



Charismatic Authority: Gender and the Architecture of Social Power Across Cultures

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Abstract

Charisma is the aptitude to project a vision and an attitude through a calibrated interplay of language, bearing and public presence such that a distinctive connection arises between a person and those who perceive and acknowledge that person as charismatic. It is neither innate nor private, but a relational dynamic in which verbal choices, posture, warmth, power and the broader framing of presence converge to generate recognition, legitimacy and a willingness to follow. Conventionally associated with high power, high warmth and the interplay of ethos, pathos and logos, charismatic authority is still interpreted through gender-coded and culturally narrow assumptions. Popular beliefs often align charismatic conduct with masculine traits and occidental models of leadership, obscuring the structural biases and cultural templates that shape its attribution. This study treats charisma as an acquired, context-specific construct, tracing how its signals are expressed, perceived and validated across distinct cultural settings. By examining the verbal cues, delivery patterns and culturally anchored modes of presence that guide this reciprocal process, the research identifies the mechanisms through which charismatic legitimacy is extended or withheld, particularly for women negotiating pre-inscribed social roles. The project ultimately demonstrates how charisma is produced at the intersection of gender norms, cultural expectations and social structure, and how these intersections shape its recognition across societies.

Keywords: cross-cultural analysis, discourse, leadership, legitimacy, social structure

1. Introduction

Charismatic authority is frequently described as a leader trait. Yet charisma is better understood as a relational, mediated accomplishment: it is performed through discourse and embodied conduct, interpreted through culturally available expectations, and sustained only when audiences publicly recognise the speaker as legitimate to define reality and collective futures.

This paper develops and applies the concept of Adaptive Charismatic Authority (ACA): the situational calibration of legitimacy claims across audiences, arenas, and media infrastructures. ACA treats charisma as an adaptive fit between (i) a leader's performed persona, (ii) culturally patterned expectations of legitimate authority, and (iii) the infrastructures of circulation that determine what becomes visible, repeatable, and politically consequential.

Two dynamics motivate the analysis. First, legitimacy is increasingly performed in hybrid media systems, where political address is shaped by broadcast framing, platform circulation, and 'clipability' (Chadwick, 2013, Papacharissi, 2014). Second, charisma is gendered. Leadership prototypes remain widely masculinised, producing a double bind in which women leaders must perform competence without being sanctioned as aggressive, and warmth without being read as weak (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Empirically, the paper juxtaposes two sets of cases to foreground cross-cultural adaptation. The first set analyses four high-stakes speeches in sub-Saharan Africa: Captain Ibrahim Traoré's Russia-Africa Summit address (28 July 2023) and New Year national message (31 December 2023), and President Samia Suluhu Hassan's UN General Assembly statement (23 September 2021) and her address to Dar es Salaam elders after the October 2025 protest (2 December 2025) (Présidence du Faso, 2023a, 2023b, United Republic of Tanzania, 2021, The Chanzo, 2025). The second set contrasts Bill Clinton and Hillary Rodham Clinton as they addressed audiences in China and the Middle East, focusing on how each recalibrated authority claims in settings marked by diplomatic protocol, transnational media attention, and culturally specific expectations of leadership (H. R. Clinton, 1995, 2010, W. J. Clinton, 1998, The White House, 1998a, 1998b).

The contribution is twofold. Theoretically, the paper refines Weberian charisma as a recognition field embedded in structured relations of symbolic power (Weber, 1978, Bourdieu, 1991). Methodologically, it operationalises ACA through a three-layer model-performance, reception, and mediation-that enables comparative analysis of how charisma is assembled, evaluated, and made legible across cultures.

Methodologically, the paper is aligned with practical discourse analysis in which discourse is treated as social action and analytic claims are grounded in demonstrable interactional evidence rather than inferred leader traits (Jenks, 2011, 2025). This orientation supports close attention to how authority is accomplished in talk, audience uptake, and the multimodal organisation of public events.

1.1 Charisma Scholarship, Culture, and Mediation

In leadership research, charisma has been treated either as a dispositional capacity that differentiates powerful leaders or as an attribution that followers confer when leader behaviour appears extraordinary. Behavioural and attributional models have specified observable charismatic leadership tactics and their effects on follower motivation (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), while experimental and field work has demonstrated that elements of charismatic communication can be trained and produce measurable changes in leader outcomes (Antonakis et al., 2011). These approaches provide indispensable micro-foundations, but they often under-specify the macro-conditions under which the same tactic becomes credible, costly, or counterproductive. A further implication is that the unit of analysis cannot be presumed to be the heroic individual, leadership scholarship has shown that authority and coordination are often distributed across roles and interactional chains (Gronn, 2002).

Cross-cultural scholarship further complicates any universalistic account. The GLOBE program shows that leadership prototypes and legitimacy expectations vary systematically across societies, including the balance between participative, autonomous, humane-oriented,

and self-protective leadership ideals (House et al., 2004). Yet cultural variation does not merely shift preferences, it alters the interpretive frames through which audiences read authority claims, especially when performances are staged for transnational publics and circulate across linguistic and media boundaries.

Gendered evaluation regimes further structure charisma attribution. Role congruity research shows that leadership prototypes are often masculinised, producing penalties when women enact agentic authority cues or when they display warmth in ways read as insufficiently leader-like (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Performativity scholarship emphasises that gender is enacted and repeatedly policed, so the same rhetorical or embodied tactic can be sanctioned differently depending on who performs it and in which setting (Butler, 1990). Intersectional critique adds that these sanctions are uneven across race, class, nationality, and institutional location, shaping whose authority can be recognised as legitimate in the first place (Crenshaw, 1989).

Finally, charisma is increasingly mediated in hybrid systems where broadcast conventions, platform logics, and excerptability condition what is seen, repeated, and remembered (Chadwick, 2013, Papacharissi, 2014). Mediatization research emphasises that political actors adapt communicative style to media formats as media become central arenas of politics, not merely downstream channels (Strömbäck, 2008). Framing scholarship further shows that what circulates is not the speech as a whole but selectively foregrounded problem definitions, causal attributions, and moral evaluations (Entman, 1993). These literatures motivate treating mediation as constitutive of charismatic authority: charisma is formatted, selected, and stabilised through circulation, not simply amplified by it.

1.2 What Adaptive Charismatic Authority Adds

Adaptive Charismatic Authority (ACA) is proposed as a comparative lens for explaining why charisma can be legible and persuasive in one arena yet misfire in another. It is not offered as a replacement for behavioural and attributional models of charismatic leadership, rather, it integrates them into a relational account of legitimation under cultural and mediated constraint (Conger & Kanungo, 1987, Antonakis et al., 2011). ACA's value-added is fourfold. First, it shifts the unit of analysis from the leader to the leader–audience–media relation, preserving behavioural detail while foregrounding the conditions of felicity that make authority claims socially efficacious (Bourdieu, 1991) and recognising that leadership is often distributed across roles and interactional chains rather than located in a single heroic individual (Gronn, 2002).

Second, it specifies adaptation as the mechanism: leaders recalibrate relational positioning, moral boundary work, institutional anchoring, and affective style in response to shifting legitimacy expectations across cultures and arenas (House et al., 2004). Third, it treats gender and intersectionality as evaluation regimes rather than demographic variables, aligned with performativity accounts of how norms are enacted and sanctioned (Butler, 1990) and with intersectional critique of uneven recognition (Crenshaw, 1989, Eagly & Karau, 2002). Fourth, it complements political style and hybrid media system approaches by modelling reception and circulation as co-producing charisma, not merely transmitting it (Chadwick, 2013, Moffitt, 2016, Papacharissi, 2014).

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 Design

The study uses a qualitative comparative design with a multimodal discourse-analytic core. Rather than treating charisma as a psychological profile, cases are treated as situated performances in which authority is produced under distinct constraints (institutional arena,

audience composition, gender norms, and media ecology). The design is theory-building through contrast: it specifies observable indicators of charismatic legitimation and compares how they are calibrated across contexts.

Case selection follows a most-different systems logic: episodes were chosen to maximize contrast on arena (domestic governance vs multilateral diplomacy), media ecology (state-managed broadcast vs transnational news and platform circulation), and gendered legitimacy scripts, while holding constant the core analytic problem of charismatic legitimation under high salience. This design supports theory-building by showing which ACA dimensions remain robust across settings and which are contingent on local legitimacy infrastructures.

Selection criteria were: (a) a bounded episode of public address with an identifiable venue and audience, (b) access to an audiovisual recording and/or a verbatim transcript sufficient for discourse-analytic inspection, (c) high salience and clear legitimacy stakes (e.g., crisis governance or multilateral diplomacy), (d) potential for cross-cultural interpretation, either because the address was delivered to a transnational audience or because it was likely to circulate beyond the immediate setting, and (e) variation in leader gender to examine differential sanctioning of comparable authority cues. Episodes were excluded when only heavily edited media summaries were available or when translation quality could not be plausibly audited.

To mitigate selection on dramatic outcomes, each leader is represented by more than one episode and by both domestic and international settings where possible. The goal is not statistical representativeness but analytic generalization: specifying mechanisms that can be tested on larger corpora.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The analysis integrates Weber's theory of charismatic domination with Bourdieu's account of symbolic power. In Weber's formulation, charismatic authority depends on devotion to the exemplary character of an individual and must be recognised by followers to become legitimate (Weber, 1978). Bourdieu clarifies that recognition depends on 'conditions of felicity': structured relations that make some performances of authority socially effective and others implausible or costly (Bourdieu, 1991). This motivates the term architecture of social power: institutions, cultural repertoires, and media infrastructures that shape which authority performances are legible.

2.3 Adaptive Charismatic Authority

ACA is defined as the situational calibration of charismatic legitimacy claims across shifting audiences and mediated arenas, achieved through strategic alignment of identity, moral boundary work, and institutional credibility within gendered and cultural architectures of social power. ACA is operationalised through a three-layer lens: (1) Performance (discourse and embodied conduct), (2) Reception (visible ratification or contestation), and (3) Mediation (how performances travel through media infrastructures).

Table 1. ACA analytic matrix

ACA dimension	Performance indicators	Reception indicators	Mediation indicators
Relational positioning	Kinship (family/sibling), comradeship, elder–youth hierarchy, inclusive ‘we’ construction.	Applause/laughter at relational moments, reaffirmation of unity, alignment displays in Q&A.	Repeatability of relational hooks in headlines/clips, platform-friendly soundbites.
Moral boundary work	Naming enemies and threats, interference/sovereignty distinctions, peace/violence categorisations.	Moral outrage cues, endorsement of boundaries, contestation or reframing by interlocutors.	Compatibility with dominant international narratives, amplification or suppression by media frames.
Institutional anchoring	Invocation of constitution, UN norms, national tradition, or military duty, role-based footing.	Perceived ‘state voice’ versus ‘personal voice’, credibility cues tied to office and venue.	Authority boosted or contested by institutional platforms (summit, UN, press conference).
Affective–political style	Indignation, empathy, grief, pride, controlled affect, humour and self-deprecation.	Emotional uptake moments, synchronised applause, approval cues in audience response.	Amplification through emotive fragments, ‘clipability’ and memetic spread.
Arena adaptation	Register shifts between domestic governance and international diplomacy, technical versus moralised language.	Differences in approval cues across settings, changes in interaction formats (speech vs Q&A).	Differences in circulation pathways (state media, international press, social platforms).

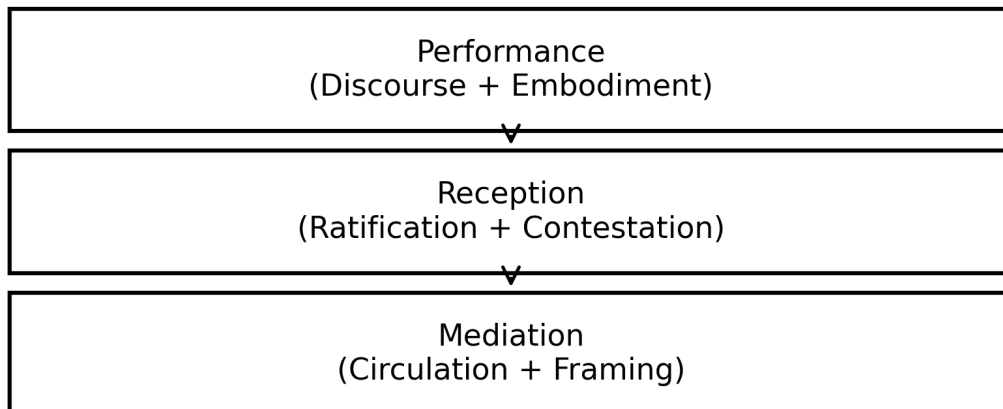


Figure 1. Three-layer model of Adaptive Charismatic Authority (Performance, Reception, Mediation).

2.4 Corpus

The primary corpus comprises eight publicly available episodes selected for high salience and arena contrast. Materials were analysed in the language of the available transcript: Traoré’s addresses were analysed in French (with meaning-preserving English translations provided for reported excerpts), while the remaining cases were analysed using available English transcripts. Africa cases: Traoré’s Russia-Africa Summit speech (28 July 2023) and New Year national address (31 December 2023), and Hassan’s UN General Assembly statement (23 September

2021) and her address to Dar es Salaam elders (2 December 2025). Clinton cases: Hillary Rodham Clinton's address to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (5 September 1995), Secretary Clinton's remarks at the U.S.-Islamic World Forum in Doha (14 February 2010), President Bill Clinton's question-and-answer session with students at Beijing University (29 June 1998), and President Clinton's remarks in a Shanghai radio call-in programme (30 June 1998). To ensure balance between China and the Middle East, the Clinton corpus is supplemented with President Clinton's address to the Palestinian National Council in Gaza City (14 December 1998) as a focal Middle East episode.

2.5 Analytic Procedure

Each episode was segmented into opening, diagnosis, responsibility attributions, programmatic commitments, and closing. Episodes were coded using the ACA matrix (Table 1), focusing on relational positioning, moral boundary work, institutional anchoring, affective-political style, and arena adaptation. Reception was inferred from observable uptake cues (e.g., applause, laughter, nodding, formal endorsement) and from the interactional organization of Q&A formats when available. Mediation was analyzed through staging conventions, address formats, and the external gaze (e.g., diplomatic audiences, international press, and platform circulation).

An ACA codebook specified operational indicators for each dimension (Table 1) and was iteratively refined in two pilot rounds. Coding was conducted at the segment level, with analytic memos documenting boundary decisions, ambiguous cases, and rationale for dimensional assignments. An audit trail was maintained by preserving (a) segmented transcripts with time stamps where available, (b) coding sheets, (c) memo logs, and (d) versioned revisions of the codebook, enabling external inspection of how analytic claims were derived from the data.

To strengthen coding dependability, a second coder independently coded a stratified subset of segments spanning all arenas and ACA dimensions using the current codebook. Disagreements were logged in a decision register, discussed with reference to the operational definitions, and resolved through rule refinement rather than ad hoc reconciliation. Revised rules were then retroactively applied to earlier coded segments to ensure internal consistency. Because ACA coding is interpretive and multi-dimensional, the emphasis is on transparent decision rules and traceable analytic steps rather than treating codes as interchangeable units.

2.6 Transcription and Representation

Where audiovisual recordings were available, extracts were analyzed with attention to timing, emphasis, overlap, and audience response, and were supplemented with notes on gesture, gaze and staging, consistent with multimodal discourse frameworks (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Transcription decisions were treated as analytic choices, following work on the representation of interactional data and the need for transparent conventions (Jenks, 2011, see also Jenks, 2020). Consistent with a practical discourse-analytic stance, the analysis prioritised procedures that make claims inspectable in the data, rather than relying on abstract trait attributions (Jenks, 2025).

For non-English materials (notably Traoré's French-language addresses), transcripts were checked against official institutional releases when available. Analytic excerpts were translated into English using a meaning-preserving approach that prioritises pragmatic force (stance, modality, address terms) over literal equivalence. Translation decisions (including alternative renderings of idioms and culturally specific terms) were logged in the audit trail, and reported excerpts are presented with the original-language segment followed by an English translation to make interpretive claims inspectable.

2.7 Ethics

All materials are publicly available speeches or published transcripts, no private human-subjects data were collected. The analysis is constrained by the partial visibility of reception (especially across language communities and media systems) and therefore limits claims to what is demonstrable in the texts and in publicly documented uptake.

2.8 Scope, Limitations, and Generalisability

The analysis is deliberately centred on high-salience political performances. This increases analytic leverage on legitimacy work under pressure, but it introduces salience bias: crisis contexts can amplify moral boundary work, compress the stylistic range available to speakers, and increase the probability that isolated fragments are circulated as emblematic. Findings should therefore be interpreted as mechanism claims about how ACA operates under heightened visibility, not as population-level estimates of charisma or as assessments of stable leader traits.

Temporal proximity is another constraint. The inclusion of 2025 episodes strengthens contemporary relevance but risks importing the interpretive frames of ongoing political contestation and the availability biases of recent digital archives. To mitigate this, the analysis triangulates 2025 claims with earlier episodes and prioritises demonstrable discourse evidence (quotations, interactional uptake cues, and documented circulation) over retrospective evaluation. Moreover, reception is only partially observable: applause, interactional formats, and publicly documented reactions are visible, while private audience evaluations and algorithmic reach are opaque. Generalisability is therefore analytic rather than statistical: ACA is expected to travel to comparable settings where a public performance is recorded, audiences can ratify or contest in observable ways, and media infrastructures shape circulation, it should not be treated as a universal model of leadership across all political communication contexts.

3 Results

3.1 Burkina Faso: Revolutionary-sovereigntist Charisma

Traoré's Russia-Africa Summit address assembles authority through revolutionary sovereignty and intergenerational truth-telling. The speech constructs a collective 'we' via comradeship and kinship registers, authorising blunt critique as loyalty to African dignity rather than diplomatic impropriety (Présidence du Faso, 2023a). Moral boundary work is explicit: dependency narratives are rejected, external interference is named, and the legitimacy of some African elites is contested through images of puppetry and betrayal. The performance is also structured for mediation through short oppositional contrasts that condense a sovereignty ethos into portable fragments.

Excerpt 1 (Présidence du Faso, 2023a): "L'esclavage qui n'est pas capable d'assumer sa révolte ne mérite pas que l'on s'apitoie sur son sort." [Translation: A people who cannot assume its revolt does not deserve pity.]

In the New Year address, the stance shifts from international confrontation to domestic consolidation (Présidence du Faso, 2023b). The nation is addressed as an organised collective under threat, and charismatic language of liberation is combined with programmatic commitments (security reorganisation, self-sufficiency, anti-corruption, and cultural restoration). Sacrifice and mourning are mobilised as legitimacy resources, converting loss into moral entitlement and authorising renewed unity demands.

3.2 Tanzania: Institutional-caretaker Charisma

Excerpt 2 (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021): "As this is my maiden speech at the United Nations General Assembly..."

Hassan's UN General Assembly statement performs authority through protocol, policy competence, and normative alignment with multilateral governance (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021). Rather than revolutionary rupture, legitimacy is built through continuity and credibility: Tanzania is positioned as a responsible partner, and institutional language functions as symbolic capital.

Gender is negotiated explicitly. Hassan frames her role as a responsibility shaped by heightened scrutiny, converting representation into obligation and presenting competence as service rather than domination. In her domestic address to Dar es Salaam elders, she recalibrates legitimacy through kinship and guardianship: elders are treated as moral authorities to whom she shows humility while also claiming the right to instruct and to justify coercion in defence of national peace (The Chanzo, 2025). The speech explicitly references circulated clips and scripted slogans, positioning mediation itself as part of the crisis and framing Dar es Salaam as a national front stage under international gaze.

Excerpt 3 (The Chanzo, 2025): "If you look at some previous clips, you will see that our youth were turned into parrots and made to chant."

3.3 Bill Clinton: Horizontal Charisma in Eastern Arenas

Bill Clinton's charisma is organised around a horizontal repertoire: conversational proximity, empathic listening, and 'explainer' talk that reduces symbolic distance. In his question-and-answer session with students at Beijing University (29 June 1998), he combines respect for China's civilisational history with a willingness to engage disagreement, using humour, inclusive pronouns, and narrative framing to position dialogue as a shared project (W. J. Clinton, 1998). The Q&A format functions as a reception technology because it publicly displays listening and responsiveness as legitimacy cues. He constructs legitimacy through proximity and epistemic humility, explicitly positioning himself as a listener and learner. He frames freedom as relational-requiring respect for the freedom of others-and repeatedly manages cultural difference through a vocabulary of mutual understanding rather than civilisational confrontation. The performance layer is characterised by inclusive pronouns ("we"), conversational pacing, and audience-directed recognition. The transcript records applause at points where he aligns moral principles with respect rather than coercion, suggesting that the performance is designed to invite ratification without humiliating the host

In a call-in program on Shanghai Radio (30 June 1998), Clinton again performs accessibility by taking questions from ordinary callers and responding with policy explanation and reassurance (The White House, 1998a). Here ACA is visible in the calibration of informality to a mediated venue: the performance is designed for broadcast, with short answer-units and relational greetings that travel well across audio media specifically.

Excerpt 4 (The White House, 1998a): "We want enough freedom in the classroom so that the children have the confidence they need to participate."

In Gaza (14 December 1998), Clinton's address to Palestinians and to the Palestinian National Council performs legitimacy through acknowledgement and moral accompaniment rather than denunciation (The White House, 1998b). He foregrounds listening and recognition of suffering, then frames compromise and institutional change as collective dignity. Across China and the Middle East, Clinton's ACA relies on the same interactional solution-reducing distance-while

adapting its surface form to local protocol and to the expectations of state-managed and international media.

In the Middle East case, the Rabin funeral address illustrates a distinct but related adaptation: intimacy is not achieved through humour but through solemn relationality and symbolic alignment. Clinton positions himself as a mourning partner and peace-process participant, not an external commentator, and uses a brief Hebrew closing (“shalom, chaver”) to perform proximity to Israeli public grief while signalling respect for local linguistic and cultural forms (W. J. Clinton, 1995). Here, the performance layer shifts toward controlled affect and commemorative authority, while retaining the horizontal logic of relational bonding-now anchored in shared loss and shared commitment to peace.

Across settings, Clinton’s reception is shaped by institutional mediation: Chinese venues are tightly staged and broadcast, which privileges disciplined civility and quotable moral generalities, Middle East commemorative settings privilege solemnity and symbolic gesture. In both cases, the “clipability” of short, relational formulations (e.g., the Hebrew closing) becomes a mediation advantage, enabling the performance to travel beyond the immediate audience.

Finally, Bill Clinton’s MasterClass lesson on inclusive leadership provides a rare instance of reflexive articulation of charismatic practice by a high-profile political actor (Clinton, 2021). Rather than naturalizing charisma as an innate gift, Clinton frames it as a trainable competence built through repetition, narrative refinement, and audience-calibrated delivery. This self-description aligns with ACA’s claim that authority emerges from situational fit between performed persona, legitimacy expectations, and the infrastructures that make performances visible and repeatable. It also supports discourse-analytic approaches that treat public address as multimodal action, where voice, gaze, pacing, and bodily stance are part of the evidence for how authority is accomplished (Jenks, 2011, 2025).

3.4 Hillary Rodham Clinton: Hybrid Charisma and Gendered Authority in Eastern Arenas

Hillary Rodham Clinton’s authority performances are more consistently hybrid: they blend competence and controlled institutional footing with strategic warmth, frequently under intensified gendered evaluation. In her address to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (5 September 1995), she anchors legitimacy in institutional authority and builds a moral argument that links rights to everyday harms (H. R. Clinton, 1995). The speech demonstrates ACA through calibration: universal claims are framed as non-negotiable while still recognising cultural specificity, and the speaker’s moral stance is balanced with a constructive, coalition-building address to a heterogeneous international audience.

Excerpt 5 (H. R. Clinton, 1995): "Women's rights are human rights."

The mediation layer is particularly salient. The speech’s rhetorical parallelism and quotability enabled extensive transnational circulation, making the performance charismatic beyond the immediate venue through repetition, citation, and institutional endorsement. In ACA terms, mediation does not merely transmit charisma, it co-produces it by selecting fragments that become emblematic and by stabilising interpretive frames around them.

As Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton’s remarks at the U.S.-Islamic World Forum in Doha (14 February 2010) illustrate adaptation to Middle Eastern diplomatic and media contexts (H. R. Clinton, 2010). She combines policy competence (partnership framing, development and governance vocabulary) with selective affective cues (recognition, humility, and invitation). Gender operates as an evaluation regime in the background: institutional anchoring and

controlled affect reduce the risk that assertiveness will be read as illegitimate dominance, while still clearly delineating moral limits concerning extremism, political violence, and human rights.

However, in Egypt (Cairo and Alexandria) in July 2012, Hillary Clinton’s performance attempts to combine partnership language with normative claims about democratic transition. Yet the reception layer becomes visibly contested: video clips documented protests and symbolic acts of disrespect, namely tomatoes and shoes directed at the visiting delegation, reflecting suspicions of foreign interference and frustration with US policy positions (Reuters, 2012). The episode illustrates a core ACA point: charisma is not only performed, it is granted or withheld within locally rooted ideas of fairness, obligation, reciprocity, and legitimacy that may interpret identical signals—support for “democratic transition”, for example—as either solidarity or manipulation.

Gender also shapes reception costs. Although the protest drivers are geopolitical, public derision and individuated humiliation directed at a woman diplomat can intensify the interactional difficulty of sustaining authority in adversarial settings. In mediated contexts, coverage may foreground tone, appearance, and demeanour, which can reframe substantive claims as personal style and amplify double-bind pressures on women leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002, Papacharissi, 2014).

Hillary Clinton’s adaptive response is primarily institutional: she continues to speak from the authority of office, emphasising process, partnership and stability, rather than escalating affect or adopting a confrontational populist style that could be penalised as inappropriate.

3.5 Comparative Synthesis: Adaptation, Gender, and Cultural Expectation Systems

Across cases, ACA appears as strategic recalibration rather than as a stable quantity of charisma. Traoré’s repertoire foregrounds revolutionary sovereignty and elite denunciation, Hassan’s foregrounds institutional credibility, unity, and constitutional guardianship. Bill Clinton’s repertoire foregrounds conversational proximity as legitimacy, Hillary Clinton’s foregrounds competence and controlled moral clarity combined with strategic warmth.

China and the Middle East highlight how diplomatic protocol, state and international media, and transnational audiences shape the conditions of felicity for charismatic performance. The same ‘charisma cue’ can carry different costs across contexts: informality can signal authenticity or disrespect, moral certainty can signal leadership or coercion. Gender intersects with these constraints by shaping which authority scripts are socially available and which invite sanction, a pattern visible in Hassan’s gender-explicit negotiation of legitimacy and in Hillary Clinton’s reliance on institutional anchoring to stabilise authority claims in cross-cultural arenas.

Table 2. *Bill Clinton vs Hillary Rodham Clinton in Eastern arenas (China and the Middle East) through the ACA lens*

ACA layer	Bill Clinton	Hillary Rodham Clinton
Performance	Horizontal charisma: conversational pacing, self-deprecating humour, inclusive ‘we’, public listening in Q&A and call-in formats, empathy and recognitional talk as legitimacy resources (W. J. Clinton, 1998, The White House, 1998a).	Hybrid charisma: institutional footing, structured argumentation, controlled affect, strategic warmth through recognition and coalition language, moral clarity anchored in office or forum legitimacy (H. R. Clinton, 1995, 2010).

ACA layer	Bill Clinton	Hillary Rodham Clinton
Reception	Ratification through laughter/applause and interactional uptake, credibility increased by perceived accessibility. Risks managed by respect displays in high-protocol settings.	Ratification via institutional endorsement and applause, reception filtered by gendered scrutiny (assertiveness vs warmth). Risks managed through competence framing and careful stance calibration.
Mediation	Broadcast and transcript formats amplify 'approachability' cues, portability of humour and empathy supports clip circulation.	Iconic quotable lines circulate transnationally, mediation can foreground competence or gendered framing (appearance, tone), shaping charisma attribution.
Adaptive moves with China	Respect for Chinese history, dialogue framing, avoidance of overt moralising, engagement through questions and explanations (W. J. Clinton, 1998, <i>The White House</i> , 1998a).	Universal rights framed as human concerns, combined with diplomatic recognition of context, institutional setting (UN conference) stabilises legitimacy (H. R. Clinton, 1995).
Adaptive moves with the Middle East	Acknowledgement of suffering, mediator footing, dignity-based compromise framing (<i>The White House</i> , 1998b).	Partnership framing, selective moral boundary work, controlled affect and institutional anchoring in diplomatic forum (H. R. Clinton, 2010).

4 Discussion

Taken together, the findings support a relational account of charisma as legitimation work embedded in structured fields. Rather than being a personal essence, charisma is produced through the publicly recognisable alignment of voice, body, and moral stance with the expectations of a setting. ACA captures this as recalibration: the same leader can shift footing and rhetorical mode across arenas, and different leaders can achieve recognition through different interactional solutions.

4.1 Positioning ACA Relative to Charismatic Leadership and Mediated Politics

ACA is compatible with behavioural and attributional accounts of charismatic leadership but shifts explanatory emphasis from whether leaders deploy charismatic tactics to when such tactics become socially efficacious. In Conger and Kanungo's behavioural theory, charisma is produced through identifiable leader behaviours that reframe reality and model risk-taking (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). ACA retains this behavioural focus yet specifies that the credibility of reframing is contingent on institutional footing, audience expectations, and the media formats through which the reframing circulates.

ACA also complements rhetorical and signaling approaches that treat charisma as a package of communicative cues shaping follower perceptions (Antonakis et al., 2011). The distinctive claim is that cue effectiveness depends on the architecture of social power: the structured distribution of symbolic authority, the normative constraints on who may speak with what tone, and the mediation systems that select which fragments become publicly authoritative.

Relative to hybrid media system theory, ACA narrows the explanatory target to the micro-politics of legitimation: not only how media environments hybridize, but how leaders adapt discourse, embodiment, and moral stance to be ratified within those environments (Chadwick,

2013). Relative to political style theory, ACA makes reception and gendered sanctioning analytically explicit, thereby clarifying why similar stylistic repertoires yield divergent legitimacy outcomes across contexts.

ACA's distinct contribution can be summarised in three comparative moves. First, relative to charismatic leadership-tactic accounts (Conger & Kanungo, 1987, Antonakis et al., 2011), ACA specifies arena-specific conditions of felicity and adaptation costs, explaining why the same tactic can be credible in one setting yet costly or counterproductive in another. Second, relative to political style theory (Moffitt, 2016), ACA foregrounds audience ratification and gendered sanctioning as mechanisms, not only as descriptive features of a leader's performance. Third, relative to hybrid media system and affective publics scholarship (Chadwick, 2013, Papacharissi, 2014), ACA provides a micro-analytic protocol for linking discourse features to circulation pathways and to the stabilisation (or destabilisation) of legitimacy claims.

4.2 Practical Implications: Training, Diplomacy, and Media Strategy

Leadership training: Use the ACA analytic matrix (Table 1) as a rehearsal checklist. (1) Diagnose the target arena's legitimacy script (who can speak, with what footing, and what affect is appropriate). (2) Draft and deliver two versions of the same message calibrated for domestic versus international reception. (3) Practice relational positioning and moral boundary work with feedback on both delivery and anticipated interpretation. (4) Run double-bind drills for gendered evaluation and document which cues travel well under mediation (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Diplomatic communication: Apply a pre-brief protocol. (1) Map host expectations using culturally specific leadership prototypes and protocol norms (House et al., 2004). (2) Anchor moral claims in recognised institutional roles and shared commitments to reduce being framed as external interference. (3) Identify translation-sensitive phrases and pre-approve official renderings to minimise pragmatic drift across languages. (4) Treat Q&A as a reception technology: design answers that preserve dignity while still producing quotable formulations.

Media strategy: Treat circulation as part of the performance. (1) Design clip-ready lines that retain context markers (role-based footing and explicit audience recognition) to reduce decontextualisation. (2) Seed interpretive guardrails by repeating a core legitimacy claim across segments. (3) Anticipate adversarial reframing and pre-bunk with explicit boundary definitions. (4) Use post-event monitoring of circulated fragments to inform future calibration, recognising that charisma can be stabilised or undermined through platform selection and framing (Chadwick, 2013, Papacharissi, 2014).

The comparison suggests two recurrent charismatic architectures. One is vertical charisma, which increases distance through heroic symbolism, moral certainty, and protective authority. Traoré's revolutionary sovereignty speechwork approximates this mode, particularly in its anti-dependency boundary work and in its disciplined stance of sacrifice. The second is horizontal charisma, which reduces distance through recognition, empathy, and public listening. Bill Clinton's performances in China and the Middle East exemplify this mode through Q&A formats, conversational narration, and 'explainer' talk.

Hillary Clinton and Samia Suluhu Hassan illustrate how gendered authority operates as an evaluation regime that can reshape the available charisma repertoire. Both women leaders mobilise institutional anchoring and competence as charisma resources, and both periodically make gender visible in order to manage interpretation. The implication is not that women are 'less charismatic', but that charisma attribution is filtered through gendered prototypes that can penalise identical cues when performed by different bodies.

China and the Middle East further show that ‘the East’ cannot be treated as a uniform cultural variable. What matters for ACA is the interaction between protocol, interpretive frames, and the mediation infrastructure. In China, state-managed media and the symbolic weight of civilisational respect make deference displays a key condition of felicity. In Middle Eastern diplomatic forums and conflict-saturated contexts, authority is constrained by high moral stakes and by competing narratives of legitimacy. In both contexts, international media attention increases the consequences of small performative details and amplifies the value of portable, quotable formulations.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of treating reception and mediation as constitutive rather than secondary. Audience ratification is not limited to applause, it includes the interactional organisation of Q&A, the public treatment of the speaker as credible, and the subsequent circulation that stabilises interpretive frames. Future research can extend the ACA protocol to larger corpora, to multilingual interaction, and to platform comment cultures, specifying more precisely how cross-cultural legibility emerges and how it breaks down. This corresponds to Jenks’s practical emphasis on privileging analysis and using discourse methods as a research toolkit (Jenks, 2025).

5 Conclusion

This paper argued that charismatic authority is a relational and mediated accomplishment shaped by gender norms and culturally patterned expectations. By introducing Adaptive Charismatic Authority (ACA) and operationalising it through a three-layer model (performance, reception, mediation), the analysis provides a portable framework for comparing how legitimacy is assembled and evaluated across contexts.

The comparative cases show that charisma travels only partially. Some cues—such as inclusive relational positioning, recognitional talk, and moral boundary work—are broadly legible, but their effectiveness depends on local conditions of felicity (in other terms the social conditions of pragmatic appropriateness), including protocol, media infrastructure, and gendered leadership prototypes. For cross-cultural research and for leadership practice alike, the implication is that charisma is best treated as adaptive social work rather than as a private trait.

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