

The Political and Legal Interpretation of Speech: A Forensic Linguistic Analysis of Public Perception on the Statement "Who Are You to Take Photos of Me?"

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether the statement made by a Zambian Member of Parliament—"Who are you to take photos of me?"—constitutes a criminal verbal threat or a politically misinterpreted expression of frustration. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative survey data with qualitative forensic linguistic and legal analysis. Public perception was examined through a survey of 140 participants, revealing that 78% interpreted the statement as a non-threatening emotional response. Forensic linguistic frameworks, including Speech Act Theory and contextual discourse analysis, were applied to determine the presence of threatening intent or coercive illocutionary force. Legal precedent and comparative dictionary definitions were also evaluated. Findings indicate that the MP's statement lacks specificity, threat-related intent, and coercive language, thereby failing to meet both linguistic and legal thresholds for a prosecutable threat. Additionally, political affiliation was shown to significantly influence perception, suggesting that legal responses to political speech may be shaped more by ideology than objective standards. The study concludes that the MP's prosecution reflects selective legal enforcement and raises concerns about the weaponization of speech laws in politically sensitive environments. These results underscore the importance of forensic linguistics in ensuring fair and unbiased interpretation of politically charged speech.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Language is a fundamental tool in political communication, serving as a means of expression, persuasion, and power dynamics (Fairclough, 2003). The law is the repository of the rights of citizens, including that of politicians to express their thoughts and discontent. In political discourse, words are often subjected to intense scrutiny, especially when spoken in emotionally charged moments. Political figures—particularly those in opposition—frequently find their statements interpreted through partisan lenses, with their speech either politicized or legally challenged (Van Dijk, 1997). Speech operates as a weapon against individuals perceived as political dissenters, especially by those in power attempting to avoid scrutiny and accountability.

This complex interplay of speech, law, and power is heightened when governments use legal mechanisms to silence dissent (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). In multiparty democracies, such dynamics are even more pronounced, with opposing voices using language to advance their agenda. Zambia, like many other nations, has undergone significant political and legal transformations. Before gaining independence in 1964, Zambia was a British colony. Following independence, it became a one-party state. During this period, restrictive colonial laws limiting freedom of expression remained intact, carried over into the post-independence era.

Even the democratic reforms of 1991 did not repeal many of these laws. As a result, Zambia's legal system still includes statutes that can infringe on freedom of speech. Although freedom of expression is enshrined in the Zambian Constitution—Article 20 of the 1996 Constitution, Chapter 1 of the Laws of Zambia—it is curtailed by derogation clauses and subsequent legislative acts. "Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered on the enjoyment of his freedom of expression..." (*Zambian Constitution, Article 20(1), quoting Aaron, 1969*)

These provisions reflect international instruments such as Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and

Political Rights (1996), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (1950).

Nevertheless, Zambian laws have often been selectively enforced by governments to suppress dissent, making it difficult for citizens to freely exercise this constitutional freedom.

A **recent incident** illustrates the intersection of political speech and legal interpretation:

*A Member of Parliament (MP), suspended from Parliament, shouted “**Who are you to take photos of me?**” at a laughing, unaccredited photojournalist. The journalist filed a criminal complaint to the Police alleging threats of violence, leading to the MP’s arrest under the Penal Code, Chapter 87 of the Laws of Zambia.*

This case raises significant questions about the **interpretation of political speech**, especially when forensic linguistic and legal standards are applied. According to speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), context, tone, and perceived intent matter significantly in interpreting whether speech is threatening.

The Problem of Speech Criminalization in Political Contexts

The **criminalization of speech**, particularly that of opposition figures, remains a global concern. Governments often rely on vague definitions of *threats* and *incitement* to silence opposition voices (Foucault, 1980; Fairclough, 2003).

In Zambia, this has manifested through selective enforcement of speech laws (Chirwa, 2019).

According to **forensic linguistic standards**, a verbal threat must:

- Convey intent to cause harm (explicitly or implicitly),
- Be credible and realistic,
- Induce fear or coercion in the recipient (*Elonis v. United States*, 2015).

This study investigates whether the MP’s statement meets these criteria or was merely a spontaneous, emotional expression. It also explores whether public and legal interpretations are affected by **political bias**.

The Role of Forensic Linguistics in Political Speech

Forensic linguistics applies linguistic principles to legal contexts, helping courts assess meaning, intent, and interpretation (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). Legal precedent—such as *Elonis v. United States* (2015)—emphasizes speaker intent over listener fear when determining the criminality of speech (Shuy, 2006).

This study investigates:

- Whether the phrase was inherently threatening or exaggerated.
- Whether the MP’s political identity influenced her arrest.
- Whether public perception aligns with forensic linguistic and legal standards.

Research Justification

This study is critical for the following reasons:

- **Legal Clarity:** Provides empirical insight into speech law enforcement in Zambia.
- **Forensic Linguistics:** Demonstrates its utility in political speech analysis.

- **Political Implications:** Assesses whether the MP's case is politically motivated.
- **Free Speech Protection:** Evaluates whether speech laws are selectively applied.

It also explores Zambia's adherence to international norms and seeks to inform **legal reforms** supporting democratic expression.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Analyze public perception of the MP's statement using forensic linguistic principles.
2. Assess whether the phrase meets the legal criteria for a verbal threat under Zambian law.
3. Examine how political affiliation influenced interpretation and prosecution.
4. Investigate the role of context, intent, and tone in speech perception.
5. Evaluate whether speech laws are used to suppress political dissent.

Research Questions

1. How do people interpret the statement *"Who are you to take photos of me?"* in political and social contexts?
2. Does forensic linguistic analysis classify the statement as a threat?
3. How do demographic factors (age, gender, political affiliation, education) shape perception?
4. Did the MP's opposition to government influence her legal treatment?
5. Are laws on verbal threats enforced selectively based on political alignment?

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the **context, problem, framework, and objectives** of the study. The analysis focuses on the intersection of **forensic linguistics, political discourse, and legal interpretation**—offering a multidimensional perspective on the criminalization of speech. It lays the foundation for examining how political speech is interpreted and prosecuted, especially in polarized political environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The interpretation of speech within legal and political contexts lies at the heart of forensic linguistics and political communication studies. Speech, especially from public figures, is often ambiguous and interpreted variably depending on tone, context, and the listener's biases (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). In politically sensitive environments, such interpretations may serve as grounds for prosecution, particularly when directed at dissenting voices (Fairclough, 2003).

While scholars have examined intersections between law, politics, and language, few have focused specifically on how **interpretations of speech shift under political pressure**—a gap this study addresses, particularly within the Zambian context.

Linguistic Contributions to Legal Interpretation

Prasasti (2024) highlights the practical role of linguists in clarifying ambiguous or biased statements. Forensic

linguistics, he argues, aids in resolving legal disputes through the analysis of speech, documents, recordings, and emotional context. Applications range from defamation and threats to fraud, plagiarism, and slander.

While Prasasti outlines broad forensic utility, this study narrows focus to **political speech criminalization**, where speech is often policed selectively to the advantage of ruling elites.

Professor **Alfred Chanda** similarly stresses the role of **free expression** in a democratic society. He emphasizes the constitutional protection of the press and cautions that without it, the freedom of expression remains illusory. This aligns with Zambia's constitutional provision under **Article 20** safeguarding expression, albeit with notable statutory limitations.

Conversely, **Carlson Anyangwe** criticizes **Section 69 of the Penal Code**, arguing that its continued existence curtails evolution in Zambian political discourse. While his critique is valid, it neglects interdisciplinary analysis—such as forensic linguistics—which could further clarify how legal texts are enforced based on perceived intent rather than objective threat.

Legal Framework: Speech and Its Constraints in Zambia

The **Zambian Constitution (1996)** affirms the right to freedom of expression (Article 20), subject to public interest limitations (Article 20(3)). However, several statutes limit this right in practice:

- **Section 53(1–2), Penal Code:** Grants the President powers to ban publications deemed contrary to public interest.
- **Section 60, Penal Code:** Defines sedition in broad terms, including inciting discontent or disobedience.
- **Section 67:** Criminalizes publication of false news, even if done unknowingly, without reasonable verification.
- **Section 69:** Covers criminal defamation of the President.
- **Section 71:** Penalizes defamation of foreign dignitaries.
- **Cyber Crimes Act (2021), Section 66:** Addresses hate speech but is often **selectively enforced**.

These provisions, though legally enshrined, are frequently used **against opposition figures** while sparing pro-government individuals, indicating **selective enforcement** rather than neutral legal application.

Case Law: Selective Enforcement of Speech Laws

Several notable Zambian cases demonstrate how speech laws are wielded politically:

- **The People v. Bright Mwape & Fred M'membe (1995):** Journalists charged with defaming the President; courts upheld Section 69 despite constitutional challenges.
- **The Post Newspaper Ban (1996):** President Chiluba banned a publication and detained journalists under the State Security Act. Charges were later dismissed due to lack of evidence.
- **Opposition Politician Case (2012):** Then opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema was prosecuted for publishing false news, while media platforms that carried his message were untouched.

These cases illustrate the broader trend of **politicizing speech law** to silence dissent, even when **legal justifications are tenuous or absent**.

Forensic Linguistics and Threat Assessment

Forensic linguistics applies language analysis to legal contexts—especially useful when assessing **verbal threats**. Key theoretical contributions include:

- **Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962):** Distinguishes between:
 - *Locutionary acts* (literal words),
 - *Illocutionary acts* (speaker's intent),
 - *Perlocutionary acts* (effect on listener).
- **Searle (1969)** builds on this, emphasizing the role of **context** and **audience** in meaning construction.

A statement must contain:

- **Intent to harm,**
- **Credibility,**
- **Specificity of threat** (Gales, 2011; Solan & Tiersma, 2005).

In *Elonis v. United States (2015)*, the U.S. Supreme Court emphasized **intent over perception**, confirming that listener fear alone is insufficient to constitute a legal threat.

In the present study, the MP's phrase—"Who are you to take photos of me?"—lacks specificity or direct intent to harm, supporting the view that **no actionable threat occurred**.

Contextual Interpretation of Political Speech

Speech interpretation is shaped by:

- **Speaker's emotional state,**
- **Audience's prior biases,**
- **Political dynamics and power relations** (Fairclough, 2003; Van Dijk, 1997).

A frustrated outburst by an MP can be construed as aggression if **political opponents** control the legal narrative. This aligns with findings in **forensic phonetics**, where intonation and delivery affect threat perception (Hollien, 2012).

In politically polarized environments, this ambiguity allows authorities to **weaponize rhetoric**, transforming emotional speech into grounds for prosecution.

Criminalizing Speech in Politically Sensitive Contexts

Laws on **sedition, threats, and defamation** are frequently employed as **political instruments** rather than for public safety (Schauer, 1982; Barendt, 2005). For a threat to be prosecutable, it must:

- Express clear intent to harm,
- Be specific and realistic,
- Induce fear in a **reasonable** listener (Elonis, 2015; Shuy, 2006).

The **Zambian Penal Code** lacks clarity on what qualifies as a credible threat. This legal ambiguity grants discretion to law enforcement, who often act based on **political loyalty** rather than forensic criteria.

Summary of Literature Review

Key insights from the literature include:

- Threats must be clearly intentional and specific, not merely emotional outbursts.
- Context, including political alignment and emotional state, heavily influences speech perception.
- Forensic linguistics and phonetics provide valuable tools for distinguishing real threats from ambiguous speech.
- Legal enforcement in Zambia is politically selective, undermining the credibility of speech-related prosecutions.

This study builds upon these findings to examine whether the MP's statement constitutes a criminal threat, or reflects yet another case of **speech being weaponized for political suppression**.

Conclusion

The literature reveals a clear disconnect between **legal standards, linguistic theory, and actual legal practice** in Zambia. Forensic linguistics offers a critical lens for evaluating speech fairly, beyond subjective or politically motivated interpretations. This study situates itself within that framework, seeking to promote legal consistency, protect expression, and prevent misuse of speech laws.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to analyze public perception of the MP's statement in relation to its forensic linguistic and legal interpretation. The objective of this approach is to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of how political speech is understood across demographic, legal, and linguistic contexts. The combination of survey data, forensic linguistic analysis, and discourse interpretation allows for a balanced and objective assessment of whether the MP's utterance qualifies as a verbal threat or reflects political misinterpretation. This chapter outlines the research design, population and sampling procedures, data collection techniques, methods of analysis, and the ethical considerations observed throughout the study.

Research Design

The research design combines structured survey analysis with forensic linguistic discourse evaluation.

Quantitatively, the study relied on a survey administered to 140 participants to explore interpretations of the MP's phrase according to variables such as age, gender, education, and political affiliation. The intention was to detect perceptual patterns and assess whether bias related to political stance plays a role in determining how the statement is interpreted. The qualitative component involved applying speech act theory and legal threat assessment frameworks to analyze the intent, tone, and context of the MP's words. In addition, thematic analysis was applied to open-ended survey responses to explore the reasoning behind participants' views. Desk research supplemented these findings through a review of relevant literature, legal texts, and case law to contextualize the study within established academic and legal discourse.

Target Population and Sampling

The study targeted individuals with varying perspectives on political speech, freedom of expression, and legal interpretation, focusing primarily on Zambian citizens and professionals in law, linguistics, and political science. To ensure balanced representation, a stratified random sampling method was used, enabling categorization based on age, gender, education, and political affiliation. This approach aimed to reduce bias and enhance the reliability and generalizability of the findings. The chosen sample size of 140 respondents was deemed sufficient to allow for both statistical analysis and manageable qualitative interpretation, thereby supporting the mixed-methods design.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Survey Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was developed to assess how respondents interpreted the phrase “Who are you to take photos of me?” Participants were asked to consider the phrase in different hypothetical contexts, with responses measured using both closed and open-ended items. Key sections of the questionnaire captured demographic information, scenario-based interpretation shifts, Likert scale ratings for perceived threat levels, and legal understanding of what constitutes a verbal threat. The inclusion of open-ended questions allowed for the collection of subjective explanations, offering insight into the personal logic and emotional underpinnings of participants’ interpretations. The survey was conducted both online and in person to ensure inclusivity and accessibility across different regions and backgrounds.

Forensic Linguistic Analysis

To evaluate whether the MP’s words constituted a verbal threat under legal standards, forensic linguistic techniques were applied. Guided by Austin’s and Searle’s speech act theories, the phrase was analyzed to determine whether it functioned as a question, command, or implicit threat, with particular focus on its illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect. Further, the criteria provided by Solan and Tiersma were used to assess the credibility, specificity, and context-based realism of any implied threat. The broader political and social context was also considered through discourse analysis, which accounted for power relations between the speaker and listener, the public nature of the interaction, and the historical use of similar laws in Zambia and internationally.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data obtained from the survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics to outline general trends in interpretation. Chi-square tests were applied to evaluate the relationship between demographic variables and perception of threat, while correlation analysis was used to explore the influence of political alignment on interpretation. On the qualitative side, thematic coding was used to extract recurring patterns from participants’ open-ended responses. Discourse analysis allowed for a deeper understanding of how political identity and emotional tone shaped interpretations. Finally, a legal comparison was conducted to determine whether the MP’s words aligned with domestic and international legal thresholds for prosecutable speech.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical guidelines, ensuring that all participants gave informed consent and were made fully aware of the purpose and nature of the research before participation. Confidentiality was maintained by excluding any identifying information, and respondents were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. The questionnaire and data analysis were designed to maintain neutrality and avoid political bias. In addition, the study was conducted in alignment with international research ethics and Zambia’s data protection laws, ensuring legal compliance and academic integrity throughout the process.

Research Limitations

While the study applied rigorous methodology, several limitations were acknowledged. Interpretation of speech is inherently subjective, and individuals may perceive the same phrase differently based on their experiences or biases. Given the political nature of the topic, some respondents may have been reluctant to express their views honestly. Furthermore, the sample size, though diverse, may not fully capture the complexity of national opinion. Lastly, the absence of official court transcripts required reliance on secondary sources, which may limit the precision of legal contextualization. Nevertheless, the use of triangulated methods provides sufficient reliability and depth to support the findings.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a multidisciplinary methodological framework combining legal, linguistic, and

empirical tools to assess the interpretation of political speech. The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods ensures that both public perception and legal standards are evaluated with scholarly and procedural rigor. This approach positions the study to contribute meaningful insight into whether the MP's statement constitutes a legal threat or exemplifies the politicization of free speech.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents the study's core findings, analyzing the statement by the Member of Parliament (MP), "Who are you to take photos of me?" from legal, linguistic, political, and public perspectives. Using an interdisciplinary framework, the analysis draws from forensic linguistics, legal interpretation, dictionary definitions, public opinion, and political discourse theory to assess whether the MP's words qualify as a criminal verbal threat or reflect an emotionally charged reaction in a political context.

The chapter evaluates public perception and political affiliation in speech interpretation, applies legal and linguistic standards to the statement, analyzes relevant case law, and explores broader implications of speech criminalization in politically sensitive environments. Through this multi-dimensional approach, the chapter advances the debate on selective enforcement of speech laws and the role of forensic linguistics in speech-related prosecutions.

Public Perception of the MP's Statement

Survey Findings on Speech Interpretation

The survey conducted among 140 participants from varied professional backgrounds aimed to assess how people perceived the MP's statement. Respondents were asked to categorize the phrase as either an expression of frustration, intimidation, an indirect threat, or uncertain. A majority, 78%, interpreted it as an expression of frustration. Only 12% perceived it as intimidation, 7% viewed it as an indirect threat, and 3% remained undecided. These results indicate a general consensus that the MP's words lacked the aggressive or directive force typically associated with criminal threats.

DISCUSSION: PUBLIC PERCEPTION VS. LEGAL INTERPRETATION

The findings suggest that most people viewed the statement as a non-threatening emotional outburst. This aligns with forensic linguistic principles, which emphasize intent and contextual delivery over listener discomfort. Legal precedent from *Elonis v. United States* (2015) supports this view, establishing that a threat must be judged based on the speaker's intent, not the listener's perception alone.

Political Affiliation and Speech Interpretation

The influence of political alignment on interpretation was evident. Among opposition supporters, 88% saw the MP's words as frustration, while only 5% considered them a threat. In contrast, 30% of government supporters labeled the statement as a threat. Neutral respondents were more balanced, with 70% perceiving frustration and 10% perceiving threat. These discrepancies reflect how ideological bias shapes interpretation, a phenomenon supported by Fairclough's political discourse theory, which posits that language is often interpreted through partisan lenses.

Summary of Public Perception Findings

Overall, the public largely did not perceive the MP's words as threatening. The survey reveals that perceptions were significantly influenced by political affiliation, with government supporters more likely to interpret the statement as a threat. These findings support the argument that legal responses to political speech may be ideologically driven rather than based on objective linguistic or legal standards.

Legal and Forensic Linguistic Analysis of the MP's Statement

Legal Assessment: Does the Statement Qualify as a Threat?

Legal standards for a criminal threat require explicit intent to cause harm, credible and specific language, and evidence that a reasonable person would interpret the words as a threat. The MP's statement fails to meet these criteria. It does not contain any indication of future harm, and its rhetorical structure suggests emotional expression rather than an intent to coerce or intimidate.

Discussion of Legal Precedents

This assessment is consistent with decisions such as *Elonis v. United States* (2015), where the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that intent must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Similarly, in *Katsvara v. The State* (2021), the Namibian High Court determined that rhetorical or frustrated speech does not constitute a threat unless it contains clear and coercive intent. These precedents reinforce the argument that the MP's statement falls outside the legal definition of a criminal threat.

Forensic Linguistic Analysis

Using speech act theory, the MP's statement was examined at three levels: locutionary (literal content), illocutionary (intended function), and perlocutionary (effect on listener). The statement does not exhibit the illocutionary force associated with threats and instead functions as a rhetorical question. Research by Gales (2011) and Coulthard & Johnson (2010) supports the view that frustration, even when vocally expressed, is not equivalent to a threat unless coercion is evident.

Further, when analyzing the statement through the lens of frustrated speech versus threat-based speech, it became clear that the MP's words lacked the specificity and premeditated structure that define legally actionable threats. Linguistically, her expression aligns more closely with exasperation than intimidation.

Contextual and Discourse Analysis

The broader political context is essential. The MP had just been suspended from Parliament, and the incident occurred in a highly charged emotional moment. According to Fairclough's theory of discourse, context—including speaker identity, power dynamics, and political pressure—plays a critical role in interpretation. These situational elements further suggest that the MP's words were reactive, not premeditated. Comparative analysis with cases such as *Katsvara v. The State* further confirms that such expressions should not be criminalized in the absence of direct and intentional threat.

Judicial Precedents on Speech Threats

Case law continues to demonstrate that criminal liability for speech requires more than listener discomfort. In *Elonis*, *Katsvara*, and *Zimbabwe v. Opposition MPs* (2019), courts ruled that political rhetoric or emotionally charged expressions lacking specific threats cannot meet the threshold of criminal speech. These rulings underscore that the MP's prosecution lacked sufficient legal grounding and may reflect a politically motivated response rather than a legitimate legal proceeding.

Summary of Legal and Linguistic Analysis

Both legal and linguistic standards confirm that the MP's words do not constitute a criminal threat. The lack of explicit intent, coercive language, and credible threat elements—combined with the emotional and political context—support the conclusion that her statement was mischaracterized in its legal treatment. This analysis reinforces the view that political bias played a role in the interpretation and prosecution of the speech.

Comparative Dictionary Analysis of a Threat

Introduction

To further assess whether the MP's statement meets the ordinary definition of a threat, a comparative analysis

of multiple dictionary definitions was conducted. This approach establishes a linguistic baseline for what constitutes a "threat" in general English usage, which can then be contrasted with the actual phrasing used by the MP.

Dictionary Definitions and Application

The word *threat* is generally defined across standard English dictionaries as “a declaration of intent to inflict harm or punishment” (Oxford), or “an expression that implies negative consequences or danger to the recipient” (Cambridge). Merriam-Webster describes it as “an indication of something impending, typically harm, danger, or punishment.”

Applying these definitions to the MP’s statement—“Who are you to take photos of me?”—reveals an absence of declarative intent to harm or impose consequences. The phrase is framed as a rhetorical question rather than a conditional or imperative statement. It lacks the fundamental linguistic features of a threat: no future-oriented harm, no stated consequence, and no explicit or implicit declaration of action.

Thus, even when judged against general language standards found in leading dictionaries, the MP’s statement does not satisfy the basic semantic criteria for a threat. It aligns more closely with expressions of shock or resistance, not intimidation or coercion.

Table 4.6: Dictionary Definitions of a Threat

Source	Definition of Threat
Oxford Dictionary	A declaration of intent to inflict harm or punishment.
Cambridge Dictionary	An expression that implies negative consequences or danger to the recipient.
Merriam-Webster	An indication of something impending, typically harm, danger, or punishment.
Collins Dictionary	A statement in which someone says they will cause harm or trouble.
Longman Dictionary	A warning that one may be hurt or punished.

Interpretation:

The MP’s statement, “*Who are you to take photos of me?*”, does not meet the criteria defined by any of these sources. It lacks a declaration of harm, implied consequence, or threatening tone. Therefore, it aligns more with emotional expression than legal or linguistic threat.

Legal and Political Implications of Speech Criminalization

The broader implications of this study revolve around the potential for speech laws to be misapplied in politically charged contexts. The selective prosecution of opposition figures for statements that would otherwise be considered emotionally charged but legally non-threatening speech raises serious questions about judicial independence, political bias, and freedom of expression in democratic societies.

The findings demonstrate how vague or broadly worded laws—such as those governing defamation, sedition, or public order offenses—can be used to silence dissenting voices. When such laws are applied inconsistently or discriminatorily, they undermine both the rule of law and democratic discourse.

This study also suggests that forensic linguistics can serve as a powerful tool in preventing misuse of legal speech classifications. By providing objective analysis based on linguistic principles and legal thresholds, forensic experts can assist courts in distinguishing between true threats and rhetorical speech. The integration of linguistic expertise into legal procedures thus promotes fairness, protects freedom of speech, and ensures that prosecutions are grounded in credible evidence rather than political expediency.

Furthermore, the results reflect on the need for clearer legal frameworks that differentiate between offensive,

emotional, and threatening speech, particularly in politically sensitive environments. Without this clarity, the risk of arbitrary or politicized enforcement remains high.

Table 4.7: Summary of Legal and Political Implications

Aspect	Implication
Selective Enforcement	Speech laws are inconsistently applied, especially toward opposition figures.
Judicial Independence	Politically motivated prosecutions may erode trust in the legal system.
Forensic Linguistics	Offers objective analysis to distinguish rhetorical speech from true threats.
Legal Framework Clarity	Demonstrates the need for clearer legal language on threats and speech acts.
Freedom of Expression	Over-criminalization risks suppressing dissent and weakening democratic debate.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the MP’s statement through public opinion, legal precedent, forensic linguistic theory, and comparative dictionary analysis. The evidence overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that the statement does not meet the threshold for a criminal verbal threat.

From a public perception standpoint, the majority of respondents viewed the words as an expression of frustration, not intimidation. Forensic linguistic analysis confirmed that the statement lacks the illocutionary force and specificity required for a threat. Legal precedents both regionally and internationally confirm that intent—not perception—is key in establishing threat-based liability.

The political context surrounding the MP’s arrest raises concerns about selective enforcement and legal misuse. When political figures are prosecuted not on the strength of their language, but on the basis of ideological opposition, the foundational principles of justice are undermined.

In sum, the MP’s words were emotionally charged but non-threatening. The findings call for more rigorous standards in speech-related prosecutions, greater incorporation of linguistic expertise in legal settings, and reforms to speech legislation to ensure that free expression is preserved—even in politically contentious moments.

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