



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Altruistic and Emotive Legitimization Strategies in Pakistani,  
Indian and US Politicians' Discourse**

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**ABSTRACT**

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Research into manifestations of altruism and emotions in political discourse suggests that these facilitate in legitimizing the decisions and actions of political leaders. An important aspect of the political rhetoric is the strategies used by political actors to justify their acts and decisions. Drawing upon Critical Discourse Analysis and using textual analysis, this study focuses on altruistic legitimization strategies employed by Pakistani, Indian and US politicians. The scope of the present study is limited to explaining the linguistic construction and shaping of altruistic legitimization strategies. This is done through analysis of the discursive structures from the speeches of Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump. Results show striking similarities among their speeches when it comes to altruistic legitimization strategies and strategies based on fear are concerned. However, Trump stands apart from other two leaders in that his strategies are less emotive

**Introduction**

Research into manifestations of altruism and emotions in political discourse suggests that it facilitates in legitimizing the decisions and actions of political leaders (Reye, 2011). Language is not just a means of communication; it is, rather, an instrument of power and control as well. An important aspect of the political rhetoric is the strategies used by political actors to justify their acts and decisions. Leaders of different ideologies use certain legitimization strategies to legitimize their choices and decisions on important issues.

## **Legitimization**

Legitimization can be defined as a process through which beliefs, attitudes and actions can be justified and vindicated (Perren& Jennings, 2005). It is a method, or a set of methods, used to acquire legitimacy (Bourricaud, 1987). It is, hence, a part of functional rhetoric. Political speakers employ legitimization strategies in order to justify their actions (Cap, 2008). Another definition, which is more elaborative in nature and the one that covers the issue in its entirety is that legitimization is “the creation of a sense of positive, beneficial, ethical, understandable, necessary or otherwise acceptable action in a specific setting.” (Vaara, 2014)

Politicians have to create an impression that whatever they do is driven by their urge to make the nation prosperous, strong and sovereign. Their slogans and speeches are based on concepts of service. Hence, they come up with certain legitimization strategies so that they appear to be catering to common good (Reyes, 2011).

## **Political Discourse and Persuasive Strategies**

Research and theoretical discussion into political discourse show that it is the writing and speeches of the political actors, i.e. politicians, heads of governments and states as well as the elected representatives (Dijk, 1997). While politicians may announce their manifestos and explain their actions in their public speeches, politicians either legitimize or de-legitimize. Politics is essentially the art of persuasion. Political actors persuade voters to elect them and activists to speed up their campaign in order to gain power. Hence, persuasive strategies occupy primary importance in developing a sound political narrative and counter-narrative. Politicians make promises and articulate their visions for a future, which is better than the present. They not only present their own ideas but also discredit their opponents (Azin&Roodi, 2007). Hence, it is a process of legitimization as well as de-legitimization.

## **Altruistic Strategies**

Researchers and psychologists have been trying to find out what drives people to help others and what they try to get back by helping others (Roberts, 2019). Altruistic strategies are a type of persuasive strategies in which the political actors tend to demonstrate their selfness for the sake of larger good. Altruism can be defined as a feeling for empathy with those at a disadvantage without any consideration for one’s own gains. It is cooperative in nature and is characterized by negation of self and a desire to help one’s fellow beings. Individuals often come up with description or narration of their personal experiences as part of the legitimization process to establish their credibility and align that with their concept of reality. Thus, politicians claim that it is the well-being of public in general that they are concerned with, and

that they do not have their own ends to serve (Reyes, 2011). These altruistic strategies spring from a system of values. Politicians make the people believe that the motive behind their actions is public good and hence they use the people's welfare as a tool for legitimizing their own actions (Kocourek, 2017). Hence, the social good is shown to take precedence over the personal good.

### **Emotive Strategies**

Another type of persuasive strategies is the one that deals with emotions of the masses. Salmela & von Scheve (2018) believe that both the far-right and far-left politicians in a society exploit emotions of the electorate. Meanwhile, it has also been established that fear and resentment can easily be developed among masses against certain groups (Salmela & von Scheve, 2017). Although there is no conclusive evidence to prove that political campaigns adopt emotive strategies on the basis of some informed research on impact of these strategies, it is evident that all the campaigns adopt them (Schnur, 2007). Politicians can easily incite anger and fear among their followers or public at large through the advertent or inadvertent use of certain emotive strategies (Searle & Ridout, 2017). These strategies can result in certain specific or general kinds of behavior.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis and Textual Analysis**

The study is set in the methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA deals with language and power relationship as well as language and ideology relationship. It is interested in finding out how language is used to acquire, maintain or boost power in a non-egalitarian and unequal setting (Wodak & Mayor, 2015). While employing CDA, researchers have extensively used textual analysis (TA). As a methodology, TA understands language, both written and spoken, and images in the text to understand how these are used to communicate and make meaning. In a ground breaking book for social science researchers, Fairclough declares "texts bring about changes" (2003, p.8) because it is the speech or writing that leads to generation of theories and ideas, which ultimately effect changes in society. Since the publication of that book, thousands of studies have been conducted using TA. TA looks at the content in text and talk, and analyses it by looking at the linguistic choices social actors make. The studies in political communication using TA have looked at, analysis of newspapers in terms of class politics (Russello, 2016), discursive strategies in literary texts (Ullah & Aib, 2017) and political speeches (Phadnis & Kashyap, 2019).

### **Altruistic Strategies**

In this section, we analyze different altruistic strategies employed by politicians to gain and perpetuate political power.

## Altruistic Strategies by Trump

Trump launched his campaign with presenting the United States as a weak and crumbling country, and then came up with a slogan, i.e. "Make America great again". He claimed that the only way of making the United States a great country was to elect him as its president. First he informed people that Mexico and China had snatched all the businesses and that was why there was rampant unemployment in the country. He goes on to promise people, "I will bring back our jobs".

Trump legitimized his campaign by saying that he was doing it for the sake of the United States and the Americans. "I have joined the political arena so that the powerful can no longer beat up on people who cannot defend themselves." He presented himself as someone who will fight the case of the downtrodden against the powerful people. Despite being a billionaire and a successful businessman, Trump used the powerful-powerless binary to attract his voters. He repeats over and over again, "I am with you. I will fight for you."

Trump's campaign had several similarities with those of Khan. As far as the altruistic legitimization strategies are concerned, we see that both Khan and Trump draw on their charitable work. While Khan repeatedly refers to the cancer hospital that he built in the memory of his mother, Trump states, "I have raised a tremendous amount of money for the Vets [sic].... I raised close to \$6 million".

Trump informed the masses that he is spending his own money during his campaign unlike his opponents who rely on lobbyists and wealthy businessmen. He says, "I don't need anyone's money. It's nice. I don't need anybody's money. **I am using my own money**". This strategy is very effective because it presents Trump as someone who can sacrifice his own wealth for making America great again.

Talking of wealth, Trump said that the United States needed money and that money was available to make "our country so rich again, and therefore, make it great again. Because we need money. **We are dying. We are dying. We need money.** We have to do it, and we need the **right people**". The repetition of the clause "we are dying" not only instills fear in people's heart about their future but also informs them that it is Trump that can save them from this death. In order to avoid death, the United States needs the right people. Since all the Trump opponents are crooked and incompetent, it is Trump who represents the right people. Hence, his campaign is legitimized.

Another striking similarity between Khan and Trump in terms of employing altruistic legitimization strategies is that they claim that they have given up their luxurious lifestyles for the sake of public good. In the same way as Khan stated that he had everything in life but preferred to serve his country, Trump says, "A lot of people said he will not run. Number one, he will not like to **give up his lifestyle.** They are right about that. **But I am doing it.**"

## **Altruistic Strategies by Khan**

Khan has always claimed that he entered the political arena with a mission, and that he does not have any personal interests. He has repeatedly stated, “**God has given me everything. I could have lived a cozy life.**” He emphasizes that his “**25-year long political struggle**” is “**meant only for you**”. He says that he could have stayed in any other country and enjoyed a comfortable life. “Never has Britain owned anyone as much as it owned me. [Former UK Prime Minister] Margaret Thatcher once said to me, ‘Imran! Consider Britain as your home’; however, whatever I might have done, I, Imran Khan, was a Pakistani; I could never have become English.” This is perhaps the best example of the use of altruistic strategies in politics. The very claim that a person who could have lived a comfortable life in Britain decided to serve his own country and its people shows that the speaker wants people to understand that his struggle is focused on ‘public good’, and there is not even an iota of self-aggrandizement. Such claims could be heard in every Khan speech. This strategy is also used by Trump over and over again. He informs the US voters that as he is a billionaire and a very successful businessman, he could have carried on the way he was moving but it was just in order to “make America great again” that he has decided to enter the political arena and contest presidential elections.

After entering the political arena, Khan has been consistently saying “**We are gonna fight** the parties of the status-quo, these **crooked politicians**, the **alliance of the crooked.**” Linked with his claims that he was better off when not in politics, he associates his desire to fight and win the war against parties of the status quo. However, he links his ambition with public good by using pronoun “**We**”. He tells people that it is the crooked politicians and the alliance of the crooked that he is up against, and all that will result in turning their lives better. He contrasts his own wealth and achievements with corruption by other politicians. He says in a TV interview, “I have earned money all over the world, and brought that to Pakistan while these people have looted money from Pakistan and stashed it in banks abroad”. The allegation that other politicians have stashed money in foreign banks while Khan has brought his hard-earned money to Pakistan means that he wants the people to understand the difference between selflessness and other’s corruption and callousness.

Khan also makes promises that are based purely on public good. He informs people that his only purpose behind coming to politics is to redeem the self-respect of Pakistanis. Again, there is a close similarity with the strategy that Trump employs. In one of the speeches, he says, “I will not let my people be disgraced”, and that “in my government, there will be a respect for Pakistani passport”. He assures people that good times will soon come and he will create such opportunities in the country that “God willing, there will be a time when people from other countries will come to Pakistan to find jobs.”

### **Altruistic Strategies by Modi**

Modi presents himself as an ordinary man who is aware of the problems facing the common man. This is one of the best altruistic strategies. If we compare this strategy with those employed by Khan, we realize that there is a stark difference between the two. Khan builds his image as a rock star: someone who enjoyed every pleasure in life but has renounced all pleasures because he considers his national duty to be superior to everything else. As against it, Modi claims that he has been an ordinary Indian like his voters. He claims that he is not concerned with his image at all. In a TV interview, when asked if he is worried about his image, he says, "I am more concerned with Gujarat's image than my own image." He explains that being a chief minister has not had any effect on his mindset since "I believe CM [chief minister] means common man and PM [Prime Minister] primary member in BJP." By so doing, Modi is, in fact, informing his electorate that even after becoming the prime minister, he will be at their service.

Another altruistic strategy is based on promises of service delivery. Modi claims,

"I will be satisfied only when I have a country in which even the poorest family has a house to live in; elderly will have medical provisions, children will have education; farmers will not have to commit suicide, and people will not have to look for employment. Until then, I will have no peace and satisfaction." Interview with News 18.

This resonates very well with the public at large. Faced with unemployment and poverty, the masses need someone who thinks about them, and wants to provide them with housing, medical facilities, children's education. Masses quickly stand behind those who show empathy and concern for their issues. Farmers' suicides have been a major issue in India during the past two decades. That is what Modi hits at. Not only this, he claims that he will not have any peace and satisfaction until he has provided people with all that they need.

### **Emotive Legitimization Strategies**

Politicians all over the world employ various strategies to evoke the electorate's emotions in order to legitimize their actions or to advocate their campaign. By so doing they provoke mental and behavioural responses from their audience. Legitimizing one's own perception of reality through appeal to emotions is not a novel idea (Reyes, 2011), and politicians often employ these to acquire power (Reyes, 2010). Researchers have studied use of individual emotions as well as sets of emotions (Nabi, 2010). However, whether discreet or grouped, emotions play a vital role in shaping our worldview and constructing our individual and collective cognition.

### **Emotive Legitimization Strategies by Khan**

Let us begin with Prime Minister Khan has been evoking massive amount of emotions among the Pakistani youth for the last two decades. Khan started his political career after captaining Pakistani cricket team to win 1992 World Cup and building a cancer hospital in memory of his mother who died of cancer. Khan's hospital provides free cancer treatment to the poor, and he makes frequent reference to it during his public rallies. Addressing a political gathering, he repeatedly refers to the pain his mother went through and proclaims: *"I did not want any other mother dying of cancer."* He evokes strong emotions here. No one would like his/her mother to die of cancer. It is painful. This pain is not individual; it is, rather, shared. This can happen to anyone and everyone. Taking an ideational approach to study this sentence, we will see that cancer is used as an actor

However, referring to cancer hospital and evoking fear of cancer is not the only type of emotion he evokes. He also refers to the sufferings of the Pakistani masses. In one of the speeches, he narrates an incident told to him by a poor father in the following words: *"The family had to leave behind their disabled in the drought-hit area because they did not have resources to bring him along."* While saying that, he is emotionally choked and gasps. He arouses the emotions of pity among the masses by talking about the differences between the haves and the have-nots. Here, the material process of leaving behind the disabled child is contrasted with the bringing him along. The parents were unable to carry the child for lack of resources. The adjectival phrases disabled child and drought-hit area leave a great mark on the audience's mind so that they start feeling pity for the impoverished family.

### **Emotive Legitimization Strategies by Trump**

One of the most recurrent emotive strategies adopted by Trump during his campaign was the evocation of fear. For instance, *"When you have ISIS and others who wanna blow up our country"*. Trump knows that despite the lapse of 15 years, the images of 9/11 are still fresh in the minds of the US public. Although they have not been directly by ISIS yet masses can easily be manipulated, through evocation of fear, that they face a threat from ISIS since they can recall the 9/11 images. In addition, there have been media reports on ISIS for quite some time now. In this situation, it is but natural for masses to fear ingress of ISIS in their country. This is coupled with his claims that his counterparts have done nothing to stop ISIS. It provides him with a perfect platform to legitimize his own stance. Hence, he promises, *"We are going to defeat thebarbarians of ISIS and we are going to defeat them fast"*. Use of plural pronoun acts as a binding agent here since the candidate regards himself as part of the masses and promises that it will not be hard to quickly defeat the terrorist group.

Another issue in Trump campaign, and the one that resonated very highly as part of his foreign policy was illegal immigration. Talking about the Mexican immigrants, he says, *"They are bringing drugs. They are bringing crime. They are rapists,*

and some, *I assume, are good people*". The issues of drugs, crimes and rapes are not unknown to the US public. However, Trump evokes fear among the masses about the impact of Mexican immigrants who are termed as drug barons, criminals and rapists. That there could be a few good people is just an assumption, according to him. This is used to legitimize his idea of building a wall on the Mexican border.

Coming to the domestic front, Trump declares, "*Our country is going to hell.*" Every politician vying to replace the incumbent ruler states that the country is nose diving, and it is always done to legitimize their own plans. Trump believes that the Democrats have taken the country to such a position that it is on its way to utter and complete destruction. In order to avoid that, there is a need to bring Trump to power. If Trump is not voted into power,

*"Democrats would unleash a wave of violent crime that endangers families everywhere."*

Here Trump appeals to the emotions of families that Democrats would perpetrate crimes against them throughout the United States if he is not elected. Democrats are presented as enemies of the people throughout the country. Hence, it should be a source of concern for the masses. He legitimizes himself while referring to violence both in domestic and international arenas.

### **Emotive Legitimization Strategies by Modi**

What Modi and Trump have in common when it comes to employing emotive strategies is that both of them use fear from across the border to legitimize their narratives. While Trump focused on ISIS and Mexico, Modi had Pakistan to blame for terrorism that was perpetrated in India. In a speech, he said, "Pakistan has **unleashed terror** on us, and the **country doubts** whether Prime Minister has the **courage to take up the issue** with Pakistan." By saying so Modi achieves two targets: on the one hand, he employs the emotive strategy of fear by accusing Pakistan of unleashing terror on India while, on the other hand, he casts doubts on Indian prime minister's capability of taking up the issue with Pakistan. Since Modi believes that the Indian prime minister is not capable of taking up the issue with Pakistan, it is but natural for him to advocate the cause of his own party. He says, "If you want to eradicate terrorism, you will have to vote for BJP." If we deconstruct this statement, its binary is that if the BJP does not win elections, the country will continue facing terrorism.

Modi often wins sympathy of the masses by selling his past as a tea vendor. People empathize with him since he is up against those born with a silver spoon in their mouths. In an interview after winning the elections, he said, "No one can believe that the largest democracy of the world elected a **tea vendor as their Prime Minister**. I thank hundreds of millions of people who owned an **ordinary man like me**..... When we were young, **our mother used to clean crockery** in nearby homes to meet both ends meet (breaks down sobbing)." Breaking down is another strategy to win the hearts and minds of masses. People are quick to sympathize with him because as they believe him to be one of them.



Another interesting emotive strategy that employs is that of evoking the emotions of pity. In one of his public meeting, he referred to his opponents hurling abuses at him and taunting him with regard to his humble background. He says, "It is not for the first time that they have called me **low-cast**... Do they hate me because I was **born poor**?" In a country where large number of people in electorate live in abject poverty, such statements are part of an effective emotive strategy to evoke emotions of pity.

## **Conclusion**

The study has explored use of altruism and emotions for self-legitimization in political discourse. We have shown how political actors employ altruistic and emotive strategies in their speeches and interviews. While so doing, we have employed textual analysis to find out how particular words are used as part of the discursive strategies in order to gain power through legitimization. From the findings of the study, we have found certain striking similarities between and among politicians when it comes to arousing emotions in their favor or trying to convince the masses that all they are doing is for public good. We have also found that whether these politicians employ altruistic or emotive strategies, they tend to compare themselves with their political rivals and counterparts in political arena.

However, this study was delimited to politicians. Other studies can be conducted to find out how other social actors employ the similar strategies gain prominence. Since speech acts are essentially a common ground among all social actors, it would be interesting to see how these acts are shaped and used in other discourses.

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