Strategies for inducing people's cooperation in leaders' COVID-19 addresses: Affiliation, polarization, and exclusion

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Key words

Abstract

This article explores the strategies by which three world leaders induce people's cooperation in their COVID-19 addresses. The study examines how leaders exploit banal nationalism to evoke people's solidarity and cooperation. The data comprised three addresses delivered upon the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic by Queen Elizabeth, President Trump, and King Salman bin Abdul Aziz. The critical analysis revealed that the two Western leaders, Queen Elizabeth and President Trump, exploited nationalism to generate solidarity and elicit cooperation from their people, using some strategies that align with Billig's notion of banal nationalism and other strategies that go beyond banality. On the other hand, King Salman of Saudi Arabia, representing a non-Western approach in this study, avoided evoking nationalistic emotions and established a social, familial relationship with all groups of society. The study discusses how nationalistic strategies may have resulted in polarizing and excluding subgroups of society. The analysis also revealed that leaders may distance people instead of affiliating with them to construct a powerful image.

1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders' speeches were crucial in informing citizens about the risks and need for precautions. We argue that many leaders exploited nationalistic emotions or "flag nationalism", as Billig (1995) put it, to garner support and cooperation with government measures. However, we also argue that the discriminating power of nationalism (Brubaker, 2012) in political discourse may cause societal fractures along ethnic and political lines. Contrarily, leaders who avoid flagging nationalism and reinforce inclusivity may yield more support and cooperation during the pandemic. This hypothesis is partly borne out by

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the differing trajectories of countries like Saudi Arabia, which managed the crisis effectively, versus the UK and USA, which encountered multiple waves of outbreak. We also examine the dual nature of leaders' discourse: while they may express solidarity, they can also, paradoxically, display power through divisive language. The analysis of three COVID-19 speeches reveals how these approaches play out and their impacts.

1.1 Banality of nationalism

Nationalism is "primarily a political principle that suggests the political and the national units should be congruent" (Gellner, 1983, p.1) and a principle embracing culture, religion, and ethnicity (Brubaker, 2012). Nationalism essentially "involves a distinctive organization of sameness and difference" (Brubaker, 2102, p.7). Billig's (1995) notion of banal nationalism is based on the assumed homogeneity of nationalism.

In Billig's (1995) terms, politicians use simple words and symbols in their media speeches, such as national flags and deixis (pronouns), to flag their national identities. He contends that nations or nationhood are reproduced through these ideological habits and focuses on the reproduction of nationalism in the established nations of Western democracies. This concept has been critiqued for its assumptions of homogeneity and the lack of analysis of the symbols' impact, since Billig did not provide an in-depth analysis of the link between symbols, deixis, and their impact on specific audiences (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2014).

Our study aligns with critiques by Slavtcheva-Petkova (2014) and Wodak (2017), who argue against a homogenous national identity. Challenging Billig's (1995) view, Wodak (2017) posits that in modern multicultural states, identities are fragmented and dynamic. She contends that the view of homogenous imagined communities does not fit current multicultural nation-states constituted through citizenship and heterogeneity. Thus, in the complex struggle over belonging to a nation-state, all national, collective, and individual identities "are dynamic, fluid, and fragmented" (Wodak, 2017, p.3). In this study, we argue that this assumption of homogeneity of a nation may result in ethnic and racist discourse if specific banal strategies of nationalism are used, which contradicts the premise that banal nationalism is perceived as harmless and naturalized (Billig, 1995; Wodak, 2017).

Billig's (1995) concept of banal nationalism, particularly through pronominals, has been widely supported (e.g., Alqahtani, 2017; Bramley, 2001; Proctor & Su, 2011). However, these studies expand beyond Billig's original idea, focusing on process over product. For example, Proctor and Su (2011) demonstrated that politicians use nationalism strategically in campaigns, while Slavtcheva-Petkova (2014) argues that Billig's theory applies within national borders but not to "supranational banal identities or national identities operating outside national borders" (p. 58).

Alqahtani's (2017) findings suggest that national identities are not static but can be reshaped in response to political challenges. The term *national we*, referring to the first-person

pronoun's use to stir nationalistic emotions, suggests that distancing from the nation in speech can deconstruct national identities. This study proposes that leaders may avoid affiliative pronouns in COVID-19 addresses to construct a powerful self or when their authority is challenged.

1.2 Constructions of ideologies through linguistic choices in discourse analysis

Examining the influence of transitivity choices in constructing ideologies in newspapers, Lean et al. (2013) argue that these choices contribute to the polarization of discourse, "especially when ideologically loaded statements about terrorism are quoted verbatim from international news agencies" (p. 33). The pragmatic use of pronouns in expressing political ideologies has received considerable attention from researchers (e.g., Alqahtani, 2017; Kaewrungruang & Yaoharee, 2018). Several studies have found that politicians actively exploit pronouns to evoke nationalistic emotions and create alignments and oppositions (Bramley, 2001; Proctor & Su, 2011; Kaewrungruang & Yaoharee, 2018). Alqahtani (2017) concludes that politicians utilize the first-person plural pronoun to achieve various strategies and express multiple identities. The first-person singular pronoun has been found to emphasize an independent, powerful political identity (Alqahtani, 2017; Bramley, 2001; Fetzer, 2014; Proctor & Su, 2011).

The current study aims to contribute to this growing body of research by investigating how three leaders exploited lexical choices in their COVID-19 speeches to construct strategies that induce cooperation from their constituents by addressing the following questions:

1. What strategies do world leaders employ to induce cooperation from their people during the COVID-19 crisis?
2. How do leaders exploit pronominal choices to construct ideologies of power and nationalism?

This paper is structured as follows: first, we outline the methodology, including data selection and analytical approach. We then present an analysis of the COVID-19 addresses by each leader. For each speech, we examine the use of pronouns, national references, religious language, and other rhetorical strategies. Next, we provide a comparative discussion of the nationalistic and social approaches employed by these leaders, with particular attention to the use of the first-person plural pronoun and the pragmatic functions of *you* in establishing leader-people relationships. We then explore the intersection of religion and nationalism in these political speeches. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these rhetorical strategies for crisis management and public cooperation, offering insights into the effectiveness of various approaches in addressing a diverse, cosmopolitan society during a global pandemic.

2. Methodology

This study examines how leaders exploit banal nationalism in COVID-19 addresses suggesting that Western leaders favour nationalistic messages more than their non-Western counterparts, who might rely more on inclusive social strategies. Such nationalistic messaging can, however, sideline societal subgroups. Moreover, we propose that leaders shift from national to institutional or royal identities to assert authority to enhance their powerful image. To this end, the study utilizes critical discourse analysis (CDA) to investigate the strategies by which leaders construct their political identities and ideologies to persuade their people to adhere to prevention guidelines. A mixed-method analysis was utilized to answer the research questions to combine the nuanced findings of the qualitative analysis and the numerical data provided by quantitative analysis (Jimarkon & Todd, 2011).

CDA is an interdisciplinary approach that is mainly concerned with investigating the hidden power "beneath as it were the representations produced in discourse" (Angermuller, 2015). It addresses issues of ideology, power, and inequality (Fairclough, 2013, Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017). CDA offers useful analytical tools "to investigate the dialectical relationship between discourse and the social world" (Johnson & Mclean, 2020, p. 382) by focusing on how language users express power relations, ideological meanings, and identities through their discursive practices in social interactions (Van Dijk, 2001). Van Dijk (1998, p. 44) characterizes these relations in an ideological square:

– Emphasize positive things about Us.
– Emphasize negative things about Them.
– De-emphasize negative things about Us.
– De-emphasize positive things about Them.

Fairclough (2013) contends that CDA needs to address modern developing world issues, including natural disasters, and address crises to overcome them. This study follows this suggestion by examining discourse during the pandemic crisis.

This study demonstrates how ideologies, identities, and representations of "self" and the "other" in political discourse are constructed at the macro level of discourse by tools employed at the micro level of discourse. Therefore, our analysis is conducted at two levels: the macro level deals with the strategies politicians construct to induce cooperation through using specific linguistic tools at the micro level. The study particularly focuses on how leaders exploit pronominal structures at the micro level to build their strategies at the macro level. More specifically, the micro-level analysis explores whether leaders invoke nationalistic themes, employ banal elements like pronouns and national narratives, reveal their ideologies, or distance themselves from national identities. At the macro level, these strategies are compared to see if they impact public behaviour during the pandemic.

This study focuses on the COVID-19 speeches of three influential leaders: President Trump of the USA, Queen Elizabeth of the UK, and King Salman of Saudi Arabia. The speeches varied in length, with President Trump's address being the longest at 9 minutes, 31 seconds, and 1,280 words, while Queen Elizabeth's and King Salman's addresses were shorter (Table 1).

Table 1. Length of COVID-19 address in minutes

Leader	Length of Address in minutes	No. of words
Queen Elizabeth (BBC, 2020)	04:09	526
King Salman (Saudi Press Agency, 2020)	04:46	543
President Trump (The US National Archives and Records Administration, 2020)	09:31	1,280

The selection of these three leaders for this study provides a diverse yet focused sample of leadership styles and political contexts. These leaders represent three distinct systems: a constitutional monarchy (UK), a federal presidential republic (USA), and an absolute monarchy (Saudi Arabia), which allows for comparative analysis across different governance structures, cultural contexts, and COVID-19 response trajectories. Queen Elizabeth represents a figurehead in a Western democracy, President Trump exemplifies an elected leader in a polarized political landscape, and King Salman offers insight into Middle Eastern monarchical leadership. This selection enables an exploration of how different political traditions and cultural contexts influence the use of nationalistic or social rhetoric in crisis communication, including the interplay between religious and nationalistic language.

For analytical clarity, Queen Elizabeth's address is segmented into an opening, which concentrates on the NHS (the National Health Service), and the following parts, which touch upon the national spirit, marked by a discernible shift in language use. President Trump's speech is also split into two sections: before and after the closing, signaled by "finally", where a notable change in language occurs. These divisions aid in discerning how different speech segments use varied discursive strategies. A major challenge was analysing King Salman's speech in English in terms of the FPPP (first-person plural pronoun), as the analysis draws on a critical account of the frequency of the pronominals. Therefore, due to the essential differences between Arabic and English concerning the affixation of the pronoun in the word, we translated the affixed pronoun between parenthesis to avoid diminishing the meaning of the translated text while maintaining the accurate occurrence of the pronominal and the precise word count.

Since pronouns mark a salient strategy in representing Billig's banal nationalism, Table 2 shows the distribution of the personal pronouns that the three leaders use to designate their relationship with the people in COVID-19 speeches.

Table 2. Frequencies of pronominals in the three leaders' COVID-19 speeches

	FPSP	Per 100 words	FPPP	Per 100 words	SPP	Per 100 words	TPP	Per 100 words
King Salman	11	2.0	19	3.5	14	2.6	4	0.73
Queen Elizabeth	13	2.4	28	5.32	7	1.33	5	0.95
President Trump	16	1.3	46	3.71	10	0.08	4	0.32

Note: FPSP: first-person singular pronoun, FPPP: first-person plural pronoun, SPP: second-person pronoun, TPP: third-person pronoun

In addition, the frequency of *we* when referring to the people versus the government varied significantly among the three leaders, as shown in Table 3. While Queen Elizabeth used *we* exclusively to refer to the people, President Trump used it more often to refer to his administration, and King Salman's usage was more evenly split.

Table 3. Frequencies of *we* when affiliating with people and the government in the leaders' speeches

Leader	People	Per 100 words	Government[1] (Administration)	Per 100 words
King Salman	11	2.03	8	1.5
Queen Elizbeth	27*	5.13	0	0
President Trump	19	1.53	27	2.18

Note: One instance was affiliating with her sister

3. Findings

3.1 Strategies in Queen Elizabeth's COVID-19 address

Queen Elizabeth exploits banal nationalism to induce national cooperation during the pandemic, including using pronominals, linguistic references with ethnic and nationalistic associations, and national narratives and memories. Despite these nationalistic strategies, she also stresses an individual, authoritative royal identity in many other instances (Table 2).

In the Queen's address, the use of the FPPP is prevalent (Table 2), aligning with Bramley's (2001) observation that such pronouns can invoke a collective response. The Queen employs the FPPP to foster national identity and encourage a united reaction to the pandemic. However, the distribution of pronouns varies between distinct parts of her speech. In the opening, there is a notable emphasis on authority, with a higher frequency of FPSPs (*I, me*) compared to collective pronouns (*we, us, our*). This changes in the subsequent parts, where the use of collective pronouns surpasses the frequency of the singular, indicating a shift from an authoritative to a more inclusive stance.

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[1] The *governmental we* is adopted from Alqahtani (2017) "when the affiliation is made with government / administration" (p. 132).

However, despite the high frequency of the affiliative *we* in her address, the absence of emotional connection with the nation is noticeable in the opening statement of the address. The Queen commences her speech without any address form to define the relationship with the addressee. Nonetheless, the absence of address forms or any greeting seems a salient discursive feature of the Queen's speech (see the Queen's addresses to the nation since 1991).

In the COVID-19 address, the Queen initiates her address by constructing a binary relationship with the nation through an I-You dichotomy where she indexes her identity as the knowledgeable, authoritative leader:

(1) *I*'m speaking to *you* at what *I know* is an increasingly challenging time.

The Queen stresses her royal identity by ascribing the knowledge of the challenges to herself, which is atypical of the language used in commencing the address to the nation. To establish an emotional connection, the Queen could have involved the nation in the act of knowing as she used a similar context when she commenced her address with the collective perspective, using the national *we* (Alqahtani, 2017) in her address upon Diana's death:

(2) Since last Sunday's dreadful news, *we have seen*, throughout Britain and around the world, an overwhelming expression of sadness at Diana's death.

Thus, distancing the people from the act of knowing in this context in the COVID-19 address may be interpreted as an expression of power and authority. Assuring the nation they have a knowing leader may aim to build trust but may, contrarily, distance the nation emotionally.

As aforementioned, the Queen's affiliation with the people in the opening part occurs in a few instances, only as a recipient of the action rather than the doer of the action, as in "brings us" or a shared possession as "our country," "lives of us all." After these instances of affiliation, the Queen constantly shifts to reconstruct her royal self as an expression of authority and power. The shift is expressed by an I-They-You trichotomy between the Queen, the nation, and the NHS workers. In the trichotomy, the Queen endows the appreciation of the NHS workers' efforts to her royal self, relegating the people to the role of a third party, the role of a follower in the act of appreciation:

(3) I am sure *the nation will join me in assuring you* that what you do is appreciated.

In expressing gratitude to the NHS, the Queen uses hedging phrases like "I am sure" and "assure you that," along with passive constructions ("is appreciated") to convey that the nation shares her appreciation for the NHS's efforts. This suggests that the public's appreciation is dependent on her own, emphasizing her role in initiating this sentiment. This approach highlights her political self and shifts from a collective national identity to a more

authoritative, royal persona, redefining the leader's role over their subjects. This is contrasted with her more direct, less distant language in addressing Princess Diana's death in 1997.

(4) I hope that tomorrow *we can all*, wherever *we are*, *join in expressing our grief* at Diana's loss, and gratitude for her all-too-short life.

In (4), in her address upon Diana's death, the Queen did not make the same linguistic choices she makes in her COVID-19 address when expressing a similar idea.

Later, her language becomes more inclusive, cooperative, and nationalistic, contrasting with the individual tone in the first part. The frequency of the FPPP (national *we*) is notable, especially with action verbs like *tackle* and *overcome*, whereas *I* occurs with mental verbs, such as *want* and *hope*, and several action words. These sections focus on building a national social identity, emphasizing the national spirit during the pandemic. The national *we* occurs in the contexts of national narratives, adherence to pandemic procedures, and seeking national cooperation.

Using *we* in political discourse constitutes a national we-group identity that serves, as De Cillia et al. (1999) argue, to appeal to national solidarity. Bramley (2001) argues that this affiliative *we* involves the people by sharing responsibility or benefits. The Queen effectively uses this strategy, exploiting the collective pronoun to engage the nation emotionally and provoke a sense of responsibility, particularly for actions like "tackling the disease", "overcoming it", "remaining united", "having more to endure", (the disease), "joining the world in a common endeavor", and "facing challenges before." This contrasts with her use of *I* in actions like *making a broadcast in 1940* and *sending my thanks to you*.

Shifts between the individual and collective perspectives also occur in the first subsequent part. The individual perspective sometimes precedes the collective perspective in I-We relations, as in:

(5) *I want* to reassure you that if *we remain* united and resolute, then *we will overcome* it.
(6) *I hope* in the years to come …who come after *us*.

Introducing the *affiliative we* by using the individual perspective functions as a balance of power, where the Queen primarily emphasizes her powerful identity as a decision-maker and then includes herself in the act of following the procedures for safety as an average citizen. It can be argued that the Queen uses the I-You-We pattern to show that the Queen is not exempted from following the guidelines and the restrictions during the pandemic.

Flagging nationalism in the Queen's address is also realized by linguistic references. The Queen uses terms that have nationalistic, ethnic, and imperialistic connotations, such as *United Kingdom*, *Britons*, and *Commonwealth*, respectively, to index a national identity. Although the Queen exploits these strategies to achieve national unity, the consequences of some uses of these affiliative strategies in the Queen's address may have implications of polarization and

exclusion. The term *United Kingdom*, for example, is more inclusive than the term *Britons* and less imperialistic than *Commonwealth*.

Using the national references *Britons* and *Commonwealth*, the Queen strategically evokes national emotions by attaching the nation to their ethnicity and provokes emotions of political supremacy, respectively. However, these references' associations may divide or polarize rather than unify.

The Queen's address about COVID-19 is the only event where the Queen uses the term "Britons" to address the British people. The absence of this term in the Queen's other addresses suggests that the reference to *Britons* has specific connotations. It indexes the ethnicity of British citizens of native ancestries, which may exclude the non-native British from the address, creating social polarization and dividing the society into Britons and non-Britons, unlike her referring to the nation in her address upon her mother's death:

(7)   It is a chance to show to the whole world *the British nation* united in grief and respect.

The reference to *the British nation*, which the Queen also used on other occasions, could have been more inclusive than the term *Britons*, if it had been used in her COVID-19 address.

The Queen often references the *Commonwealth* to evoke emotions of the Empire's past supremacy. The constant occurrence of this term in the Queen's address, except for her address upon Princess Diana's death, suggests it is used to evoke nationalistic and imperialistic emotions for political purposes.

Besides using collective pronouns and national references, the Queen uses national narratives. Notably, she used the rainbow symbol to foster societal unity, making it a symbol of hope across Europe during COVID-19. However, its association with the LGBTQ community led to some controversy in Britain (Milton, 2020). Ultimately, the Queen's address helped "legitimize" the rainbow as an NHS symbol highlighting social tolerance and unity. Cooper (2020) suggests this symbol in her address implies the formation of a new national narrative, moving beyond war memories to encompass pandemic triumphs.

In the second narrative, the Queen draws on a shared national memory to enhance cooperation and promote her political image as a successful crisis leader. We argue that the narrative of her childhood during World War II serves two ends, which may aim to fulfil political goals beyond Billig's banal nationalism. On the one hand, the Queen exploits the narrative to compare the separation families faced during World War II and the social distancing that the people must keep for the sake of their loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. The function of the narrative is to give hope that any crisis will eventually end in victory if people cooperate and, therefore, strengthen their will to conform to the restrictions during the pandemic. On the other hand, the Queen also channels political emotions by indexing her political identity as an experienced leader. The Queen relies on the nation's collective memory to remind them of her contribution and support when she was young,

which builds trust with the nation during the COVID-19 crisis. To this end, the Queen initiates the narrative through the individual self-perspective in successive propositions, "reminds me", "I made in 1940", "my sister", or collective self by affiliating with her sister in "we as children spoke from here". The emphasis on the personal perspective in this narrative indicates the Queen's emphasis on reconstructing her political identity through national recollections, convincing the public of her ability to handle the situation – particularly amid severe criticism against the monarchy's and government's response to the pandemic (Dettmer, 2020).

After exploiting different strategies to establish an emotional connection through flagging nationalism, the Queen ends her address by reconstructing herself as a leader in:

(8)   *I* send *my* thanks and warmest good wishes to *you* all.

Interestingly, only in her speeches during the COVID-19 pandemic (see also her address in May 2020) does the Queen use the sentence "*I send my thanks to you*" instead of *I thank you all*, which she sometimes used to end her address. Using the verb *send* to pass thanks could, arguably, increase the distance between the speaker and the addressee because it emphasizes physical distance. However, the Queen's use of this structure in her addresses during the COVID-19 crisis could also be interpreted within the context of the pandemic per se. The Queen may have used this structure deliberately to imply the rules of social distancing in interaction.

3.2 Strategies in Trump's COVID-19 address

Before this paper was submitted, Trump lost the election to his opponent, Joe Biden. According to authorities (Parker et al., 2020), one of the main factors that contributed to Trump's defeat was how his administration handled the pandemic. Therefore, this section aims to trace the first stone in the Trump administration's handling of the pandemic, realized by his address about the COVID-19 crisis.

Trump's strategies to evoke national solidarity and cooperation through the crisis ranged from "banal" to ideological or identity-specific. Typically, Trump evokes national solidarity and cooperation through flagging nationalism, using various strategies of banal nationalism such as pronominals, linguistic references, and religious references. Trump also uses strategies beyond Billig's conceptualization of banality by evoking wartime emotions, creating alignments and oppositions, and augmenting the American ego and superiority.

Trump focuses on nationalistic references to *American/s* from the outset and throughout the speech, either in a direct second-person address or reference as a third party to evoke nationalistic emotions. In his opening statement, Trump includes only the "American people":

(9)   My *American* fellows.

Trump commences his address by expressing equality and common ground with the American people. The address form emphasizes a common destiny and solidarity and, thus, shortens the distance from the addressee. However, addressing only Americans from the outset of the address may imply the exclusion of non-American people, implying that the American-non-American dichotomy extends over speech even when Trump requests people to follow protection guidelines, as in (10)-(13).

(10) For all *Americans*, it is essential that everyone take extra precautions and practice good hygiene.

(11) To protect *American* people

(12) For the vast majority of *Americans*

(13) Working/older *Americans/American* workers, families, and businessmen

His linguistic choices may imply that the government's focus is on the American people only and that non-Americans may be exempted from following the rules of protection or the government's vision. These choices, therefore, may emotionally disconnect non-American groups from the president's address, which may also lead to lax adherence to hygiene and distancing rules by the excluded groups.

However, a salient strategy to flag nationalism in Trump's speech is using national linguistic symbols. Trump uses the terms *United States* and *America* symbolically to index national identity. However, whereas the term *United States* occurs as a non-national reference (as in [14]) or as a national reference in (15), the reference *America*, on the other hand, occurs only to index nationhood (16-17).

(14) Anything coming from Europe to the *United States* is what we are discussing.

(15) No nation is more prepared or more resilient than the *United States*.

(16) I will always put the well-being of *America* first.

(17) God Bless *America*.

Pronominals are crucial in constructing nationalism in political discourse, as seen in Trump's COVID-19 address. Although national *we* occurs frequently, it occurs less frequently than governmental *we*, consistent with several studies (e.g., Sclafani, 2018). This pattern implies that Trump prefers maintaining a powerful, authoritative leadership identity over a collective national figure. The use of *we* seems to vary based on how it affects Trump's powerful image. Trump uses the national *we* in contexts that do not threaten his image or when seeking audience support. Otherwise, he distances himself from the public and affiliates with his administration or uses individual perspectives, as evidenced in various parts of his speech.

(18) *We* have been in frequent contact with *our* allies, and *we* are marshaling the full power of the federal government and the private sector to protect *the American people*.

Most of the instances of the national *we* occur at the closing part of the address. Before the closing part, the national *we* occurs seven times (within 1,040 words) and 12 times after Trump signals the conclusion (within 240 words only). On the other hand, the governmental *we* occurs 24 times before the closing part and only three times after the closing part. This shift suggests a strategic move to create a closer connection with the audience towards the final parts (Bramley, 2001).

Most instances of the national *we* in the closing part occur in two main contexts: emphasizing the importance of adherence to the rules of protection and requesting the nation to abandon partisanship. In these propositions, it is obvious that Trump finds affiliation with the nation more persuasive than distancing them by other pronominals. Trump's understanding of the importance of winning the nation's cooperation may have been the reason behind the high frequency of affiliation with the people at the closing part of the address, which is typically known to be a crucial part of the speech that focuses on the main goal of the speech. In the final part, Trump seems to shift his perspective to position himself as an average citizen within the national collective, which is more persuasive than speaking as a distant individual or affiliating with the powerful governmental collective. This argument is demonstrated by Trump's pronominal choices in two similar contexts in (19) and (20).

(19) For all Americans, it is essential that everyone take extra precautions and practice good hygiene. Each of *us* has a role to play in defeating this virus. Wash *your* hands, clean often-used surfaces, cover *your* face and mouth if *you* sneeze or cough, and most of all, if *you* are sick or not feeling well, stay home.

(20) If *we* are vigilant—and *we* can reduce the chance of infection, which *we* will—*we* will significantly impede the transmission of the virus. The virus will not have a chance against *us*.

In (19), Trump disaffiliates from the audience because the context indicates submission to the rules. Trump initiates the context by addressing distant audiences *all Americans* and *everyone*, which blurs the identity of who is included in the collective. Trump, then, shifts immediately to affiliate with the nation in "each of *us* has a role to play in defeating this virus", hinting at his distinct role, which can be interpreted from the successive bald-on requests in the subsequent utterances. Trump shifts to the *you* perspective to emphasize who should adhere to his instructions, excluding himself from the act. Bramley (2001) argues that a sudden shift in pronominal use indicates a change in the relationship with the addressee or the overhearers. Shifting to *you*, Trump constructs the identity of a commander rather than a member of the collective, which aligns with Trump's ideology, political identity, and personal

attitude outside the political arena. During the Covid-19 crisis, Trump refused to follow the rules of hygiene or wearing a mask (Cathey, 2020; Givhan, 2020), "suggesting that donning a mask is an acknowledgment of fear and a declaration of weakness" (Givhan, 2020). The premise is that Trump disaffiliates from the people and reconstructs the presidential stance to protect his image as a powerful leader.

Trump's apparent self-exclusion from following the rules by distancing *you* to save his image in (19) contrasts with his pronominal choices in (20). Unlike (19), in (20), Trump chooses to affiliate with the people, using the collective perspective, although he is speaking about a similar topic as in (19), that is, adherence to rules of protection. Arguably, two reasons contribute to the difference in pronominal choice between the two contexts. Firstly, in (20), Trump generally expresses how to defeat the virus, unlike (19), which expresses fear of the virus and submitting to the rules to win the battle against the virus, which threatens his face as a powerful leader. Secondly, (20) is uttered at the end of the address, demonstrating Trump's need to maximize his interest in national cooperation and solidarity "before leaving the scene", using more cooperative and inclusive language.

Disaffiliating from the people and reconstructing a presidential identity is also supported by the high frequency of reference to the *American people* as a third party. Trump frequently refers to the nation as a third party through references to *Americans* and *American people*. In disaffiliative contexts, Trump uses the third-person reference in different dichotomies and trichotomies: We (governmental)-People (see example [18]), We (governmental)-I-People as in (21):

(21) *We* will not delay. *I* will never hesitate to take any necessary steps to protect the lives, health, and safety of *the American people*. *I* will always put the well-being of *America* first.

Using the individual perspective, *I*, or affiliating with the government while referring to the audience as a third party, serves a salient pragmatic function. In line with Trump's political discursive identity in various political encounters, using the individual perspective while referring to the people, the intended addressees, who are overhearing the speech, as a third party and simultaneously affiliating with the government is a strategy to construct his powerful institutional identity invoked by *we* (Bramley, 2001), known as "the advocative style" in which the lawyer advocates their clients by referring to them as a third party with their presence while addressing the jury (the government per se). Trump positions himself as the leader and defender of the nation. This strategy may stress the power of the speaker and enhance their image. These constant shifts between identities support Wodak's (2017) view that identities are not static – as suggested by Billig (1995) – but are fluid and dynamic.

As aforementioned, Trump reconstructs national identities strategically when the audience is in a powerful position, as when requesting the nation to abandon partisanship. In such context, Trump uses highly inclusive language in (22).

(22) *We* are all in this together. *We* must put politics aside, stop the partisanship, and unify together as one nation and one family. As history has proven time and time again, Americans always rise to the challenge and overcome adversity. *Our* future remains brighter than anyone can imagine.

In Trump's address, his most inclusive and emotional language emerges when urging people to set aside partisanship. Unlike previous segments where he used a second-person perspective, Trump adopts a more inclusive *we*, incorporating familial and national references. This shift in language, which includes references to the audience as a family and the use of "together", aligns with De Cellia et al.'s (1999) observation that such terms often appear in narratives to encourage national cooperation. Trump uses "Americans" and "America" to reinforce his call for unity. This nationalistic and cooperative approach suggests an attempt to mitigate potential partisan exploitation of the pandemic, underscoring the complexity and multifaceted nature of expressing nationalism.

Trump strategically incorporates religious references to evoke nationalistic emotions. Following the tradition of American presidential addresses, as noted by Hughes (2019), he often concludes with a religious blessing: "God bless America" (p. 529). This practice aligns with the historical religious backdrop of American society. Sclafani (2018) suggests that Trump uses religion to bolster his nationalistic and political identity for political gain, which aligns with Wodak's (2017) observation of the intertwining of new nationalisms with religious beliefs. The study will delve deeper into Trump's strategic use of religious language, especially in comparison with King Salman's approach, in Section 4.

Trump also evokes nationalistic flags to induce people's cooperation through two distinctive strategies that reveal Trump's ideology: augmenting the American ego by exaggerating the estimation of the abilities of various governmental sectors and evoking nationalistic wartime emotions. The egoistic emotions prevail in Trump's address through using superlatives, such as the most, best, and greatest:

(23) Our team is *the best* anywhere in the world.
(24) It is critical for you to follow the guidelines of your local officials who are working closely with our federal health experts—and *they are the best.*
(25) We have the *best economy*, the *most advanced health care*, and the *most talented* doctors, scientists, and researchers anywhere in the world.
(26) We have the *greatest economy* anywhere in the world, by far.

In the same vein, but in a converse direction, Trump evokes American superiority by underestimating the threat of the virus to the American people.

(27) For the vast majority of Americans, the risk is very, very low.
(28) We have seen *dramatically fewer cases* of the virus in the United States than are now present in Europe.

Arguably, despite Trump's emphasis on the importance of adherence to the rules of prevention in his address, overestimating the American health system and underestimating the risk of the disease on the American people in several instances may have contributed to people's lax adherence to the rules.

However, we argue that the most salient feature in Trump's discourse that may go beyond the banality of nationalism is the use of war discourse. Trump's style of expressing nationalism accords with Wodak's (2017) premise that the notion of nationalism is closely tied to concepts underlying racism. Trump creates oppositions and alignments throughout his speech to evoke emotions against conspiracies and foreigners. Dissemination of fear against foreigners seems integral to Trump's discursive and political identities (Sclafani, 2018). Trump exploits the crisis to create an opposition against China in polarizing language. Similar to his speeches during the pandemic, in this address, Trump insists on using the word "foreign" when describing the virus, as in:

(29) This is the most aggressive and comprehensive effort to confront a *foreign* virus in modern history.

Such representations of foreigners are frequent in racist discourse (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). Therefore, Trump seems to exploit the ideology of conspiracy in his speeches as a strategy to flag nationalism and evoke solidarity and cooperation with his administration through co-implicating the nation in oppositions such as Chinese-American and European-American dichotomies as in the examples (18) and (21) above, and in (30) and (31) below:

(30) We are at a critical time in the *fight against the virus*. We made a lifesaving move with early action on *China*. Now, we must take the same action as *Europe*.
(31) The virus will not have a chance against us.

It is difficult to infer the context of these propositions without thinking of war times. Aspects of Trump's political identity can be understood from his linguistic behaviour in crises. It seems a discursive pattern in Trump's speech (as a Republican) to promote the idea of conspiracy against the American nation in every context, particularly against China, using negative associations such as *foreign virus*, personifying the virus as a fierce enemy.

3.3 Strategies in King Salman's COVID-19 address

By the time of writing this section, Saudi Arabia had announced a dramatic improvement in its pandemic situation. Many cities scored zero cases. As in the case of the USA and Britain, we analysed King Salman's address delivered on 19 March 2020, to explore whether King Salman exploits banal nationalism to evoke people's cooperation during the pandemic. We will also conclude the potential effect of King Salman's language used in the address on the current situation of the pandemic in Saudi Arabia.

In contrast with Billig's (1995) view of nationalism, in his address to the nation, King Salman focuses on the family as the unit of social interaction. King Salman initiates his address, using familial address forms: "brothers", "sisters", "sons" and "daughters" to express intimacy:

(32) My brothers and my sisters, my sons, and my daughters, the citizens, and residents of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

King Salman also reiterates familial terms at topic shifts, framing his address as a paternal speech. Focusing on family rather than national identity effectively unites the diverse sections of society. In contrast with nationalism, which could divide citizens and non-citizens, the appeal to familial bonds may be more potent during crises like the pandemic.

King Salman employs a unifying strategy by fostering a sense of paternal intimacy, addressing both citizens and residents of Saudi Arabia together as a family – brothers, sisters, daughters, and sons – without differentiating them by national identity, which contrasts with the speeches of Elizabeth and Trump, who specifically addressed their citizens based on national identity. Besides, King Salman uses pronominals to create a sense of unity and collective action. The pronoun *I* occurs three times in the subject form with mental and verbal verbs (e.g., "know" and "tell"), whereas *we* occurs with action and material verbs (e.g., "live through", "depend on", "deploy", "affirm", "go through", "rely on"), emphasizing collective rather than individual agency in the face of the pandemic.

Affiliation with the people using the first-person plural pronoun (FPPP) is more frequent in King Salman's speech than in Trump's but less frequent than in Queen Elizabeth's (see Table 3). We argue that the intimacy invoked by the intimate familial address forms in King Salman's' address in different instances may have lessened the need for extensive collective affiliation. We also argue that King Salman uses the FPPP not to evoke banal nationalism, as Billig (1995) argues and as in Trump's and Elizabeth's speeches, but to strengthen the intimate familial connection with the audience, which is evident from the father-family dialogue with the audience, unlike Trump and Elizabeth who establish a speaker-public relation. More importantly, the use of *we* is not accompanied by national linguistic references as in Trump's and the Queen's discourse, but, instead, by familial intimate address forms. As such, the use

of the national *we* (Alqhatani, 2017) may not be valid for interpreting the pragmatic use of the FPPP in King Salman's discourse – the term affiliative (inclusive) *we* is used instead.

Another premise is that the pronoun *you* occurs in King Salman's speech in contexts that indicate inclusiveness and shared responsibility. We argue that the context in which *you* is used in King Salman's address differs from the contexts in Trump's and Elizabeth's addresses. The second-person address in King Salman's speech extends over the speech with instances of identification with the people in specific contexts, which aligns with earlier notions suggesting that "'you' is an inclusive term because it does not exclude the hearer, unlike 'we', which has the potential to exclude the hearer depending on the intended membership of 'we'" (Bramley, 2001, p. 129). In several utterances, King Salman attributes the source of support and prospective victory over the pandemic to the people, which foregrounds the role of the people and their co-implication in the event as in (33):

(33) The strength, steadfastness, and determination that *you* have demonstrated during the honorable defiance of this difficult phase, and *your* full cooperation with relevant government agencies, are the most important contributing factors and pillars of the success of the state's efforts.

A salient instance of emotional involvement of the people in the speech is expressed in (34). The King uses language that portrays face-to-face intimate dialogue:

(34) *You* are accustomed to *my* frankness, and that is why *I* took the initiative to tell *you* that *we* are going through a difficult phase.

The utterance in (34) expresses a short social distance from the addressee, portraying an intimate relationship and a strong role of the addressee in the situation. The proposition presumably indicates that the leader and his people have been cooperating in previous similar situations, which strengthens the connection between the two parties and contributes to establishing new cooperation. The You-I-We trichotomy emphasizes that the people are assigned different positions in the same utterance: as a second person, in a position equal to the first person (the leader), and as a collective inclusive of the leader.

However, despite the extensive use of *you* in his address, King Salman does not use the direct address or inclusive *we* when requesting people to follow the rules of hygiene, as did Trump and Queen Elizabeth respectively. Instead, he discusses the instructions in impersonalized propositions. King Salman does not position himself as the source of information or command but, instead, refers the people to the Ministry of Health for instructions.

(35) We affirm that continuing to work hard in this difficult time can only be done with solidarity, cooperation, and having a positive spirit, enhancing individual and

collective awareness, and *following the instructions* issued by the concerned authorities to confront this pandemic.

We argue that impersonalizing the request may be more effective than using imperatives or the FPPP to request that people follow the guidelines, for two reasons. Firstly, the strategy saves the leader from the dilemma of the power challenge that may result from either inclusion or exclusion. Including the leader in the act of submitting to the rules of hygiene may be power challenging for leaders; it may threaten the leader's self-image as it portrays the leader as weak and terrified by the disease. Excluding the leader, expressed by *you*, on the other hand, may imply that the leader exempts themselves from the rules, which may send a negative message about adherence to the instructions. Thus, the use of impersonalized propositions in giving the instructions and linking the people to the Ministry of Health as the source of instructions, on the one hand, saves the leader's self-image from threat and ensures people's constant connection with the Ministry for instructions.

However, religious affiliation may be considered the most distinctive strategy in King Salman's COVID-19 address to strengthen the emotional connection with the people. Although it is argued that reference to religion in a political speech may function as a political tactic (Williams, 2018) and evoke nationalism (Brubaker, 2012), we argue that the effect of religion in discourse is contingent on the religiosity of the speaker and their audience, and the social context in which religious discourse is produced.

The historical Islamic background of Saudi Arabia makes religion the most unifying social and cultural factor, not only for its native people and monarchy but also for the millions of non-national residents who choose to live near the Holy Mosques. This mutual ideology, we argue, serves salient functions in political speech. First, religion is a spiritual connection that exerts control over peoples' behavior, particularly in crises, particularly within societies that revere religion as a social organizing power. Therefore, realizing the distinctive Islamic character of his country, King Salman seems to establish a spiritual connection, rather than nationalistic common ground, with the audience, which supports the view that religious ties are found to be at times more unifying than national or political ties (Brubaker, 2012). In Section 4, a distinction is made between Trump's use of religion and King Salman's religious language.

4. Discussion

This study demonstrated how leaders use strategies reflecting their ideologies to induce cooperation among their people. Trump and Elizabeth exploited banal nationalism to evoke people's cooperation, whereas King Salman avoided evoking nationalistic emotions and foregrounded the social connection between subgroups of the cosmopolitan society. This leads to drawing a distinction between nationalistic and social approaches in political discourse, which in turn leads to a distinction between *nation* and *society*.

4.1 Nationalistic approach vs social approach

The analysis showed that President Trump and Queen Elizabeth employed "nationalist" rhetoric to connect with the audience, while King Salman emphasized social bonds over a national background. Trump and Elizabeth utilized past victories and narratives to promote a sense of national pride, in line with Billig's argument that established Western democracies often flag nationhood (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2014). King Salman, on the other hand, abandoned nationalism for a more inclusive approach highlighting the family as the primary social unit encouraging cooperation during the pandemic.

This study also highlights the nuanced use of the first-person plural pronoun (FPPP). In political discourse, the FPPP typically signifies banal nationalism (Billig, 1995; Proctor & Su, 2011). However, our analysis reveals that the FPPP's role as an expression of nationalism is context-dependent. When used within national narratives or alongside nationalistic references, the FPPP serves as the *national we* (Alqahtani, 2017). In a non-nationalistic context, such as King Salman's speech, the *affiliative we* does not suggest national affiliation.

Understanding the distinction between nationalistic and social functions of the affiliative *we* is crucial. While nationalist use can lead to exclusion and polarization, social use can foster inclusion and unity. The national *we* in Trump's and Elizabeth's nationalist discourse potentially marginalizes non-national residents, resonating with Brubaker's (2012) assertion of nationalism's discriminating power. Conversely, King Salman's approach could promote social solidarity without such divisive implications.

4.2 Inclusive *you* vs exclusive *you*

The analysis revealed the dual role of *you* in leaders' addresses to the nation: inclusiveness and exclusiveness. Although Bramley (2001) contends that *you* has an inherently inclusive function, we argue that the pronominal has a salient exclusive function, which is evident in two uses of the second-person perspective in Trump's and Salman's speeches. In Trump's speeches, *you* serves as a means of distancing, a rhetorical strategy that can be interpreted as an attempt to preserve his authoritative image by not associating himself with the directives he is communicating. This contrasts with the inclusive use of *you* in King Salman's speech, fostering a sense of shared destiny and collective responsibility. This demonstrates that pronouns in political language are flexible tools that can either bridge or widen the gap between leaders and their constituents, depending upon the broader discourse they are situated within.

When considering nationalism, Trump's and Elizabeth's speeches enhance nationalistic spirits by recalling past glories or claiming national superiority, diverging from Billig's notion of "banal nationalism", which implies a more subtle and unobtrusive manifestation of national pride. The analysis suggests that the leaders' approaches to nationalism are intentional, overt, and aimed at rallying the nation against adversity. Also, the paper's distinction between

society, nation, and community offers a nuanced perspective on how these concepts interrelate within political discourse. Societies encompass a diverse array of linguistic, cultural, and national groups, whereas nations and communities are more homogenous and narrowly defined (Wodak, 2017). This hierarchical conceptualization allows for a more detailed analysis of political rhetoric and its target audiences.

Regarding the intersection of religion and nationalism in political speech (Brubaker, 2012), the study argues for a nuanced understanding beyond the common linkage of the two for political expediency. While religion in Trump's rhetoric may follow a traditional pattern of aligning religious references with national identity as seen in some Western political contexts (Williams, 2018), King Salman's use of religious language is embedded within the fabric of societal norms and life in Saudi Arabia, suggesting that religion may transcend nationalism and serve as a societal glue (Sclafani, 2018), particularly in Islamic contexts (Richey, 2016).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the effectiveness of political discourse during a crisis could be enhanced by employing language emphasizing social bonds, shared responsibility, and inclusivity. By addressing a society's cosmopolitan composition, leaders can foster unity and collective action. This inclusive approach, transcending national boundaries and evoking shared human experiences and values, might be critical in triggering public action and enhancing the efficacy of governmental efforts to manage crises.

The analysis of COVID-19 addresses by Queen Elizabeth, President Trump, and King Salman reveals distinct approaches to inducing public cooperation during the pandemic. The two Western leaders predominantly employed nationalistic rhetoric, utilizing banal strategies such as collective pronouns, national narratives, and symbols to evoke solidarity. In contrast, King Salman eschewed nationalistic appeals for a social, familial approach, emphasizing inclusive language and religious references to foster unity across diverse societal groups.

These findings highlight the complex interplay between political discourse and crisis management. The nationalistic approach, while potentially effective in rallying citizens, risks marginalizing non-national residents and exacerbating societal divisions. Conversely, the social approach appears more inclusive, potentially fostering broader cooperation across diverse populations. The study also underscores the nuanced use of pronouns in political discourse, revealing how leaders strategically employ personal and collective pronouns to construct authority, establish rapport, or distance themselves from certain actions or responsibilities.

This study's limitations include its focus on only three leaders, potentially limiting the generalizability of its findings. Future research could expand this analysis to a broader range of global leaders, including those from other major nations and diverse political systems. Additionally, investigating the long-term impacts of these rhetorical strategies on public

behaviour and pandemic outcomes could provide valuable insights for crisis communication. Such studies could further explore the effectiveness of nationalistic versus social approaches in fostering public cooperation during global crises, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of political communication in diverse, cosmopolitan societies.

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