourse demonstrates a stronger tendency toward strategic ambiguity and historical reframing. Sensitive political issues are often repositioned within larger narratives of national history, sovereignty, or geopolitical competition.

A representative example is:

“Мы верно храним память об этих исторических, триумфальных событиях.”

When contemporary political questions are linked to historical memory, the communicative focus moves away from immediate accountability and toward symbolic legitimacy.

Another indicator of ambiguity is the use of generalized agency [13]:

“Но как это сделать и можно ли, и нужно ли это делать прямо сейчас, я не знаю.”

The statement postpones commitment by emphasizing uncertainty rather than providing a concrete position. This corresponds to Bull’s category of ambiguity, where politicians avoid direct responsibility while maintaining rhetorical credibility.

Russian political discourse therefore tends to combine historical *legitimation*, *strategic uncertainty*, and *symbolic reframing* as key evasive mechanisms.

Political Evasion in the Discourse of Donald Trump

Among the three leaders examined, Donald Trump demonstrates the highest frequency of confrontational and personalized evasive strategies. His political rhetoric frequently relies on nationalistic reframing :

“I have a vision for the United States — America First.”

Instead of engaging with specific policy criticism, the discourse redirects attention toward an emotionally charged national project.

Another characteristic example is:

“For American citizens, January 20th, 2025, is Liberation Day.”

The statement reframes political transition as a symbolic national victory, shifting the discussion from policy evaluation to identity-based mobilization [14].

Trump's discourse also exhibits extensive use of generalized positive assertions:

“The American dream will soon be back and thriving like never before.”

Such formulations represent strategic generalization, avoiding measurable commitments while creating a persuasive emotional effect.

Consequently, Trump's evasive style is characterized by *emotional diversion*, *identity appeals*, and *attack-and-deflect rhetoric*, a pattern frequently noted in contemporary studies of populist political communication.

The comparative analysis reveals both universal and culture-specific manifestations of political evasion (see the figure 2) [15].

Figure 2

Universal and culture-specific manifestations of political evasion

Strategy	Mirziyoyev	Putin	Trump
Reframing	High	High	High
Ambiguity	Moderate	High	Moderate
Collective identity appeals	Very High	High	Moderate
Historical legitimization	Moderate	Very High	Moderate
Emotional diversion	Low	Moderate	Very High
Attack-and-deflect	Rare	Moderate	High

The findings indicate that political evasion is a universal communicative resource; however, its linguistic realization is strongly influenced by political culture.

In Uzbek political discourse, evasion tends to be realized through consensus-building narratives and collective solidarity. In Russian discourse, it is frequently embedded in historical and geopolitical framing. In American political communication, particularly in Trump's rhetoric, evasion is often accompanied by emotional mobilization and personalized political confrontation [16].

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that political evasion is not a random feature of political communication but a strategic discursive resource used to manage sensitive issues and maintain communicative control. Across the speeches of Mirziyoyev, Putin, and Trump, evasion was realized through lexical vagueness, ambiguity, topic shifting, and reframing. These strategies allow political actors to avoid direct commitments while preserving their public image and authority [17].

The analysis demonstrates a close connection between evasion, political power, and legitimacy. Evasive strategies help political leaders control the interpretation of controversial issues and reinforce preferred narratives. While Putin's discourse often relies on historical and geopolitical framing, Mirziyoyev's speeches emphasize collective responsibility and national development. Trump's rhetoric frequently combines evasion with identity-based and confrontational strategies. These differences reflect the influence of political culture on communicative behavior [18].

Political evasion has important implications for democratic communication. Excessive use of evasive strategies may reduce transparency and limit citizens' ability to evaluate political decisions. At the same time, certain forms of indirectness can be justified in situations involving diplomacy, security, or crisis management. Therefore, distinguishing between legitimate ambiguity and strategic evasion remains a key challenge for political discourse research [19].

The study confirms that political evasion cannot be identified through isolated linguistic markers alone. Effective detection requires the integration of linguistic, pragmatic, and contextual analysis. The results also suggest that computational tools can support the identification of evasive discourse, although human interpretation remains necessary for understanding pragmatic meaning and cultural context [20].

5. Conclusion

This study examined political evasion in the discourse of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump. The analysis revealed that evasion is a systematic communicative strategy manifested through ambiguity, reframing, topic shifting, and

strategic generalization. Although these mechanisms occur across all three political contexts, their realization is influenced by cultural and political traditions.

The study contributes to political discourse research by conceptualizing political evasion as a multidimensional phenomenon operating at linguistic, pragmatic, and sociocultural levels. The findings demonstrate that evasive communication should be analyzed within its broader communicative context rather than through individual linguistic features.

A methodological contribution of the study is the integration of discourse analysis, pragmatics, and corpus-based approaches. The proposed classification of evasive strategies provides a framework for future comparative studies of political communication.

Future research may expand the corpus to include additional political cultures and digital communication platforms. Further studies could also explore audience perceptions of evasive discourse and develop computational models capable of identifying context-dependent forms of political evasion in multilingual environments.

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