

Sectarian Rhetoric in Contemporary Political Discourse: A Critical Pragmatic Approach Using van Dijk's Ideological Square

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2024/10/13 2025/12/14

Abstract

This study investigates the manifestations and impacts of sectarian rhetoric in contemporary political discourse through a critical pragmatic lens, employing Van Dijk's Ideological Square framework. Drawing on a corpus of 150 political texts, including speeches, campaign materials, and social media posts, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach to analyze the linguistic strategies employed by diverse political factions. Key findings reveal distinct rhetorical patterns: conservative factions predominantly utilize fear-based and exclusionary narratives, emphasizing negative out-group representation (85%), while liberal factions focus on inclusivity, promoting positive in-group representation (70%). Quantitative analyses highlight a strong correlation between sectarian rhetoric and societal polarization ($R = 0.82$, $p < 0.01$) as well as diminished institutional trust ($R = -0.65$, $p < 0.01$). These results underscore the role of sectarian rhetoric in fostering ideological divides, eroding public trust, and shaping political identities. The implications are far-reaching, offering theoretical advancements in understanding the interplay between political language and societal cohesion. Practically, the study calls for policymakers to adopt more inclusive communication strategies, educators to enhance media literacy programs, and media organizations to counteract divisive narratives. It also highlights the ethical dilemmas posed by AI-driven amplification of sectarian rhetoric on digital platforms, urging further exploration of technology's role in political communication. By bridging gaps in the literature, particularly regarding the intersection of technology, rhetoric, and societal impacts, this research contributes to ongoing efforts to mitigate polarization and promote democratic dialogue.

Keywords: Sectarian Rhetoric, Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Communication, Ideological Square, Pragmatics

Introduction

The nexus of language and power has been a central theme in linguistic and political studies, particularly within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Political language operates as a potent mechanism for shaping ideologies, constructing identities, and influencing power dynamics. As language serves as a tool for constructing meaning and negotiating social relationships, it becomes instrumental in reflecting and perpetuating power structures.

Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square provides a foundational framework for examining political discourse, offering a systematic approach to deconstructing how language strategically emphasizes in-group virtues while marginalizing out-group attributes. The four key dimensions—emphasizing positive in-group information, downplaying in-group negatives, emphasizing negative out-group information, and downplaying out-group positives—are essential for understanding how political actors create and sustain polarized narratives. The interplay between language and politics has grown more complex in recent years, with digital media and algorithm-driven content shaping the dissemination and reception of political rhetoric. Studies such as Liu et al. (2023) argue that social media platforms amplify polarization by tailoring content to reinforce users' existing beliefs, exacerbating ideological divides. The increasing prevalence of "us versus them" narratives has made political discourse a crucial area of study, especially in understanding how such rhetoric affects public trust, societal cohesion, and democratic processes.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

Van Dijk's Ideological Square remains one of the most influential frameworks in CDA, offering a versatile model for dissecting the underlying strategies of political rhetoric. This approach situates discourse as both a reflection and a driver of social power dynamics, underscoring how language reinforces group identities and constructs ideological dichotomies. Van Dijk's (2001) emphasis on cognitive and social processes—how individuals interpret, internalize, and reproduce discourse—adds depth to this analytical framework. Recent expansions of Van Dijk's framework highlight its applicability to digital and multimodal discourse. For instance, García et al. (2022) applied the Ideological Square to analyze visual rhetoric in political advertisements, demonstrating how visual elements complement textual strategies to manipulate perceptions. Similarly, Tang and Chen (2023) explored its use in analyzing misinformation campaigns, revealing how subtle linguistic choices amplify biases in digital environments.

Other theoretical advancements, such as Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (2021) work on mediated discourse, emphasize the role of intertextuality and recontextualization in shaping political narratives. By integrating these perspectives, scholars have deepened our understanding of how discourse operates across diverse communicative contexts, particularly in fostering ideological alignment and polarization.

Empirical Background

Empirical studies from 2015 onward provide critical insights into the evolution of sectarian rhetoric. Murphy (2024) underscores the transformative impact of digital media on political communication, noting how platforms like Twitter and Facebook enable rapid dissemination of polarized discourse. The study emphasizes that algorithm-driven amplification of provocative content reinforces "echo chambers," where users are exposed predominantly to ideologically congruent narratives. Similarly, López-Nicolás et al. (2021) investigate the role of crisis events in intensifying political rhetoric. Their analysis of European political campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals a marked increase in other-demotion strategies, as political leaders capitalized on public fears to consolidate support. This aligns with Beddoe's (2024) findings that crises serve as fertile grounds for ideological entrenchment, often exacerbating divisions through strategic framing of "us versus them" narratives.

Shinbori et al. (2022) provide another critical dimension by examining the societal impacts of polarized rhetoric. Their longitudinal study across democratic nations demonstrates a significant correlation between ideological divides and declining trust in institutions, highlighting how sectarian rhetoric undermines the social fabric.

Emerging studies also focus on the intersection of rhetoric and technology. For instance, Cruz et al. (2023) analyzes the use of artificial intelligence in crafting personalized political messages, emphasizing how tailored content magnifies ideological divisions. The integration of AI in political campaigns, while innovative, raises ethical concerns about the manipulation of public opinion through data-driven strategies.

Gap in the Literature

While significant progress has been made in understanding political discourse, several gaps persist. First, the nuanced dynamics of sectarian rhetoric—particularly how it varies across political ideologies and cultural contexts—require further exploration. Existing studies often focus on broad trends, leaving the micro-level intricacies of rhetorical strategies underexamined. For example, while the role of digital media in amplifying polarized narratives is well-documented (Murphy, 2024; Liu et al., 2023), less attention has been paid to how these narratives are linguistically constructed to resonate with specific audiences.

Second, comparative analyses of sectarian rhetoric across global political systems are sparse. Most studies concentrate on Western democracies, overlooking the rhetorical strategies employed in non-Western or emerging democracies. This study aims to address these gaps by integrating theoretical insights from Van Dijk's framework with empirical findings from diverse political contexts, offering a comprehensive analysis of sectarian rhetoric's manifestations and impacts.

Lastly, the ethical implications of emerging technologies, such as AI and deepfakes, in shaping political discourse warrant further investigation. While Cruz et al. (2023) highlight the role of AI in crafting persuasive rhetoric, the broader societal consequences of such innovations remain an underexplored domain. By bridging these gaps, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving landscape of political discourse and its implications for democratic governance.

The Problem

The rise of divisive political rhetoric poses profound challenges to societal cohesion and the foundations of democratic governance. Political discourse, traditionally a forum for debate and dialogue, is increasingly characterized by polarizing strategies that exploit group identities to create and deepen ideological divides (Van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 2001). The strategic deployment of sectarian rhetoric—language designed to emphasize in-group solidarity while demonizing out-groups—has become a prominent feature of modern political communication. This phenomenon undermines collective trust, fosters alienation among diverse societal groups, and exacerbates tensions within and across political systems (Murphy, 2024; Shinbori et al., 2022).

The global proliferation of digital platforms has amplified these dynamics, transformed the nature and reached of political rhetoric. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok enable the rapid dissemination of provocative and emotionally charged messages, often tailored to specific demographics using data-driven algorithms (Liu et al., 2023). This digital ecosystem not only accelerates the spread of divisive content but also entrenches individuals within ideological "echo chambers," where exposure to opposing viewpoints is minimal (Murphy, 2024). Such environments heighten susceptibility to manipulation and reduce the potential for constructive political engagement (Beddoe, 2024). Moreover, emerging technologies like artificial intelligence have introduced new dimensions to political communication. From AI-generated propaganda to deepfake videos, these tools enhance the ability of political actors to craft persuasive and often misleading narratives, further complicating efforts to maintain transparency and accountability (Cruz et al., 2023). These technological advancements present ethical dilemmas, particularly regarding the manipulation of public opinion and the erosion of informed decision-making (Tang & Chen, 2023).

The present study seeks to address critical gaps in understanding the mechanics and consequences of sectarian rhetoric. Specifically, it examines the linguistic manifestations of such rhetoric, explores variations across political factions, and evaluates its broader societal impacts. By investigating how language constructs and perpetuates "us versus them" narratives, this research contributes to the broader discourse on mitigating polarization, fostering inclusive dialogue, and safeguarding democratic processes in an era of unprecedented technological and communicative change.

Objectives of the Study

The following were the objectives of the current study:

- To conduct a detailed analysis of the linguistic and rhetorical manifestations of sectarian rhetoric within political discourse, emphasizing both traditional and digital communicative contexts.

- To compare and contrast the discursive strategies employed by diverse political factions, with a focus on identifying patterns, divergences, and alignments with Van Dijk's theoretical constructs (Van Dijk, 2001).

--To critically assess the societal implications of sectarian rhetoric, particularly its influence on public trust, institutional credibility, intergroup relations, and the overall health of democratic processes (Shinbori et al., 2022; López-Nicolás et al., 2021).

--To investigate the role of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and social media algorithms, in shaping, amplifying, and disseminating sectarian rhetoric (Cruz et al., 2023; Murphy, 2024).

--To provide actionable recommendations for mitigating the negative impacts of sectarian rhetoric through education, policy reform, and technological innovation.

Novelty of the Study

This research offers a pioneering and multifaceted approach to understanding sectarian rhetoric by integrating Van Dijk's theoretical framework with contemporary empirical findings. While previous studies have extensively explored political discourse, this study uniquely bridges the theoretical and practical dimensions by examining the intersection of linguistic strategies, technological advancements, and societal impacts (Fairclough, 2001; Murphy, 2024).

By incorporating insights from recent investigations conducted between 2015 and 2024, the study provides a timely analysis of emerging trends in political communication. For instance, it highlights the influence of algorithmic content curation in reinforcing ideological divides, the ethical dilemmas posed by AI-generated propaganda, and the shifting nature of political engagement in digital spaces (Beddoe, 2024; Tang & Chen, 2023). Additionally, the comparative approach adopted in this research allows for an in-depth examination of how different political factions adapt their rhetorical strategies to resonate with their target audiences while adhering to or diverging from established theoretical paradigms (López-Nicolás et al., 2021).

A significant contribution of this study lies in its exploration of underexamined dimensions, such as the ethical and societal implications of technologically mediated rhetoric. By addressing these issues, the research not only advances academic understanding but also provides practical insights for policymakers, educators, and media practitioners seeking to counteract the divisive effects of sectarian rhetoric and promote more inclusive and constructive forms of political communication.

6. Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

***RQ1:** How does sectarian rhetoric manifest in contemporary political discourse?*

***RQ2:** What are the differences in discursive strategies across political factions?*

***RQ3:** What are the societal implications of sectarian rhetoric?*

***H0:** Sectarian rhetoric does not significantly affect societal cohesion or public perception.*

Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was chosen for this study to offer a comprehensive understanding of the research questions by leveraging the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Mixed methods, as defined by Creswell (2018), integrate quantitative and qualitative data to provide a richer, more holistic view of the research problem. This approach has been extensively used in the social sciences to capture the complexities of human behavior, particularly in areas like political discourse analysis (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2020).

Corpus of the Study

The corpus of this study consisted of 150 political texts, including speeches, campaign materials, and social media posts. The selection of these texts aimed to encompass a variety of political contexts and communicative forms to reflect the contemporary political landscape. The texts were categorized based on political affiliation and thematic content to provide a balanced representation of the political spectrum.

Model of the Study

Van Dijk's Ideological Square (1998) was applied as the primary analytical framework for the study. This model focuses on how language reflects ideologies by analyzing the strategies of self-presentation and other-demotion in political discourse. The framework was used to systematically categorize rhetorical strategies in the political texts.

Data Collection Procedures

The data were collected from publicly available political texts, including political speeches, campaign materials, and social media posts, sourced from archives, websites, and various media platforms. The selection process aimed for diversity in political affiliation and thematic content to ensure that the study captured a wide spectrum of rhetorical strategies. Publicly available texts were chosen for their accessibility and the real-world relevance they provided in understanding the political discourse of the period.

Data Analysis Procedures

The following steps were followed in the analysis of the obtained data:

Qualitative Analysis: The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding in Atlas.ti. This allowed for the identification of key themes, patterns, and rhetorical strategies in the political texts. Themes were coded based on Van Dijk's dimensions of self-presentation and other-demotion. The qualitative analysis aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of how political actors frame issues and construct identities.

Quantitative Analysis: The quantitative component involved statistical methods to compare the frequency of rhetorical strategies across different political affiliations and to explore correlations

with public opinion data. Quantitative analysis allowed for the identification of trends and patterns in political communication over time.

Results

Statistical Results of the First Research Question

The first research question aimed to analyze sectarian rhetoric, focusing on how political texts from different affiliations represent in-group and out-group identities. The findings revealed distinct patterns in the representation of these groups, with conservative texts exhibiting higher frequencies of negative out-group representation compared to liberal texts. This finding aligns with the broader trends in political rhetoric, where conservative political discourse often emphasizes in-group cohesion by negatively portraying out-groups, especially in the context of national security, immigration, and cultural identity (e.g., Jost et al., 2017; Mudde, 2019).

Table 1

Sectarian Rhetoric by Political Affiliation

Political Affiliation	Positive In-Group (%)	Negative Out-Group (%)
Conservative	70	85
Liberal	60	50

The data reveals a substantial disparity in the use of negative out-group representation, with conservative texts using negative out-group rhetoric significantly more frequently (85%) compared to liberal texts (50%). This result reflects the trend that conservative rhetoric tends to construct a sharper dichotomy between "us" and "them," often employing out-group demotion as a strategy to bolster in-group solidarity (Van Dijk, 1998). Recent studies (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 2020) have emphasized the role of negative out-group representation in fostering nationalistic ideologies, which is consistent with these findings.

Statistical Results of the Second Research Question

The second research question examined the discursive strategies used by conservative and liberal political factions. The analysis identified that conservatives tend to use fear-based narratives more frequently, while liberals focus on inclusive narratives. These findings align with existing research on the ideological divides in rhetorical strategies employed by different political factions (e.g., Hume & Susi, 2022).

Table 2

Rhetorical Strategies by Political Factions

Strategy	Conservative (%)	Liberal (%)
Fear-Mongering	75	30
Inclusive Narratives	20	70
Polarization Techniques	85	45

Conservatives utilize fear-mongering tactics at a much higher rate (75%) compared to liberals (30%). Fear-based rhetoric often revolves around issues of security, economic threat, or cultural loss (e.g., the "immigrant invasion" narrative). These strategies align with the findings of several studies that argue conservatives use fear to mobilize political support by emphasizing societal threats (Perry & Scrivens, 2019). On the other hand, liberals emphasize inclusivity (70%), focusing on themes like diversity, unity, and social justice, aligning with their progressive stance on equality and human rights.

Statistical Results of the Third Research Question

The third research question explored the societal impacts of sectarian rhetoric, particularly its correlation with increased polarization and reduced trust in institutions. The results suggest a strong relationship between the use of sectarian rhetoric and these negative societal outcomes, reinforcing the findings of previous studies that highlight the harmful effects of divisive political discourse.

Table 3

Societal Impacts of Sectarian Rhetoric

Variable	Correlation (R)	Significance (p-value)
Polarization	0.82	<0.01
Institutional Trust	-0.65	<0.01

The data show a very strong positive correlation between the use of sectarian rhetoric and polarization ($R = 0.82$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that as sectarian rhetoric increases, so does societal polarization. This aligns with recent literature on the relationship between divisive political discourse and social fragmentation (e.g., Papa Georgiou & Bateman, 2021). Additionally, there is a significant negative correlation between sectarian rhetoric and institutional trust ($R = -0.65$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that the use of sectarian rhetoric erodes public confidence in institutions.

Discussion

Discussion Related to RQ1

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *How does sectarian rhetoric manifest in political discourse, and how do political factions differ in their portrayal of in-group and out-group identities?*

The study found that conservative political texts exhibit a higher frequency of negative out-group representation compared to liberal texts. This aligns with Van Dijk's Ideological Square framework, which posits that in-group identity is often constructed through the devaluation of the out-group. In conservative rhetoric, the out-group is depicted as a threat, enhancing in-group cohesion through negative framing.

The findings support Van Dijk's (1998) theory, which highlights how political discourse uses rhetorical strategies to construct polarized identities. Van Dijk's concept of the Ideological Square—focusing on the positive portrayal of the in-group and the negative portrayal of the out-group—was evident in the data. Conservative texts employed a high frequency of negative out-group representations (85%), which is consistent with the idea that political rhetoric often reinforces social divisions by depicting certain groups (e.g., immigrants, minorities) as undesirable or threatening. This rhetoric serves to rally the in-group (e.g., conservative voters) by emphasizing a common enemy, often external or "other."

Discussion Related to RQ2

Research Question 2 (RQ2): *What rhetorical strategies do conservative and liberal political factions use to construct their identities and engage with the opposition?*

The analysis revealed that conservatives predominantly employ fear-based appeals (75%) and polarization techniques (85%), while liberals focus more on inclusive narratives (70%) and less on fear-mongering (30%). These differences reflect broader ideological divides, with conservatives tending to emphasize existential threats and liberals focusing on unity and social justice.

The differences in rhetorical strategies observed between conservatives and liberals reflect deeper socio-political dynamics. Conservatives' reliance on fear-based narratives aligns with the findings of previous research that highlights how conservative rhetoric often frames issues in terms of threats (e.g., national security, immigration) and positions the in-group as under siege (e.g., Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). This fear-mongering strategy is designed to galvanize support by fostering anxiety and presenting clear "us vs. them" distinctions. Conversely, liberals' focus on inclusivity and diversity can be understood as part of a broader ideological commitment to human rights, equality, and social justice, which often frames societal issues in terms of unity and cooperation. This finding aligns with the work of López-Nicolás et al. (2021), who observe that political rhetoric tends to reflect the broader ideological commitments of political factions. Conservatives are more likely to use exclusionary, fear-based rhetoric to maintain group solidarity, while liberals lean toward inclusive, progressive narratives to foster collaboration and cohesion. This distinction supports the hypothesis that political factions engage in different rhetorical strategies to construct opposing identities.

Discussion Related to RQ3

Research Question 3 (RQ3): *What are the societal impacts of sectarian rhetoric, particularly in terms of polarization and trust in institutions?*

The study found a significant correlation between sectarian rhetoric and increased polarization ($R = 0.82, p < 0.01$), as well as a decline in institutional trust ($R = -0.65, p < 0.01$). These results suggest that as sectarian rhetoric intensifies, polarization increases, and public trust in political institutions diminishes. These findings resonate with concerns raised in contemporary research about the negative effects of sectarian rhetoric on democratic societies. Sectarian rhetoric, particularly when used in political discourse, fosters division and distrust, weakening social cohesion and undermining the legitimacy of political institutions. The significant correlation between sectarian rhetoric and increased polarization aligns with the conclusions of scholars like Shinbori et al. (2022), who argue that divisive political discourse exacerbates ideological divides, intensifies social conflicts, and leads to a more fragmented public sphere. These findings align with recent studies on the societal impacts of divisive rhetoric, such as those by Gidron & Hall (2021) and Sides et al. (2020), which highlight the connection between increased political polarization and the rise of partisan rhetoric. Moreover, the negative correlation with institutional trust echoes the findings of several studies that show how polarized rhetoric contributes to a general decline in faith in governmental and political institutions (e.g., Hetherington, 2021).

Conclusion

At the heart of the current study were three central research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3), each of which focused on different aspects of sectarian rhetoric in political discourse. The key findings derived from these questions contribute significantly to the understanding of how political language constructs identities and affects public perception. These findings are essential not only for scholars of political communication but also for practitioners and policymakers interested in mitigating the divisive impacts of rhetoric.

Sectarian Rhetoric and Political Identity Construction (RQ1): The study found that conservative political texts displayed a much higher frequency of negative out-group representation than liberal texts, with conservatives emphasizing threats posed by the out-group (85% negative out-group portrayal). This finding aligns with Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square framework, confirming that political discourse often constructs in-group identity by negatively framing out-group identities. This result emphasizes the ongoing use of sectarian rhetoric to solidify political loyalties by positioning the "other" as a threat. Recent scholarship (e.g., Le et al., 2022) supports these findings, showing that such rhetoric reinforces ideological divides and promotes polarized identities.

Rhetorical Strategies Employed by Political Factions (RQ2): The study identified distinct rhetorical strategies between conservative and liberal factions, with conservatives relying heavily on fear-mongering (75%) and polarization techniques (85%), while liberals favored inclusive narratives (70%) and less fear-based rhetoric (30%). These strategies reflect the ideological divides between the two factions: conservatives use fear and exclusionary language to rally their base, while liberals emphasize unity and social justice to appeal to diverse groups. These findings mirror broader socio-political dynamics and recent research by scholars like López-Nicolás et al. (2021), who highlight the role of discourse in shaping political mobilization and social cohesion.

Societal Impacts of Sectarian Rhetoric (RQ3): The analysis of the societal consequences of sectarian rhetoric revealed a significant correlation between increased polarization ($R = 0.82, p < 0.01$) and reduced trust in institutions ($R = -0.65, p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that divisive political rhetoric contributes to a fragmented society where trust in democratic institutions and social solidarity erodes. This is in line with the work of Shinbori et al. (2022), who found that political polarization, exacerbated by sectarian rhetoric, undermines societal trust and democratic engagement. These findings underscore the urgency of addressing the role of rhetoric in shaping political and social dynamics.

These findings are pivotal in understanding how rhetoric not only shapes political discourse but also has tangible effects on social cohesion and public trust. The study's empirical evidence reinforces the view that sectarian rhetoric plays a central role in both political identity formation and societal polarization, highlighting the importance of addressing this issue in political communication strategies.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have significant implications for both theory and practice. By revealing the pervasive role of sectarian rhetoric in fostering political polarization and undermining trust in institutions, this research underscores the importance of understanding and mitigating divisive discourse in contemporary political environments. The study demonstrates how political actors use rhetorical strategies, such as fear-mongering and the construction of negative out-group identities, to influence public perception and mobilize support. These findings have several practical applications:

--Policymakers: The study suggests that political leaders and policymakers should be mindful of the rhetoric they use, as it can have far-reaching effects on societal cohesion and institutional legitimacy. Specifically, policymakers could implement communication strategies that avoid inflammatory language and instead focus on promoting unity, inclusivity, and constructive dialogue. The growing role of social media and digital platforms in amplifying political messages makes it all the more essential for leaders to adopt rhetoric that fosters understanding rather than division.

--Educators: The study also highlights the potential for educators to intervene in the growing culture of political polarization. By integrating media literacy programs and critical thinking exercises into educational curricula, educators can help students recognize and resist sectarian rhetoric. This would empower citizens to engage more critically with political discourse and reduce the influence of divisive narratives. Educational programs that promote cross-cultural understanding and empathy could also counterbalance the negative effects of out-group demotion.

--Civil Society and Media Organizations: Given the impact of sectarian rhetoric on public trust, organizations dedicated to promoting democracy and public trust in institutions should consider developing campaigns aimed at fostering inclusivity and media literacy. Engaging in efforts to

reduce the impact of polarizing narratives in media could help bridge divides and encourage more collaborative problem-solving at the societal level.

Limitations of the Study

While the study offers valuable insights into the role of sectarian rhetoric in political discourse, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged:

--Language Limitation: The study primarily focused on English-language political texts, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other linguistic and cultural contexts. Political discourse in different languages may involve distinct rhetorical strategies, cultural references, and communication styles that could lead to variations in the way sectarianism is expressed. For example, while conservative texts in English may emphasize certain out-group threats (e.g., immigration), political rhetoric in other languages or cultures might focus on different social issues or use different frames to construct identities. Future research could expand the corpus to include texts in multiple languages to gain a more nuanced understanding of sectarian rhetoric in diverse political environments.

--Scope of Data: The study's focus on political texts from 2015 to 2024 offers a snapshot of contemporary political rhetoric. However, the rapidly evolving nature of political communication—especially in light of the increasing prominence of digital and social media—means that the rhetorical strategies and impacts identified in this study may change over time. As political discourse continues to adapt to new media platforms and technological advancements, future research could explore longer periods or more dynamic periods of political change to assess how these patterns evolve.

--Potential Biases in Text Selection: The study relied on publicly available political texts, which may introduce selection biases. For instance, political texts sourced from specific media outlets or political campaigns may not be fully representative of the broader political discourse in a given country or region. Additionally, the study did not account for variations in audience demographics, which could influence the effectiveness and reception of sectarian rhetoric. Future studies could incorporate a wider range of data sources, including televised speeches, debates, and political ads, to ensure a more comprehensive analysis.

Delimitations of the Study

The study has specific delimitations that focus the research on particular aspects of political discourse:

--Temporal Focus: The study's scope was confined to political texts from 2015 to 2024. This focus on contemporary trends allows for an in-depth analysis of recent shifts in political rhetoric, particularly as it pertains to the rise of populist movements and the increasing reliance on social media platforms in political campaigns. By concentrating on the last decade, the study captures the most relevant shifts in political communication, especially as sectarian rhetoric has become more pronounced in the digital era.

--Type of Political Texts: The study focused on political texts such as speeches, campaign materials, and social media posts. These forms of communication were selected because they are central to how political messages are disseminated to the public and how political leaders engage with their constituencies. However, the study did not include other forms of political discourse, such as policy documents, legislative debates, or informal communications. Future research could expand the scope to include these additional texts to examine how sectarian rhetoric manifests in a broader range of political contexts.

Suggestions for Further Research

Building on the findings of this study, several directions for future research emerge:

The Role of Emerging Technologies in Shaping Rhetorical Strategies: The rise of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and automated content generation has already begun to reshape political communication. AI-driven tools like chatbots, automated political ads, and algorithms that prioritize certain types of content in social media feeds may amplify sectarian rhetoric or create new forms of polarization. Future studies could explore how these technologies influence rhetorical strategies, particularly in terms of how they construct in-group and out-group identities.

Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies: Given that sectarian rhetoric is not limited to any one political ideology or cultural context, future research could benefit from cross-cultural comparative studies. Comparing how sectarianism manifests in different political environments—such as in the U.S., Europe, and the Global South—could reveal important insights into the universal and culturally specific aspects of divisive political discourse.

Impact of Digital and Social Media Platforms: While this study examined political texts more broadly, the role of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok in amplifying political rhetoric has become increasingly significant. Future research could focus specifically on the influence of these platforms in shaping political narratives, especially as they relate to the construction of out-group identities and the spread of polarizing content.

Longitudinal Studies on the Evolution of Political Rhetoric: Given the rapid evolution of political discourse, longitudinal studies that track the trajectory of sectarian rhetoric over multiple election cycles or periods of political crisis would provide valuable insights into how political rhetoric adapts over time. This would be particularly relevant in analyzing shifts in political communication in response to global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the rise of nationalist movements.

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