

# A COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE-PRAGMATIC AND RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL FESTIVE SPEECHES

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## Abstract

This paper analyses American presidential festive speeches delivered by Barack Obama and Donald Trump, treating them as instances of epideictic political discourse. Such speeches conventionally emphasise celebration, unity, and the affirmation of shared values, yet they are also produced in specific political and ideological contexts. This makes them a productive site for examining how national identity and political authority are discursively constructed within ceremonial constraints.

The analysis is conducted within a Critical Discourse Analysis framework and incorporates insights from conceptual metaphor theory. It examines recurring patterns of figurative language, forms of address, evaluative expression, and symbolic reference in a small corpus of presidential festive speeches delivered on occasions such as Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The focus is on how established differences in presidential rhetoric are realised within the conventions of a highly ritualised epideictic genre.

The findings show that, although both presidents operate within shared generic expectations, they configure rhetorical and metaphorical resources in systematically different ways. Obama's festive speeches more consistently frame national identity in civic and inclusion-oriented terms, supported by metaphors of journey, hope, and collective responsibility. Trump's speeches, by contrast, place greater emphasis on military commemoration, strength, and defence, drawing on martial imagery and narratives of protection. These differences emerge through distinct uses of the genre's established rhetorical repertoire rather than through departures from it.

**Keywords:** Presidential festive discourse; Epideictic rhetoric; Critical Discourse Analysis; Conceptual metaphor; National identity.

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## 1 Introduction

Festive presidential speeches occupy a distinctive position within political discourse. Delivered on ritualised occasions such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, or Independence

Day, these speeches are framed as moments of celebration and unity rather than sites of policy deliberation. As a form of epideictic rhetoric, festive discourse is oriented toward praise, commemoration, and the reaffirmation of shared values, functioning to symbolically consolidate national identity and collective memory. Precisely because of their ceremonial and consensual framing, such speeches offer a revealing lens through which to examine how political authority, ideology, and belonging are discursively constructed.

In the American political context, presidential festive speeches play a central role in articulating narratives of nationhood, democracy, and shared values. These speeches make systematic use of linguistic, visual, and symbolic resources—such as metaphor, evaluative language, forms of address, and ceremonial settings—to foster a sense of unity among citizens and to reinforce culturally sedimented ideals. While often perceived as politically neutral or purely celebratory, festive speeches remain ideologically consequential, as they shape how national identity is imagined, legitimised, and emotionally experienced.

Differences between the rhetorical styles of Barack Obama and Donald Trump have been widely discussed in political discourse scholarship, particularly in relation to tone, audience positioning, and ideological framing. Obama is frequently associated with inclusive rhetoric and appeals to unity, whereas Trump is often characterised by confrontational language, populist strategies, and heightened emotional intensity. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to how these differences are articulated within festive presidential discourse as a specific epideictic genre—one that both enables symbolic amplification and constrains rhetorical choice through ritual and convention.

Drawing on Fairclough's *Critical Discourse Analysis* (1995), the present study approaches festive presidential speeches as socially situated texts in which language functions both reflectively and constitutively. From a CDA perspective, festive discourse does not merely mirror pre-existing values but actively participates in their reproduction, negotiation, and legitimisation. This approach allows for an examination of how presidents use language and symbolism to present themselves as relatable figures, enact authority, and align themselves with the nation they address, while remaining attentive to the ideological implications of such representations.

Festive speeches have been described by Campbell and Jamieson (1978) as a subgenre of epideictic rhetoric: highly formal, ceremonial, and oriented toward reinforcing communal values. Although epideictic discourse is often contrasted with deliberative rhetoric, Campbell and Jamieson emphasise its persuasive dimension, noting that festive speeches serve to unify audiences, rehearse national ideals, enact the presidential role, and, at times, contribute to the restoration of public image. In this sense, festive presidential speeches function not only as rituals of celebration but also as strategically significant acts of political communication.

Within this genre, appeals to patriotism and nationalism are particularly salient. While nationalism is often most visible during periods of crisis or conflict, it can also be mobilised during peaceful times and festive occasions, when presidents

seek to cultivate emotional attachment and a sense of collective belonging (Beasley, 2004, p. 4). Nationalism, however, is not ideologically neutral. As Beasley (2004) and Baier (2016) note, it operates as a narrative that prioritises the interests of one's own nation and encourages affective identification with an idealised national community. Such narratives may emphasise unity and shared values, but they may also exclude alternative identities or perspectives. As Fuchs (2020, pp. 238–239) observes, nationalism functions through emotional readiness to identify with “one’s” nation, operating through ideals of togetherness and common values.

Presidential festive speeches therefore constitute a rhetorical genre grounded in persuasion and symbolic alignment, offering insight into how American traditions and values are discursively framed and sustained. Genres, as Beasley (2004) argues, provide a productive linguistic lens through which social history and ideological continuity can be examined. In the case of American nationalism, festive discourse reflects ideological foundations rooted in Lockean liberalism, which have shaped core values such as equality, liberty, individualism, populism, and equity. These values are particularly prominent in speeches delivered on occasions such as Independence Day, which explicitly commemorate national origins and democratic ideals. Within American political culture, republicanism—understood as a commitment to communitarian values oriented toward advancing the perceived needs of the people—has long been regarded as central to American nationalism (Beasley, 2004, p. 34).

Against this background, the present study examines the relationship between genre constraints and ideological differentiation in political discourse. Festive presidential speeches represent a highly ritualised form of epideictic rhetoric, typically oriented toward unity, celebration, and the reaffirmation of shared values. At the same time, such speeches are produced in specific political and ideological contexts. This raises the question of how, and to what extent, ideological differences between political actors are articulated within a genre that conventionally limits conflict and emphasises consensus.

The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does festive presidential discourse, as a ritualised epideictic genre, limit ideological variation across presidencies, and where do discursive differences nonetheless become visible?
2. How are pragma-rhetorical and metaphorical resources deployed in festive speeches to construct different representations of national identity within shared genre conventions?
3. What does a corpus-assisted qualitative analysis reveal about ideological patterning in small, genre-specific corpora, and what are the methodological limits of such an approach?

These questions are explored through a comparative analysis of festive speeches delivered by Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Rather than approaching these speeches as expressions of individual rhetorical style, the study focuses on how each presidency operates within the conventions of festive discourse to frame national identity, authority, and audience alignment.

## **2 Literature Review**

The present study is situated at the intersection of research on political discourse, nationalism, and rhetorical genre, with a specific focus on festive presidential speeches as sites of ideological and affective meaning-making. Rather than treating festive discourse as a peripheral or purely ceremonial form of political communication, this review conceptualises it as a strategically significant genre through which national identity, collective values, and political authority are discursively constructed and reaffirmed.

### **2.1 Nationalism, ideology, and political discourse**

A central assumption in discourse-analytic approaches to political communication is that language functions not merely as a neutral medium of expression, but as a form of social action embedded in relations of power and ideology. From this perspective, political discourse actively shapes social reality by legitimising particular worldviews, identities, and hierarchies (Fairclough, 1995). Language is therefore understood as both reflective and constitutive: it draws on existing ideological formations while simultaneously reproducing or reshaping them in specific contexts.

Within this framework, nationalism emerges as a discursive construct that is repeatedly articulated and normalised through political communication. Historical accounts of American nation-building emphasise the role of rhetoric in transforming the experience of independence into a shared narrative of hope, freedom, and self-governance. McDonnell (2001, p. 3) traces how the rhetoric of the American War for Independence generated enduring symbolic resources that continue to inform national identity, embedding ideals of liberty and democratic self-rule into the political imagination.

Critical Discourse Analysis further highlights how such narratives are sustained through institutionalised forms of discourse. From a Discourse–Historical perspective, language must be analysed in relation to its socio-historical conditions of production, circulation, and reception (Wodak, 1997). Political texts, including presidential speeches, are thus seen as ideologically loaded practices that enact power relations by selectively foregrounding certain values while marginalising others. This approach underscores the importance of examining not only what is said, but how it is said, by whom, and in what historical moment.

Research on nationalism complicates the assumption that national discourse is inherently cohesive or benign. While civic nationalism is often associated with shared democratic ideals and collective participation, scholars have also drawn attention to the exclusionary and hierarchical dimensions of nationalist rhetoric. Beasley (2004) conceptualises nationalism as a narrative that fosters emotional identification with the nation, operating through symbols, rituals, and shared memories. At the same time, Baier (2016) demonstrates how nationalist discourse can intersect with populist and exclusionary ideologies, particularly in contexts marked by socio-economic instability and political disaffection. Although Baier's

analysis focuses primarily on European contexts, it foregrounds the ideological plasticity of nationalism as a rhetorical resource that can be mobilised for divergent political ends.

Building on this critical perspective, Fuchs (2020, pp. 238–239) situates nationalism within a broader theory of communication and ideology, arguing that national identity is produced through communicative formations that integrate symbolic representation, affective attachment, and social structure. From this viewpoint, nationalism functions not only as a set of ideas but as an emotionally charged process that binds individuals to imagined communities through language, media, and ritualised practices. Political discourse, especially in ceremonial contexts, plays a key role in sustaining these affective bonds.

Taken together, this body of scholarship suggests that nationalism in political discourse is neither static nor ideologically uniform. It is a contested, rhetorically mediated phenomenon that operates through language, symbol, and emotion. Festive presidential speeches, which explicitly foreground unity, tradition, and shared values, therefore offer a particularly revealing site for examining how nationalism is discursively enacted and normalised.

## **2.2 Rhetorical and pragmatic features of festive presidential discourse**

Festive presidential speeches have been theorised as a distinct rhetorical genre within political communication. Campbell and Jamieson (1978) identify festive speeches as a subgenre of epideictic rhetoric, characterised by ceremonial formality and an emphasis on praise, commemoration, and the reinforcement of communal values. Unlike deliberative discourse, which seeks to influence future policy decisions, epideictic discourse is oriented toward affirming shared beliefs and reinforcing social cohesion. Nevertheless, as Campbell and Jamieson argue, festive speeches retain a persuasive dimension insofar as they rehearse national ideals, enact presidential authority, and may contribute to the restoration or reinforcement of political legitimacy.

From a pragmatic perspective, festive discourse is shaped by its situational context and communicative goals. Political communication scholars emphasise that language is strategically deployed in context to influence audiences and to perform social actions (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, 2024). Festive speeches, delivered on culturally significant occasions, are therefore highly constrained yet rhetorically potent contexts in which political actors can align themselves with collective values while managing public perceptions.

Research on rhetorical performance further highlights the role of self-presentation in festive political discourse. Drawing on Goffman's (1956) theory of face and self-presentation, scholars have noted that political figures often construct carefully curated public personas in ceremonial contexts, portraying themselves as relatable, morally grounded, and representative of the community they address. Such strategies of positive self-presentation serve to establish rapport with audiences and to reinforce the legitimacy of political authority.

At the level of semantic and rhetorical patterning, festive speeches frequently draw on evaluative language associated with patriotism, solidarity, loyalty, and tolerance. Stoica (2024, p. 183) notes that rhetorical expressions of patriotism function as markers of collective identity, invoking shared emotional attachments to the nation. These expressions are often realised through metaphorical language, symbolic references, and emotionally charged lexical choices that frame the nation as a moral community.

Pragmatic theories of politeness provide additional insight into the interactional dynamics of festive political discourse. Politeness principles, as articulated by Grice (1991) and Leech (1983), help explain how speakers manage interpersonal relations and mitigate potential face threats in public communication. In festive contexts, politicians frequently employ positive politeness strategies—such as inclusive pronouns, expressions of solidarity, and appeals to common ground—to position themselves as members of the same community as their audiences. Săftoiu (2020, pp. 17–18) observes that such strategies are particularly salient in festive speeches, where the communicative aim is to elicit shared emotional responses rather than to provoke controversy.

Viewed collectively, these studies suggest that festive presidential discourse constitutes a complex rhetorical space in which genre conventions, ideological narratives, and pragmatic strategies converge. The literature reviewed here provides the theoretical foundation for analysing how linguistic, rhetorical, and symbolic resources are mobilised in festive speeches to construct national identity, manage political authority, and foster collective belonging. In this study, politeness is treated as a secondary interpretive lens rather than a primary analytic focus.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design and methodological orientation**

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Following Fairclough (1995) and Wodak (1997), discourse is treated as a form of social practice through which ideology, identity, and power relations are articulated and negotiated. The analysis does not aim to test hypotheses or produce statistically generalisable results. Instead, it offers a comparative, theory-guided examination of rhetorical, pragmatic, and metaphorical patterning in a bounded set of presidential festive speeches.

The study is situated within interpretive traditions of discourse analysis, where analytical rigour is understood in terms of transparent data selection, consistency of analytic procedures, and close alignment between research questions and methods (Popescu, 2025). Quantitative corpus outputs are used descriptively, primarily to support and contextualise qualitative observations, rather than as a basis for inferential claims.

### **3.2 Corpus composition, scope and organisation**

The corpus consists of 32 American presidential festive speeches (approximately 25,500 words) delivered by Barack Obama and Donald Trump during their presidencies. It includes speeches delivered on recurring ceremonial occasions, namely Independence Day (4th of July), Thanksgiving, Christmas, and one Naturalization Ceremony.

The Obama sub-corpus comprises 20 speeches delivered between 2009 and 2016. The Trump sub-corpus comprises 12 speeches delivered between 2017 and 2020.

The numerical imbalance between the two sub-corpora reflects differences in presidential communication practices and the availability of comparable festive speeches, rather than sampling bias.

All speeches were obtained as publicly available video recordings hosted on YouTube and were saved as separate files. The corpus was divided into sub-corpora according to speaker, festive occasion, and chronological order, allowing for both intra-speaker and inter-speaker comparison. Chronological ordering was maintained to facilitate observation of thematic continuity and variation across time.

The size of the corpus reflects the limited availability of comparable festive presidential speeches and includes all publicly available addresses delivered by Barack Obama and Donald Trump on major ceremonial occasions that met the genre criteria established for this study.

### **3.3 Transcription procedure and data preparation**

All video speeches were transcribed using TurboScribe AI. Each video was downloaded from its original YouTube source and uploaded to the transcription software. Following automated transcription, all transcripts were manually checked against the original recordings in order to correct transcription errors and ensure fidelity to the spoken text.

The textual data were subsequently cleaned to remove extraneous elements not directly relevant to linguistic analysis, such as applause markers and audience reactions. The resulting texts were saved as plain text files in English and constituted the final corpus used for analysis.

### **3.4 Analytical framework**

The speeches were analysed along several interrelated dimensions relevant to festive presidential discourse. These included patterns of topicalisation, with attention to dominant themes associated with specific festive occasions (such as freedom and sacrifice on Independence Day, gratitude and family on Thanksgiving, and unity and hope on Christmas). The analysis also focused on semantic and lexical structures, including keywords, collocations, fixed expressions, and idiomatic language, as well

as on pronominal forms of address and deictic positioning, particularly the use of first-person plural pronouns.

In addition, rhetorical devices such as repetition, inversion, metaphor, understatement, and overstatement were examined, alongside strategies of self-presentation and the representation of social actors, including constructions of in-groups and out-groups (us/them polarisation). Finally, the analysis considered politeness strategies, both positive and negative, in line with pragmatic theory. All analytic dimensions were applied consistently across the sub-corpora.

### **3.5 Metaphor and corpus-assisted analysis**

Metaphor analysis followed the procedures outlined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Charteris-Black (2004, 2011), and Fairclough and Fairclough (2012). Metaphorical expressions were identified through iterative contextual reading and grouped into broader conceptual domains, allowing for qualitative interpretation of their discursive and ideological functions.

In parallel, corpus-assisted analysis was conducted using Sketch Engine. Each sub-corpus was imported separately, and a keyword analysis was run in order to identify the top 50 keywords per sub-corpus. Keywords were established based on Sketch Engine output and subsequently manually classified into grammatical categories (e.g. pronouns, common nouns, proper nouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and collocations). Keywords also underwent collocation analysis to identify recurrent lexical and grammatical patterning.

All quantitative outputs, including keyword lists, collocation tables, and frequency data for pronouns, modal verbs, auxiliaries, and verbal tenses, were saved in separate tables and used to support qualitative interpretation.

### **3.6 Reflexivity and limitations**

The analysis is theory-guided and interpretive, and it does not claim neutrality or exhaustive coverage of all possible readings. Its contribution lies in methodological transparency, coherent analytic design, and systematic comparison across festive contexts and presidencies. Quantitative outputs are descriptive rather than inferential, and findings should be interpreted within the limits imposed by corpus size, genre specificity, and contextual scope.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 Overview of the results**

This section reports descriptive patterns identified in a corpus of 32 American presidential festive speeches delivered by Barack Obama and Donald Trump. The results consist of corpus-assisted observations of lexical distribution, pronominal and

rhetorical patterning, and recurrent figurative structures across the two sub-corpora. Quantitative outputs, including keyword frequencies and collocation patterns, are presented in tabular form to indicate relative salience and distribution, while qualitative patterns are identified through systematic annotation and close reading. Short textual excerpts are included selectively to illustrate identified patterns; full annotations and extended examples are documented in a supplementary appendix. Interpretation of these findings in relation to genre, ideology, and discourse-analytic frameworks is reserved for Section 5.

## 4.2 Lexical patterning in festive presidential speeches

Table 1 presents selected high-salience lexical items identified through a corpus-assisted analysis of the two presidential sub-corpora. For analytical purposes, these items are grouped into two analyst-defined semantic categories—family-related terms in the Obama sub-corpus and war-related terms in the Trump sub-corpus—in order to highlight contrastive lexical emphases within festive presidential discourse. Frequencies are normalised and reported as tokens per million to ensure comparability across sub-corpora of different sizes.

As shown in Table 1, the Obama sub-corpus exhibits a concentration of lexical items associated with family, kinship, and communal affiliation. These include references to families in general as well as formulations that evoke moral responsibility and collective care through kinship-related language. The clustering of these items points to a recurrent lexical emphasis on relational and community-oriented themes across festive speeches delivered during the Obama administration.

By contrast, the Trump sub-corpus shows a concentration of lexical items associated with war, the military, and armed service. The items listed in Table 1 include references to military roles, equipment, and institutional formations, alongside expressions linked to combat and martial activity. These items recur across festive speeches delivered during the Trump administration, particularly in the context of national commemorative occasions.

Taken together, the lexical distributions reported in Table 1 indicate distinct patterns of lexical salience across the two presidential sub-corpora. These findings are presented as descriptive indicators of discursive emphasis, rather than as explanatory claims in themselves. In the present study, lexical patterning serves as an empirical point of orientation for the subsequent qualitative analysis, guiding attention toward recurring rhetorical and figurative configurations without presupposing a direct or exclusive correspondence between semantic fields and conceptual metaphor mappings.

Table 1. Word frequency (selected lexical items; normalised tokens per million)

<b>Obama</b>			<b>Trump</b>		
<b>Family-related terms</b>			<b>War-related terms</b>		
TERMS	TOKENS	%	TERMS	TOKENS	%
	PER MIL.			PER MIL.	

Military family	915.3	0.092%	American warrior	183.5	0.018%
Obama family	427.14	0.043%	Bomb bursting in air	122.33	0.012%
Sister's keeper	244.08	0.024%	bombs burst	122.33	0.012%
brother's keeper	244.08	0.024%	B-25 bomber	122.33	0.012%
American family	244.08	0.024%	Helicopter squadron	122.33	0.012%
Founding ideals	122.04	0.012%	United States armed forces	122.33	0.012%
Middle-class family	122.04	0.012%	Military service member	122.33	0.012%
Other families	61.02	0.0061%	woman in uniform	22.33	0.012%

### 4.3 Metaphorical patterning in festive discourse

Analysis of the corpus indicates that festive presidential speeches delivered by both Barack Obama and Donald Trump make systematic use of metaphorical language. Several recurrent metaphor domains were identified across the sub-corpora, including metaphors of light and fire, journey, building, health, hope, and spatial movement. These domains recur across different festive occasions and are realised through conventional lexical and phrasal patterns.

Building on the lexical patterns outlined in Section 4.2, the metaphor analysis examines how salient semantic fields are integrated into broader conceptual structures through which national identity, political authority, and collective belonging are discursively constructed.

The metaphor domains discussed in this section are treated as overlapping analytical lenses rather than as mutually exclusive categories. Individual linguistic expressions may therefore participate in more than one metaphorical domain, reflecting the multifunctional and context-dependent nature of figurative language in political discourse.

#### 4.3.1 Metaphors of light and fire

Metaphors drawing on light and fire imagery were identified in festive speeches delivered by both presidents. In the Trump sub-corpus, these metaphors frequently co-occur with references to national history, military action, and economic performance. They often evoke struggle, power, and vigilance:

- (1) *"The bombs bursting in air gave proof through the night that our flag was still there."* (Trump, Independence Day address)

In the Obama sub-corpus, light and fire metaphors also recur, but they are more often combined with references to progress, continuity, and national development, framing national history in terms of endurance and renewal:

(2) *“We are a nation of discovery that blazed a trail west, of pioneers who pushed the frontier ever forward.”* (Obama, Independence Day address)

#### **4.3.2 Journey metaphors**

Journey metaphors constitute another recurrent pattern in the corpus. These metaphors are used to conceptualise national history and political development as processes of movement and progression. In the Trump sub-corpus, journey metaphors often frame national experience in terms of struggle, exceptionalism, and historical endurance:

(3) *“This is the greatest political journey in the history of our country.”* (Trump, Independence Day address)

In the Obama sub-corpus, journey metaphors similarly conceptualise national experience as movement and progression, but they more consistently emphasise continuity, collective effort, and forward momentum:

(4) *“Each generation has had to move forward and build on the progress made by those who came before.”* (Obama, Independence Day address)

#### **4.3.3 Building metaphors**

Building metaphors were identified primarily in the Trump sub-corpus, where they are realised through references to foundations, rebuilding, strength, and structural integrity. These metaphors often frame national power and institutional authority as material structures that require reinforcement or repair:

(5) *“We are rebuilding our military on a firm foundation of strength and resolve.”* (Trump, Independence Day address)

Comparable building metaphors appear in the Obama sub-corpus, where they are more frequently combined with references to institutional continuity and collective effort, framing political development as a shared, cumulative process:

(6) *“Together, we can rebuild it stronger than before and build on the progress we’ve made.”* (Obama, Independence Day address)

#### **4.3.4 Health and healing metaphors**

Health and healing metaphors occur in festive speeches delivered by both presidents, where political, social, or moral challenges are conceptualised in terms of illness, recovery, and repair. In the Trump sub-corpus, such metaphors are often used to frame social division or perceived injustice as a condition requiring correction or restoration:

(7) *“We must heal the divisions of the past and bring our country back together.”* (Trump, Thanksgiving address)

In the Obama sub-corpus, health and healing metaphors likewise frame national challenges as collective conditions, but they more frequently emphasise reconciliation, moral responsibility, and long-term recovery, as illustrated in (8).

(8) *“We know that we can heal injustice and make this nation more true to its ideals.”* (Obama, Independence Day address)

#### **4.3.5 Hope as an interpretive orientation**

While not treated here as a distinct metaphor domain, hope emerges as a recurrent interpretive orientation in festive presidential discourse, particularly in the Obama sub-corpus. Across several metaphor domains discussed above—most notably light, journey, and health—figurative language is consistently mobilised to frame national identity in aspirational and future-oriented terms. In this sense, hope functions as a discursive effect produced through the interaction of multiple metaphorical resources rather than as a stable source domain in its own right.

#### **4.3.6 Personification**

In addition to the metaphor domains discussed above, both presidents make recurrent use of personification, representing the nation as an active social actor endowed with agency, responsibility, and moral capacity. In the Obama sub-corpus, personification typically frames America as a collective and inclusive entity oriented toward shared values and progress, whereas in the Trump sub-corpus it more often emphasises strength, protection, and exceptionalism.

(9) *“America is, and always has been, a nation of immigrants.”* (Obama, Naturalization Ceremony address)

(10) *“Thank you for keeping America safe, strong, proud, mighty, and free.”* (Trump, Independence Day address)

## **5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Genre constraints and comparative frame**

The results reported in Section 4 must be interpreted in light of the genre constraints of festive presidential discourse. As epideictic rhetoric, festive speeches are designed to reaffirm communal values, commemorate national narratives, and symbolically align the president with a national “we” rather than advance policy deliberation (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978). This shared generic framing limits rhetorical options while also enabling intensified affective and symbolic appeals. Against this background, the contrastive lexical and figurative patterns identified in the two sub-

corpora can be read as different configurations of a shared epideictic repertoire rather than as wholly distinct genres.

## **5.2 Obama: civic-national narrative, origins myth, and inclusive alignment**

Across the Obama sub-corpus, national identity is frequently articulated through a civic-national narrative grounded in liberal-democratic ideals, origin myths, and inclusionary audience alignment. The speeches repeatedly invoke the Founding Fathers and national “creed” language, often connecting national belonging with equality, freedom, and moral responsibility. This framing resonates with accounts of American nationalism grounded in Lockean liberalism and civic ideals of equality and individual rights. For instance, Obama’s Independence Day rhetoric explicitly foregrounds the citizen-subject transformation and the pursuit of happiness as national principles (e.g., “we are equal... we are free... pursue... happiness”; Obama, 4 July 2009).

In addition, the Obama sub-corpus frequently integrates the mythic narrative of America as a site of moral purpose and collective aspiration, including figurations of America as a “beacon” and as a destination for those who undertake a journey toward belonging (Paul, 2014). This is especially visible in the naturalisation speech, where immigrant life trajectories are framed as “journeys” converging in America (Obama, 4 July 2014). Together with the personification patterns reported in Section 4.3, such formulations support an interpretation of national identity as aspirational and inclusive, where membership is constructed through adherence to values rather than ancestry or exclusivity.

Interactionally, this orientation is consistent with the prominence of inclusive first-person plural forms in the Obama sub-corpus (Section 4), which function to reduce distance between speaker and audience and to frame national identity as shared participation. The family lexicon (Section 4.2) further supports this alignment, with “family” frequently functioning as a lexical resource for construing communal belonging and interdependence, including formulations that frame solidarity through brotherhood and shared responsibility.

## **5.3 Trump: martial-national narrative, defence alignment, and populist stance**

In the Trump sub-corpus, national identity is more frequently articulated through martial and defence-oriented frames, including war history narration, armed service commemoration, and the personification of America as strong, protective, and exceptional (Section 4.3). Independence Day speeches in particular rely heavily on historical war narrative and military commemoration as resources for praising the nation and reaffirming collective pride, for example through references to “American warriors” and named military sites or conflicts (Trump, 4 July speeches).

At the same time, the Trump sub-corpus includes explicit constructions of internal antagonism and threat, in which the national “we” is contrasted with domestic or ideological opponents (e.g., references to “radical left... Marxists...

anarchists”); Trump, 4 July 2020). Within an epideictic context, such antagonistic moves function to consolidate in-group solidarity by sharply delimiting an out-group. This aligns with scholarship describing populist rhetoric as constructing closeness to “the people” while delegitimising opponents as outsiders or enemies (e.g., Pilyarchuk & Onysko, 2018).

In this corpus, “family” does occur, but it is often embedded in a broader discourse of protection, duty, and collective security, rather than primarily as a metaphor of communal inclusion. The war/military lexical salience documented in Section 4.2 provides a descriptive basis for reading this rhetorical configuration as defence-oriented within the genre constraints of national commemoration.

#### **5.4 Interactional positioning: in-groups, out-groups, and rhetorical intensification**

A major difference between the two corpora concerns the rhetorical management of division and conflict within festive discourse. Obama’s festive speeches acknowledge social divisions but tend to frame them through inclusive repair and shared values (e.g., “out of many we are one”; Obama, Thanksgiving 2014), maintaining the ceremonial aim of unity. Trump’s festive speeches more readily incorporate refutation and condemnation of opponents, using repetition and parallel structures (“the more you... the more we...”) to build rhetorical intensification and a crescendo effect. Such techniques are compatible with epideictic performance, where amplification and praise/blame can be used to strengthen audience alignment.

From a pragmatic perspective, these patterns can be linked to different strategies of stance-taking and audience positioning. Obama’s use of inclusive pronouns and common-ground appeals aligns with positive politeness strategies typical of ceremonial discourse. Trump’s reliance on denunciation and contrastive framing increases face-threat toward targeted out-groups while simultaneously reinforcing solidarity with the in-group audience. These observations can be discussed within pragmatic accounts of public address and facework (Goffman; Leech), though they should be treated as interpretive readings rather than as categorical violations.

#### **5.5 Power and persuasion: a cautious CDA reading**

The comparative patterns described above support a CDA-informed interpretation in which festive speeches function as ideologically consequential acts of symbolic alignment. However, a key methodological limitation is that ideological intent or “manipulation” cannot be directly inferred from lexical salience alone. Where the Trump corpus contains stronger us/them polarisation and moralised antagonism, this can be discussed in relation to Van Dijk’s account of ideological discourse and positive self-presentation/negative other-presentation, but claims about “manipulation” should be framed cautiously as interpretive possibilities rather than definitive findings.

Similarly, where the Obama corpus foregrounds inclusion, immigrant belonging, and civic ideals, these patterns can be interpreted as reinforcing a particular configuration of civic nationalism, but this should be treated as a discourse-analytic reading shaped by the selected theoretical lens rather than as an empirically exhaustive account of presidential ideology.

## **5.6 Summary**

Overall, the two corpora can be read as demonstrating different configurations of epideictic national rhetoric under shared genre constraints. Obama's festive speeches more consistently foreground civic values, inclusive audience alignment, and aspirational national personification, while Trump's festive speeches more consistently foreground martial commemoration, defence-oriented national identity, and sharper in-/out-group contrast. These interpretive claims provide the basis for the conclusions in Section 6 and for a reflection on how festive presidential discourse functions as a site of national identity work.

## **6 Conclusions**

This study has examined American presidential festive speeches as a form of epideictic political discourse, with particular attention to how Barack Obama and Donald Trump employ pragma-rhetorical and metaphorical resources to construct national identity. By focusing on speeches delivered on ritualised occasions such as Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, the analysis has highlighted how genre conventions shape, but do not fully determine, ideological expression in presidential rhetoric.

The findings suggest that festive discourse operates as a stabilising framework that encourages unity, commemoration, and value affirmation, while still allowing for meaningful variation in rhetorical emphasis and ideological framing. Across the Obama corpus, national identity is more consistently framed in civic and inclusion-oriented terms, supported by metaphors of journey, hope, and collective responsibility. In contrast, the Trump corpus more frequently foregrounds martial commemoration, defence, and strength, drawing on metaphors associated with war, protection, and rebuilding. These differences emerge within shared generic expectations rather than outside them.

At the level of interactional positioning, the two corpora also display distinct patterns of audience alignment. Obama's festive speeches tend to rely on inclusive pronouns and common-ground appeals, presenting national belonging as a matter of shared values and participation. Trump's speeches more readily introduce contrastive framing and explicit antagonism, even in ceremonial contexts, reinforcing in-group solidarity through the identification of opponents or threats. Such patterns point to different ways of managing unity and division within a genre conventionally oriented toward consensus.

Methodologically, the study illustrates how a corpus-assisted qualitative approach can support close discourse-analytic reading in small, genre-specific datasets. While the scope of quantitative analysis is necessarily limited, frequency patterns and keyword distributions provide a useful empirical reference point for qualitative interpretation. At the same time, the analysis underscores the need for caution in drawing broad ideological conclusions from restricted corpora. Overall, the study contributes to research on political discourse and epideictic rhetoric by showing how festive presidential speeches function as sites of national identity construction in which ideological differences are negotiated within, rather than outside, genre constraints. Future research could extend this approach through multimodal analysis, larger diachronic corpora, or cross-national comparison of festive political discourse.

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