

## Research Article

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# Leadership style by metaphor in crisis political discourse

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**Abstract:** This study aims to show how different political leaders ideologically position themselves in the discourse of ‘problem frame’ in their first national response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. To analyse the ideological nature of the ‘problem frame’, 17 leaders’ national lockdown speeches from different countries were collected and analysed within the theoretical framework of critical metaphor studies and frame semantics. Procedurally, metaphors in the collected speeches were identified by applying Pragglejaz Group’s MIP (2007) and MIPVU (2010), and coded into thematic categories via NVivo 12.0. Overall, 19 thematic codes (1,045 metaphorical expressions) were established, and their content analysis demonstrated specific differences in gender performance of a national health policy during the pandemic. It has been clarified that crisis political discourse is not that much affected by gender double bind, and female speakers openly display their femininity by focusing a lot on sensitivity and nurturance. By contrast, male speakers overwhelmingly follow a standardised competitive frame with emotional moments aimed at a more aggressive response to the pandemic and focusing on populist sentiment.

**Keywords:** crisis political discourse, political leaders, metaphor, problem-frame, gender

## 1 Introduction

In The New York Times (May 15, 2020), Amanda Taub discusses the issue of female leadership during the pandemic and its positive effect on political outcomes. In the article (Taub, 2020), it is argued that such a new leadership style ‘offers promise for a new era of global threats’ and is articulated and executed by woman leaders. This new kind of leadership in exceptional circumstances of the pandemic is guided by the diversity of perspectives female leaders offer (e.g. Jacinda Ardern, Angela Merkel), in contrast to their male counterparts (e.g. President Trump, Boris Johnson). The pandemic has ignited some changes in the way political leaders communicate with the public, despite the existent gender double bind dilemma, within which female leaders are expected to demonstrate leadership qualities associated with traditional masculinity (Appleby 2021).

The issue of performative gender in entrepreneurship and politics has received a lot of attention from ongoing scholarly research. It has been observed how gender double bind can be traced in online entrepreneurship, where structural inequalities are rendered by its masculine-coded nature with its traditional prescription to success between the two genders (Duffy and Pruchniewska 2017). Similarly, it has also been shown how the sexist attitudes to female legislators affect their legislator–constituent communication, pointing out the existence of a gender double bind and thus holding women to higher standards (Costa 2020). In politics, a similar pattern of performative gender double bind can be observed, when female political leaders are expected to

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demonstrate combative straightforwardness and political incivility (Angela and Michael 2022), and at the same time can be sexually abused by the mainstream media for lacking femininity (Appleby 2021).

The current study focuses on the metaphorical production of the problem frame by male and female political leaders while announcing their first national lockdowns during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic of 2020. The genre of political leaders' lockdown speeches to the nation has been purposefully chosen for its binary ideological nature: (1) to unite the nation in the face of the pandemic, and (2) to legitimise national public health strategy curtailing certain individual freedoms of movement and choice. To analyse the collected data, a political metaphor (Musolff 2016, Breeze 2020) has been chosen as an object of this study to understand how male and female political leaders interpret the 'sociopolitical situatedness' (Musolff 2016, 5) of the pandemic, and what crisis perception political leaders share with their nation. Before discussing the prevalent political metaphors in the national lockdown addresses, more light will be shed on how the problem frame is enacted by metaphors, and how political metaphors are ideologically driven.

It has been hypothesised that political leaders will frame their crisis communication in a more coercive and combative manner ideologically resonating with the politics of fear. The following research questions were raised to test this hypothesis: (1) What prevalent metaphors are used by political leaders in the national lockdown speeches? (2) What are the gender-related aspects of the metaphorical production of the problem frame? (3) How does the problem frame resonate with the politics of fear, and whether gender-related aspects contribute to that?

To address these issues, the article is structured in the following way. In the rest of this article, some of the literature on political metaphors during the COVID-19 pandemic, the leadership styles, the problem frame, and the politics of fear are outlined. It is then data and methods are introduced, and the most recurrent types of metaphors used by male and female political leaders are overviewed. Finally, the established crisis communication styles in political discourse are presented.

## 2 Metaphors and ideology in political discourse

In this study, metaphor is defined as a type of neural structure that guides our possibilities of categorisation that is crucially shaped by the inferential content of our bodies (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 19, 37). As a cognitive mechanism, metaphor allows us to use "physical logic of grasping to reason about understanding" (ibid., 45), whereby conventional mental imagery from sensorimotor domains is used for domains of subjective experience. The ubiquity of the conceptual metaphor, as a mapping across two conceptual domains (Lakoff and Johnson 1980a, 1980b, Kövecses 2005, 2017), is supported by the fact of its pervasiveness in our everyday language that is motivated by experientially grounded conceptual associations. In political discourse, the ubiquity of metaphor is also complemented by its complex ideological meaning.

The complex nature of political metaphor is mainly characterised by its ideological function and high level of persuasiveness (Mio 1997, Goatly 2007, Charteris-Black 2011, Musolff 2021). The ideological effects of metaphor use are reflected in the most recurrent metaphorical linguistic patterns (Goatly 2007) that evoke specific conceptualisations (i.e. source domains of the conceptual metaphor) highlighting certain aspects of ideology (Charteris-Black 2017). As argued by Dirven (1990, 566), the so-called metaphor approach to ideology assumes that "metaphors reflect the deep-rooted experiences of the members of a given social network." In addition to their ideological impact, metaphors have a profound persuasive effect on the receivers of political discourse, being referred to as "information-processing tools" (Mio 1997, 117) that simplify and give meaning to complex political issues, also known as "legitimacy narratives" (Tyler 2006).

Political discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic is the best illustration of how metaphors contribute to the ideological framework of a political legitimacy narrative. In Seixas's (2020) qualitative study of militaristic metaphors used during the pandemic by political leaders, it is shown how they are used to combine soft and hard power leadership skills that serve the persuasive purpose of mobilisation and the maintenance of collective morale. These findings support an idea of the political legitimacy of the lockdown measures in a time of public health crisis, justified as a larger gain over individual losses (Bhaumik et al. 2020). Despite

certain attempts to legitimise the use of the WAR metaphor during the COVID-19, its ideological meaning is generally viewed as more controversial and counter-productive (Semino 2021, Panzeri et al. 2021, Wicke and Bolognesi 2020).

In addition to the WAR metaphor, other conceptual frames have also been carefully investigated. The ideological use of such spatial metaphors as CONTAINMENT, MOVEMENT IN SPACE, and CENTRE/PERIPHERY has been linked to the psychological phase of denial of how critical to public health the current situation. According to Charteris-Black (2021), the metaphor of Containers As Bounded Spaces has become a symbol of the COVID-19 pandemic, representing government attempts to create spatial separation with its metaphorical extension to social relationships. Ideologically, the CONTAINER metaphor can serve the purpose of diminishing the overall effect of the WAR metaphor, by ascertaining the idea of containment within the spatial bounds of one's own home as integral and self-reliant (Craig 2020).

Despite certain positive entrenchment by the WAR and CONTAINMENT metaphors, the militarised perceptive to the pandemic of 2020 has contributed to the on-going social havoc and polarisation within societies worldwide. The current study will focus on the prevalent metaphors used by male and female political leaders in their first national lockdown speeches, with the aim of identifying gender-specific characteristics of ideological metaphors. The recurrent use of military metaphors is motivated by higher emotional appeal (Panzeri et al. 2021) that entrenches the problem frame (Altheide 2020) and might lead to the politics of fear.

### 3 The concepts of problem frame and politics of fear

In this study, the problem frame is viewed as a way of conceptualisation, by which an issue of concern is offered a possible solution. The COVID-19 pandemic, as a highly problematic issue, is addressed by political leaders via priming of the lockdown in their addresses to the nation. The contextual relationship between framing and priming is established by Chung and Druckman (2007), who acknowledge the impact psychological effects framing has on the understanding of public issues. In their lockdown speeches, being affected by the urgency of the critical situation, political leaders will focus on the problem frame by sending messages of fear, also known as the politics of fear (Altheide 1997, 2013).

The politics of fear is frequently enacted by decision-makers to promote and use the audience's beliefs about danger, risk, and fear to achieve their own political goals and social control over the population. This has been identified with the US public discourse of terrorism, where symbolic relationships about social order, danger, and threat were exploited by political decision-makers (Altheide 2006). One of the major reasons why people feel emotionally aligned with the politics of fear can be explained by the wide use of information technologies and their communication formats promoting the fear-as-entertainment effect (Altheide 2013, 2020). The politics of fear has also become a noticeable trend in public and political discourse during the migration crisis in 2015, with politicians spreading the ideas of Euroscepticism and populism by tasting the sentiment of unpredictable, uncertain, and fearful changes (Mudde 2016, Palaver 2019, Wodak 2021). The Eurosceptic and nationalist attitudes are deeply entrenched with Donald Trump becoming the US president and the Brexit referendum in 2016 (Inglehart and Norris 2016). This study contributes to the debate about how crisis communication is managed in political discourse and whether politics of fear is promoted in political leaders' communication strategy in a time of crisis.

### 4 Research design

Seventeen political leaders were selected for this study: 11 males and 6 females for comparison. The sample was designed to include as many political leaders as possible, representing different countries and different political regimes. All the selected leaders delivered their first national addresses to announce a national lockdown during the pandemic in 2020. More specific detail about the collected data sample is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Research data

Nr	Speaker	Timeline	Word count
1	US President <b>Donald Trump</b>	11 March 2020	1,296
2	RU President <b>Vladimir Putin</b>	25 March 2020	2,087
3	LT President <b>Gitanas Nausėda</b>	15 March 2020	416
4	UK Prime Minister <b>Boris Johnson</b>	23 March 2020	898
5	CN President <b>Xi Jinping</b>	3 February 2020	4,625
6	IN Prime Minister <b>Narendra Modi</b>	24 March 2020	1,866
7	SE Prime Minister <b>Stefan Löfven</b>	22 March 2020	740
8	UKR President <b>Volodymyr Zelenskyy</b>	1 April 2020	999
9	CA Prime Minister <b>Justin Trudeau</b>	16 March 2020	1,204
10	AU Prime Minister <b>Scott Morrison</b>	12 March 2020	612
11	AR President <b>Alberto Fernández</b>	19 March 2020	1,732
12	EU President <b>Ursula von der Leyen</b>	26 March 2020	2,285
13	NZ Prime Minister <b>Jacinda Ardern</b>	23 March 2020	4,655
14	FI Prime Minister <b>Sanna Marin</b>	29 April 2020	1,590
15	SC Prime Minister <b>Nicola Sturgeon</b>	23 March 2020	1,059
16	GR Chancellor <b>Angela Merkel</b>	19 March 2020	1,746
17	Queen Elizabeth II	5 April 2020	525
Total			<b>28,335</b>

The national lockdown speeches were delivered in the period of 2 months (March–April) in 2020 by 16 political leaders representing such countries as the United States (President Donald Trump), the Russian Federation (President Vladimir Putin), Lithuania (President Gitanas Nausėda), the UK (Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Queen Elizabeth), China (President Xi Jinping), India (Prime Minister Narendra Modi), Sweden (Prime Minister Stefan Löfven), Ukraine (President Volodymyr Zelenskyy), Canada (Prime Minister Justin Trudeau), Australia (Prime Minister Scott Morrison), Argentina (President Alberto Fernández), the EU (President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen), New Zealand (Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern), Finland (Prime Minister Sanna Marin), Scotland (Prime Minister Nicola Sturgeon), and Germany (Chancellor Angela Merkel). Due to the lower number of speeches by female leaders, the national address by Queen Elizabeth II was added to the list.

The sample was collected by following two main criteria: (1) genre – all the speeches are the first national lockdown addresses; (2) period – all the speeches were delivered during the 2 months of 2020 (March to April). The coding of the speeches was carried out in the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12.0 by procedurally implementing MIP (Pragglejaz 2007) and MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010). More specifically, a three-step procedure was followed. First, metaphorical patterns in the collected data were identified.

The metaphor analysis was carried out within the framework of two theoretical approaches to metaphor: (1) cognitive perspective or metaphor as thought-based (Fillmore 1982, Gibbs 1992, Johnson 1994, Lakoff 1996, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999, Kövecses, 2004) and (2) discourse perspective or metaphor as discourse-based (Cameron 2003, 2013, Goatly 2007, Charteris-Black 2006, 2011, Musolff 2016, 2018). Both perspectives on metaphor analysis are closely intertwined and complement each other, as the discourse-based view is inspired by the cognitive view and emphasises the need for “the importance of the metaphorical use of language in context” (Cameron 2013, 342).

Second, the metaphorical expressions were deconstructed into conceptual source domains. Finally, the most prevalent source domains and their characteristic features were assigned a thematic leadership style and compared by politicians’ gender. The content analysis of metaphor use was carried out via NVivo 12.0, whereby all the speeches were coded, and compared in terms of coded references and coverage range. In addition, frequency lists were generated and considered for each political leader. As the number of male and female political leaders is different, it has been decided to use the coverage range, estimated by NVivo 12.0 as the main parameter for comparison.

## 5 Results and discussion

The findings of the prevalent metaphor use were also complemented by word lists for all political leaders. The five most frequent words with a minimum length of three and five letters are illustrated in Table 2.

Two noticeable differences can be observed from the generated word frequency lists. First, female politicians tend to refer to both the government and the people, while male political leaders mainly emphasise the role of the people/citizens in their vision of tackling the pandemic. The former can be an indicator of the mental framing of the Nurturant Family, where responsibility between the government and the people is shared. By contrast, male speakers extend the concept of the people to the level of the nation-state with their high frequency of reference to the country. These tentative ideas are further supported by the content analysis of metaphor use. Overall, 19 source domains (i.e. thematic fields) were identified and their representative 1,045 metaphorical expressions were analysed in terms of the content of use, as indicated in Table 3.

It has been determined that all political leaders while discussing lockdown measures rely on the spatial metaphor of Movement (289 expressions) and the metaphor of War (148). However, the compared frequency of the War metaphor is much higher with male political leaders. Also, the metaphors of Killer, Enemy, Threat, and Struggle are mainly used by male leaders. Due to their highly negative emotional intensity, the thematic categories of Killer and Enemy were coded separately from the more generalised Pandemic-As-War metaphorical representation. Similarly, the analysis of the Threat and Struggle thematic codes pointed out their fear-inducing semantic associations that were not fully overlapping with the War metaphor and its ideological purposes of boosting collective morale and were thus coded as separate source domains. The analysis of the metaphorical use has also demonstrated that political leaders might be offering gender-specific features of crisis communication. Each of them will be discussed in the following subsections.

### 5.1 Fear-inducing metaphors in crisis political discourse

While communicating their lockdown measures, male leaders discursively enact politics of fear through the thematic source domains of War, Threat, Struggle, Enemy, Killer, and Natural Phenomena. By comparison, female speakers resort to some of these metaphors with a lesser frequency of use (Figure 1). Male leaders tend to focus more on uncertainty and instability that are discursively mediated through six fear-inducing metaphors, namely War, Threat, Struggle, Enemy, Killer, and Natural Phenomena. The differences in coverage range between male and female political leaders for fear-inciting metaphors are observed in all six categories, as summarised in Figure 1.

Very marked differences are observed with the WAR metaphor used for male political leaders at their range of 0.85–8.83, while the range for the same metaphor for female political leaders is 0.29–6.4. The same trend is seen with the metaphor of THREAT with its overall male range of 0.52–7.06 and female range of 0.7–4.19. Similarly, the metaphor of NATURAL PHENOMENA is used by men in the range of 0.64–4.42, while the female range occurs at 0.74–1.91. Moreover, the metaphor of STRUGGLE was mostly used by men (except for Angela Merkel's one coded reference), while the ENEMY and KILLER metaphors were exclusively used by male speakers. A more detailed coverage across genders is provided in Table 4.

The differences in coverage range are partially complemented by the specific features of metaphor use. The first difference lies in the semantic scope of the WAR metaphor. In the case of the male leaders, there is a high variability of metaphorical expressions emphasising confrontational attitudes with a clearer populist intention to mobilise people in their national “fight against the virus,” while the female leaders tend to use the WAR metaphor more generically, e.g.

#### **WAR (MALE)**

- (1) We're going to **mobilise all our forces** as an Argentine community (Alberto Fernandez, 15 references). <> But in this **fight** we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly **enlisted** (Boris Johnson, 7 references). <> And if you know someone who is working on the **frontlines** (Justine Trudeau, 2 references). <> I am confident that every Indian will not only successfully **fight** this difficult situation but also emerge

Table 2: Word frequency lists by gender

	Political leaders	WF lists (min. 3)	WF lists (min. 5)
<b>FEMALE</b>			
<b>GR</b>	Angela Merkel	Now (11) Also (9) One (9) <b>Everyone (7)</b> <b>Government (7)</b>	<b>Everyone (7)</b> <b>Government (7)</b> <b>Virus (6)</b> Every (5) Everything (5)
<b>NZ</b>	Jacinda Ardern	New (19) Now (17) <b>Essential (13)</b> Level (12) <b>Covid (5)</b> <b>Many (4)</b> <b>Children (3)</b> Come (3) Time (3) <b>Together (3)</b>	<b>Essential (13)</b> Level (12) <b>Covid (11)</b> Cases (10) <b>Services (9)</b> <b>Children (3)</b> <b>Together (3)</b> Across (2) Country (2) Disruption (2)
<b>UK</b>	Queen Elizabeth	<b>Crisis (17)</b> <b>Measures (17)</b> <b>Finland (14)</b> Also (13) <b>Government (13)</b>	<b>Crisis (17)</b> <b>Measures (17)</b> <b>Finland (14)</b> <b>Government (13)</b> <b>Situation (13)</b>
<b>EU</b>	Ursula von der Leyen	<b>Europe (27)</b> <b>European (13)</b> <b>Help (9)</b> <b>Must (9)</b> <b>Lives (8)</b>	<b>Europe (27)</b> <b>European (13)</b> <b>Lives (8)</b> Member (8) <b>People (8)</b>
<b>MALE</b>			
<b>AR</b>	Alberto Fernandez	<b>Health (13)</b> Face (8) Need (8) <b>Value (8)</b> <b>Contagion (7)</b>	<b>Health (13)</b> <b>Value (8)</b> <b>Contagion (7)</b> <b>Lives (7)</b> <b>People (7)</b>
<b>UK</b>	Boris Johnson	<b>People (10)</b> <b>Home (9)</b> <b>Lives (5)</b> Many (5) <b>HNS (5)</b>	<b>People (10)</b> <b>Lives (5)</b> <b>Disease (4)</b> Including (4) <b>Coronavirus (3)</b>
<b>US</b>	Donald Trump	<b>Virus (14)</b> <b>Health (10)</b> <b>Americans (9)</b> <b>Actions (7)</b> <b>Take (7)</b>	<b>Virus (14)</b> <b>Health (10)</b> <b>Americans (9)</b> <b>Action (7)</b> <b>States (6)</b>
<b>LT</b>	Gitanas Nausėda	<b>Lithuanian (7)</b> Own (7) Today (6) <b>Our (4)</b> However (4)	<b>Lithuanian (7)</b> Today (6) However (4) <b>Actions (4)</b> <b>Lithuania (3)</b>
<b>CA</b>	Justin Trudeau	<b>Health (13)</b> <b>Canada (11)</b> <b>Canadians (11)</b> Time (8) Keep (7)	<b>Health (13)</b> <b>Canada (11)</b> <b>Canadians (11)</b> <b>Canadian (6)</b> <b>French (6)</b>
<b>IN</b>	Narendra Modi	Days (15) <b>Corona (14)</b> <b>Friends (14)</b> <b>People (13)</b>	<b>Corona (14)</b> <b>Friends (14)</b> <b>People (13)</b> <b>Countries (12)</b>

(Continued)

Table 2: Continued

	Political leaders	WF lists (min. 3)	WF lists (min. 5)
AU	Scott Morrison	Countries (12) Australia (9) Australians (8) Health (7) Virus (7) Now (5)	Country (11) Australia (9) Australians (8) Health (7) Virus (7) Support (4)
SE	Stefan Lofven	People (9) Responsibility (7) Everyone (6) Society (6) Also (5)	People (9) Responsibility (7) Everyone (6) Society (6) Beings (5)
RU	Vladimir Putin	For (30) People (20) What (19) Russia (18) Now (17)	People (20) Russia (18) Momentarily (17) Support (14) Situation (13)
UKR	Volodymyr Zelenskyy	Ukraine (12) Also (8) Citizens (7) People (7) Coronavirus (5)	Ukraine (12) Citizens (7) People (7) Coronavirus (5) Thank (5)
CN	Xi Jinping	Epidemic (85) Control (76) Prevention (67) Necessary (37) Must (36)	Epidemic (85) Control (76) Prevention (67) Necessary (37) Strengthen (30)

Table 3: Coded source domains

SOURCE DOMAIN (coding references)	Political leaders
MOVEMENT (289)	17
WAR (148)	17
STRENGTH (67)	10
THREAT (66)	15
ONENESS (57)	15
PERSON (57)	15
CONTAINER (50)	13
NATURAL PHENOMENA (49)	12
RELATIONSHIP (43)	8
COMPETITION (34)	11
(BUSINESS) COMMODITY (31)	7
FAMILY (STATE AS A PARENT) (28)	8
MACHINERY (26)	10
STRUCTURE (26)	9
(BODY) HEALTH (25)	9
OBJECT (23)	7
STRUGGLE (19)	7
KILLER (4)	3
ENEMY (3)	2
Total 19 source domains (1,045)	

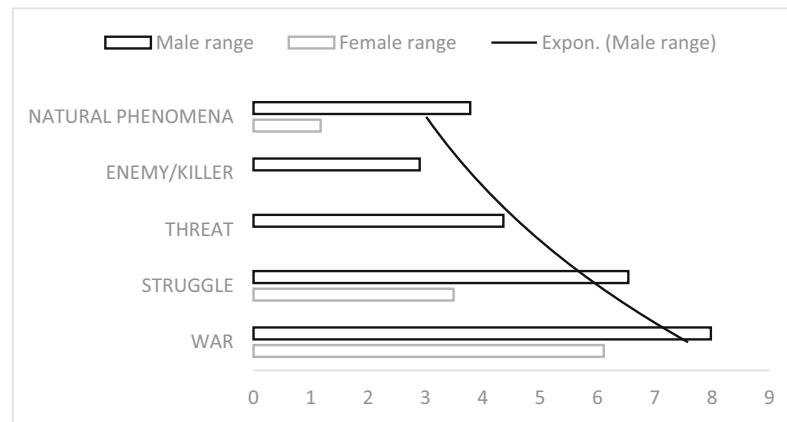


Figure 1: Coverage range between genders for FEAR-inducing metaphors.

**victorious** (Narendra Modi, 6 references). <> The example of a successful and timely **fight** against the virus (Gitanas Nausėda, 3 references). <> We have **mobilised** all the capabilities and resources for **deploying** a system of timely prevention and treatment (Vladimir Putin, 10 references). <> To **confront a foreign virus** in modern history (Donald Trump, 12 references). <> Joint preparation for the operational **deployment** of mobile hospitals (Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 8 references). <> The people's war for epidemic prevention and control was launched/resolutely **win the fight** against the epidemic (Xi Jinping, 52 references).

#### WAR (FEMALE)

- (2) I want to pay tribute to the women and men **leading that fight** (Ursula von der Leyen, 8 references) <> **Fight** this virus (Nicola Sturgeon, 1 reference) <> Alongside the controlled **dismantling** of restrictive measures (Sanna Marin, 2 references) <> **Frontline** (Queen Elizabeth II) <> In the **fight** against COVID-19/will help give our healthcare system a **fighting** chance (Jacinda Ardern, 14 references) <> At the **forefront** of this struggle (Angela Merkel, 5 references).

#### ENEMY/KILLER (MALE)

- (3) The virus will not have a chance **against** us (Donald Trump, 2 references) <> But we must not forget that in addition to **fighting the invisible enemy**, we have a war in eastern Ukraine (Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 2 references) <> The devastating impact of this **invisible killer** (Boris Johnson, 2 references).

The WAR metaphor in the male sample has recurrent populist features discursively realised together with the all-inclusive “we” (see underlined expressions in (1)), as “Coronavirus attacks us all” (Alberto Fernandez), “each and every one us is directly enlisted” (Boris Johnson) and leaders’ appeal to a “people” (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017) defined on the level of the nation-state, as in “an Argentine community” (Alberto Fernandez), “every Indian” (Narendra Modi), “people’s war” (Xi Jinping). Less explicit populist rhetoric is observed in the ideological purpose of the WAR metaphor used by the male leaders, who implicitly describe it as their national threat (e.g. Donald Trump’s “foreign virus”), enemy or a killer, as in (3). By contrast, the female leaders tend to use the WAR metaphor in its more generic meaning without any specific ideological features by recurrently using the “fight” metaphorical expressions, as in (2).

Another difference is observed with the use of the THREAT and STRUGGLE metaphors in the collected data sample. The male leaders’ use is inclined towards the politics of emotion, with fear being manipulated the most. In the national lockdown speeches, fear of the unknown is raised by using the THREAT metaphor and such metaphorical expressions as ‘in the face of this threat’, ‘great risk’, ‘real danger’, and ‘hidden danger’, as illustrated below:

#### THREAT (MALE)

- (4) The world is **facing a threat** and Argentina is also **at risk** <> We are co-responsible **in the face of this threat**. (Alberto Fernandez, 10 references). <> The biggest **threat** this country has faced for decades/that is the moment of **real danger**. (Boris Johnson, 2 references). <> A **dangerous** pandemic/puts your life at **great risk** (Narendra Modi, 3 references). <> Poses a major **hidden danger** to public health **safety** (Xi Jinping, 3 references).



Table 4: Metaphor use for inducing fear

Source domain	Male (coding references/coverage)	Female (coding references/coverage)
<b>1. WAR</b>	<i>Xi Jinping</i> (52/8.83%) <i>Alberto Fernandez</i> (15/7.24%) <i>Donald Trump</i> (12/5.84%) <i>Vladimir Putin</i> (10/0.67%) <i>Volodymyr Zelenskyy</i> (8/4.76%) <i>Boris Johnson</i> (7/10.56%) <i>Narendra Modi</i> (6/0.97%) <i>Gitanas Nausėda</i> (3/4.32%) <i>Justin Trudeau</i> (2/1.26%) <i>Scott Morrison</i> (1/0.85%) <b>Range, 0.85–8.83%</b>	<i>Jacinda Ardern</i> (14/6.4%) <i>Ursula von der Leyen</i> (8/1.98%) <i>Angela Merkel</i> (5/2.59%) <i>Queen Elisabeth</i> (2/1.08%) <i>Sanna Marin</i> (2/1.01%) <i>Nicola Sturgeon</i> (1/0.29%)  <b>Range, 0.29–6.4%</b>
<b>2. THREAT</b>	<i>Justin Trudeau</i> (11/6.83%) <i>Alberto Fernandez</i> (10/7.06%) <i>Donald Trump</i> (9/4.64%) <i>Narendra Modi</i> (3/0.52%) <i>Xi Jinping</i> (3/0.56%) <i>Stefan Lofven</i> (3/3.33%) <i>Scott Morrison</i> (2/2%) <i>Volodymyr Zelenskyy</i> (2/0.91%) <i>Gitanas Nausėda</i> (2/1.62%) <i>Boris Johnson</i> (2/1.79%) <b>Range, 0.52–7.06%</b>	<i>Ursula von der Leyen</i> (9/3.35%) <i>Nicola Sturgeon</i> (5/4.19%) <i>Jacinda Ardern</i> (2/0.81%) <i>Angela Merkel</i> (2/1.74%) <i>Sanna Marin</i> (1/0.70%)  <b>Range, 0.70–4.19%</b>
<b>3. STRUGGLE</b>	<i>Xi Jinping</i> (3/0.74%) <i>Alberto Fernandez</i> (7/4.31%) <i>Vladimir Putin</i> (2/0.19%) <i>Narendra Modi</i> (1/0.24%) <i>Gitanas Nausėda</i> (4/4.60%) <i>Scott Morrison</i> (1/0.66%) <b>Range, 0.24–4.60%</b>	<i>Angela Merkel</i> (1/0.44%)
<b>4. ENEMY</b>	<i>Donald Trump</i> (2/1.02%) <i>Volodymyr Zelenskyy</i> (1/0.52%)	
<b>5. KILLER</b>	<i>Xi Jinping</i> (1/0.28%) <i>Alberto Fernandez</i> (1/0.25%) <i>Boris Johnson</i> (2/3.15%) <b>Range, 0.25–3.15%</b>	
<b>6. NATURAL PHENOMENA</b>	<i>Gitanas Nausėda</i> (3/4.42%) <i>Xi Jinping</i> (3/0.64%) <i>Alberto Fernandez</i> (2/0.79%) <i>Volodymyr Zelenskyy</i> (2/1.96%) <i>Donald Trump</i> (1/1.22%) <b>Range, 0.64–4.42%</b>	<i>Sanna Marin</i> (5/1.91%) <i>Jacinda Ardern</i> (2/0.74%)  <b>Range, 0.74–1.91%</b>

By contrast, the female leaders ideologically reverse the politics of fear into the politics of hope, where the metaphor of THREAT shifts focus to taking actions and protecting the national community against ‘the threat’:

**THREAT (FEMALE)**

- (5) The federal government and the levels of government are doing this to **protect** everyone in our community (Angela Merkel, 2 references). <> To **protect** New Zealanders from the worst (Jacinda Ardern, 2 references). <> To **protect** the capacity of the healthcare system and to **protect** people (Sanna Marin, 1 reference). <> This is for the **protection** of each and every one of us/the **protection** of yourself, your loved ones, your community and our national health service (Nicola Sturgeon, 5 references).

As seen from the examples in (5), the female leaders demonstrate their ability to manage crisis communication with empathy. In the case of the THREAT metaphor, they not only emphasise their

readiness to protect against the threat, but also communicate their social and ethical responsibilities to behave empathetically. This communicative stance is achieved through such metaphorical expressions as “protect everyone in our community” (Angela Merkel), “the protection of yourself, your loved ones, your community” (Nicola Sturgeon), “one thing more contagious than this virus, it is love and compassion” (Ursula von der Leyen). By contrast, male political leaders emphasise their need to protect against economic threats and thus focus on “financial safety”, e.g.

#### **THREAT (MALE)**

- (6) At the same time, our government is doing everything it needs to do **to keep you safe – to keep your family safe, and to keep our economy strong**. (Justin Trudeau, 11 references). <> **Secure** Australians’ jobs and livelihoods (Scott Morrison, 2 references). <> Life, health and **jobs are threatened** (Stefan Löfven, 3 references).

Female leaders’ emotional safety (5) is replaced by male leaders’ messages of “economic safety” (6), illustrated by such metaphorical expressions as “keep our **economy strong**” (Justin Trudeau), “jobs are **threatened**,” “**protect jobs**” (Stefan Löfven), “financial **hardship**” (Donald Trump). The economic aspect of the STRUGGLE metaphor is explained by the underlying primary metaphor of STATE IS A PERSON, where the economy is perceived as its health. The ideological function of this metaphor in political discourse is to justify quantity over quality, and commercial transactions with costs and gains over actions (Lakoff 2012).

The same tendency is observed with the use of the STRUGGLE metaphor, which is more frequently used by male political leaders (range, 0.24–4.60), and its emphasis on the economic “struggle,” as in (7) “**struggling businesses**” (Vladimir Putin) or identifying “cadres in the practice of **struggle**” (Xi Jinping). Alberto Fernandez used this metaphor to mobilise his listeners’ emotional response by also evoking the military frame of “unequal **struggle** against this invisible enemy” (see (7)), e.g.

#### **STRUGGLE (MALE)**

- (7) We must examine and identify cadres in the practice of **struggle** (Xi Jinping, 3 references). <> Struggling SMEs and micro businesses/companies experiencing **hardship** (Vladimir Putin, 2 references). <> You can be sure that as from today the Argentine state commits itself to never weakening our collective **struggle**./ It’s an **unequal struggle** against this invisible enemy (Alberto Fernández, 7 references).

Only one instance of the STRUGGLE metaphor was found in Angel Merkel’s speech, with her reference to health care system workers, as in (8) below:

#### **STRUGGLE (FEMALE)**

- (8) I would like to take this opportunity to address first and foremost all those who work as doctors, in the nursing service or in any other function in our hospitals and in the health care system in general. They are at the forefront of this **struggle** (Angela Merkel, 1 reference).

Ideologically, the STRUGGLE metaphor is used by the male to raise the public fear about economic uncertainties and mobilise their listeners’ response to the virus as an external threat. By using this metaphor, the responsibility for future economic problems is indirectly assigned to the virus. By contrast, Angela Merkel’s thematic reference to the STRUGGLE source domain evoked the context of social accountability and respect for healthcare system staff.

The last metaphor with an ideological bias for inciting public fear is that of the NATURAL PHENOMENA. Semantically, its use is associated with natural forces that cannot be controlled or easily prevented from happening. In the case of the male metaphor use, both the range (i.e. 0.64–4.40) and the contextual meaning disclose speakers’ attempts to foreshadow an unpredictability factor and a lack of control over the situation, e.g.

#### **NATURAL PHENOMENA (MALE)**

- (9) In Argentina we are still in time to avoid this pandemic becoming **uncontrollable**/We know it’s going **to hit** us (Alberto Fernandez, 4 references). <> And we are buying millions of testing kits that will enable us **to turn the tide** on this invisible killer. (Boris Johnson, 1 reference). <> It spreads like **wildfire** (Narendra Modi, 4 references). <> It is impossible **to stop it from spilling over** into Russia (Vladimir Putin, 7 references). Coronavirus **outbreak** (Nausėda, 2 references). <> Virus **hotspots** (Scott Morrison, 1 reference). <> New **clusters** in the United States were **seeded** by travelers from Europe (Donald Trump, 8 references)

By contrast, the female leaders use the NATURAL PHENOMENA metaphor to highlight the concept of collective unity as a necessary factor in dealing with unpredictable consequences of the pandemic. Collective unity is expressed using the inclusive “we” (Fairclough 2001, 2013) that implies shared responsibility in the context of the consequences of the pandemic for the entire community, as in “we must reduce” (Angela Merkel), “we are facing the potential” (Jacinda Ardern), “we will not survive” (Sanna Marin), “we should focus,” and “we can withstand” (Ursula von der Leyen).

The least emotionally charging in the FEAR-inducing group of metaphors is MOVEMENT, also known as MOTION IN SPACE, and it is used by all political leaders, as shown in Figure 2. Differently from the previous metaphors, female speakers use the MOVEMENT metaphor with a higher coverage range of 3.03–13.21, in comparison to the male range of 1.03–11.01. Male leaders use the MOVEMENT metaphor in their references to the unpredictability of the virus and their economic response to the pandemic.

The male leaders’ use of the MOVEMENT metaphor is ideologically enacted in the context of change. The negative change is implied by the use of such metaphorical expressions as “pandemic is **expanding at tremendous speed**,” “**reducing the speed**” (Alberto Fernández), and “it’s vital to **slow the spread** of the disease” (Boris Johnson), “Coronavirus is **spreading at such a rapid pace**” (Narendra Modi), “the **quick spread** of this disease” (Vladimir Putin), etc. Their use evokes a semantic frame of unpredictability caused by the spread of the virus that cannot be externally controlled. By contrast, positive change is related to positive economic changes, as in “**accelerate** < ... > the consumption” (Xi Jinping), “our economy **bounces back**” (Scott



Figure 2: Coverage range between genders for the MOVEMENT metaphor.

Morrison), or political decision-making, as in “we made a life-saving **move** < ... > on China” (Donald Trump), “we are working to **provide space** for mandatory observation” (Volodymyr Zelenskyy).

Differently from their male counterparts, the female leaders used the MOVEMENT metaphor mainly in their reference to ‘slowing down the spread’. The emphasis on “**slowing down the spread**” was paralleled with the thematisation of the collective response, as in “**get through this together**” (Jacinda Ardern), “there is only one thing we can do < ... >” (Angela Merkel), and “we have also succeeded in **slowing down the progression** of the disease” (Sanna Marin).

The analysis of the FEAR inciting metaphors has revealed a focus shift between the two genders. Male political leaders metaphorically used the semantic categories of WAR, THREAT, ENEMY/KILLER, STRUGGLE, NATURAL PHENOMENA, and MOVEMENT for exploiting people’s natural fear of losing control over their lives and mobilising their trust in government and institutions (Rocatto et al. 2021). By contrast, the female used the same metaphors in the context of shared collective responsibility, accountability, and protective measures as a viable solution to the pandemic problems.

## 5.2 Mobilising in-group identity in crisis political discourse

Another group of metaphors determined in the analysed data is that of ONENESS, STRENGTH, PARENTING, and RELATIONSHIP. These metaphors are aimed at raising public morale and establishing a positive emotional connection with the audience. Such a communicative style is also known as the politicians’ discourse strategy of the United We Stand Myth for appealing to the audience for support in challenging times (Charteris-Black 2011, Umar and Rasul 2017). Their gendered use has also pointed out specific ideological differences that are reflected in the coverage range, summarised in Figure 3.

In the IN-GROUP mobilisation communicative model, the female leaders tend to use metaphorical expressions more frequently for the ONENESS metaphor with the range 1.32–4.73, while the range for the male political leaders’ metaphor use stands at 0.30–3.20. In the rest of the metaphors, the male politicians have a higher range of use. To be more precise, their use of the STRENGTH metaphor is in the range of 0.37–8.45, in comparison to the female use at 0.09–2.90. Another striking difference is observed with the RELATIONSHIP metaphor, being used by the male at 1.61–13.20, whereas the female range is 0.38–4.98. Finally, the range of the PARENTING metaphor uses points to a similar pattern, with a higher range score for the male 0.64–4.42, as compared to the female 0.74–2.08. A more detailed coverage range across genders and political leaders is summarised in Table 5.

The ONENESS metaphor was used by all political leaders in their first national lockdown addresses. By comparison, the STRENGTH and PARENTING metaphors were used by 7 male leaders out of 11, while the

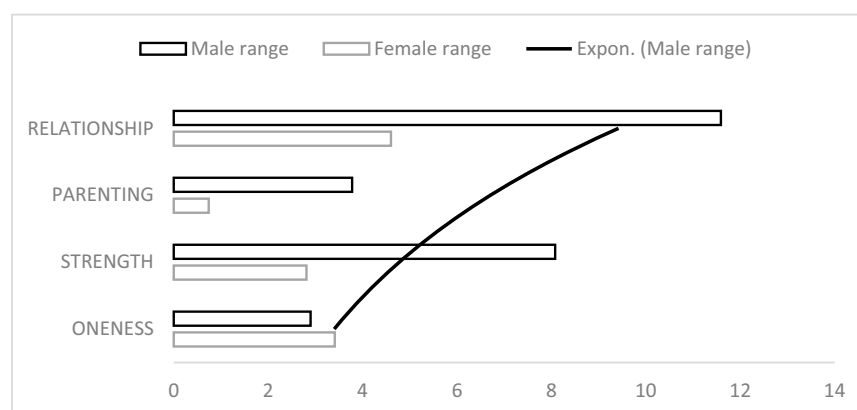


Figure 3: Coverage range between genders for the INGROUP metaphors.

RELATIONSHIP metaphor was used only by the 4 male leaders. A similar trend is observed among the female leaders, whose use of the RELATIONSHIP and STRENGTH metaphors were identified with the three leaders, while only one female leader evoked the PARENTING frame. Ideologically, the ONENESS metaphor aims at an expression of the collective affinity that tends to be more populist with the male representatives.

In the context of their speeches, the male leaders use the ONENESS metaphor to popularise their stance on solidarity and unity, as a necessary mobilisation factor. This was articulated using such metaphorical expressions as “**one** community,” “a **united** Argentina” (Alberto Fernández), “**each and everyone of us**” (Boris Johnson), “the work we’re doing **together**” (Justin Trudeau), “**united** efforts” (Narendra Modi), “**solidarity**” (Vladimir Putin, Stefan Löfven, Xi Jinping), and “**unify together**” (Donald Trump). The ONENESS metaphor was also the male leaders’ appeal to ‘a people’ on the level of the nation-state, known as a populist expression of nationalism (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017), illustrated with the following metaphorical expressions: “we need the state, society and the people to work **together**” (Vladimir Putin), “we will overcome **together** as a nation and as a world,” “**unify together** as one nation and one family” (Donald Trump), or “Show the spirit of **unity** and **solidarity** of the Chinese people” (Xi Jinping). Additionally, it was contextualised as a collective mobilisation effort against the virus (i.e. the WAR metaphor); e.g. “**Each and every one of us** is now obliged to join together/We will beat the coronavirus and we will beat it together” (Boris Johnson), and “the private sector is standing shoulder to shoulder with fellow citizens **in full capacity**” (Narendra Modi).

**Table 5:** Metaphor use for in-group identification

Source domain	Male (coding references/coverage)	Female (coding references/coverage)
<b>1. ONENESS</b>	<i>Justin Trudeau (5/3.20%)</i> <i>Alberto Fernandez (4/2.13%)</i> <i>Donald Trump (4/3.02%)</i> <i>Narendra Modi (4/1.19%)</i> <i>Vladimir Putin (3/0.30%)</i> <i>Boris Johnson (2/2.31%)</i> <i>Gitanas Nausėda (2/1.62%)</i> <i>Xi Jinping (2/0.31%)</i> <i>Scott Morrison (1/0.72%)</i> <b>Range, 0.30–3.20%</b>	<i>Jacinda Ardern (10/4.28%)</i> <i>Angela Merkel (8/4.73%)</i> <i>Ursula von der Leyen (5/1.58%)</i> <i>Queen Elizabeth (2/3.23%)</i> <i>Sanna Marin (2/1.32%)</i>  <b>Range, 1.32–4.73%</b>
<b>2. STRENGTH</b>	<i>Xi Jinping (45/8.45%)</i> <i>Boris Johnson (4/5.70%)</i> <i>Stefan Lofven (3/3.33%)</i> <i>Narendra Modi (3/0.82%)</i> <i>Donald Trump (2/1.16%)</i> <i>Volodymyr Zelenskyy (1/0.65%)</i> <i>Justin Trudeau (1/0.37%)</i> <b>Range, 0.37–8.45%</b>	<i>Ursula von der Leyen (5/2.02%)</i> <i>Queen Elizabeth (2/3.23%)</i> <i>Jacinda Ardern (1/0.09%)</i>  <b>Range, 0.09–2.90%</b>
<b>3. PARENTING</b>	<i>Vladimir Putin (13/1.44%)</i> <i>Gitanas Nausėda (3/4.42%)</i> <i>Xi Jinping (3/0.64%)</i> <i>Volodymyr Zelenskyy (2/1.96%)</i> <i>Alberto Fernandez (2/0.79%)</i> <i>Justin Trudeau (2/1.99%)</i> <i>Donald Trump (1/1.22%)</i> <b>Range, 0.64–4.42%</b>	<i>Jacinda Ardern (2/0.74%)</i>
<b>4. RELATIONSHIP</b>	<i>Stefan Lofven (11/13.20%)</i> <i>Gitanas Nausėda (6/8.29%)</i> <i>Donald Trump (4/2.46%)</i> <i>Scott Morrison (2/1.61%)</i>  <b>Range, 1.61–13.20%</b>	<i>Ursula von der Leyen (11/4.98%)</i> <i>Sanna Marin (5/3.11%)</i> <i>Nicola Sturgeon (3/3.01%)</i> <i>Jacinda Ardern (1/0.38%)</i>  <b>Range, 0.38–4.98%</b>

By contrast, female leaders focus on collective action during times of crisis. Instead of mobilising the public against a common threat, they reframe the public role of active engagement into cooperative measures. The ONENESS metaphor is realised via such metaphorical expressions as “our **joint solidarity**,” “all react **together**” (Angela Merkel), “get through this **together**” (Jacinda Ardern), and “do the right thing **together**” (Ursula von der Leyen). However, differently from their male counterparts, the female leaders emphasised the importance of cooperation constituting vulnerability and empathetic engagement. This is traced in their use of the following metaphorical expressions: “work closer **together**,” “do the right thing **together** – with **one big heart**,” “show that same trust, that same **unity**” (Ursula von der Leyen), “cooperate extensively and seek solutions **together**” (Sanna Marin), “our **collective** ability,” “**support** one another” (Jacinda Ardern), and “**stand by** each other” (Angela Merkel). The concepts of ‘trust’, ‘cooperation’, and ‘support’ contribute to an ideological narrative of the social arrangement between politicians and the public where vulnerability and social empathy prevail (Larios and Paterson 2021).

It is also interesting to observe how distinctively the STRENGTH metaphor is used by both genders, though much more frequently by the male at the range of 0.37–8.45, in comparison to the female range of 1.32–2.90. Being an ideological extension of the ONENESS metaphor, the STRENGTH metaphor is used by the male for the thematisation of the national unity aligned with strength and competitiveness. The competitive aspect of the STRENGTH metaphor is realised by the comparative form of ‘strong’, as in “we will come through it **stronger**” (Boris Johnson), “emerge from this challenge **stronger**” (Donald Trump), and the male reference to the ongoing improvements such as “**strengthening** our amazing NHS” (Boris Johnson), “**strengthening** the medical infrastructure” (Narendra Modi), and “**strengthen** material allocation and market supply” (Xi Jinping). As with other metaphors, the source domain of STRENGTH is activated in the context of mobilisation, for instance “facing the crisis with our **united strength**” (Stefan Löfven), “we will **withstand**” (Volodymyr Zelenskyy), or “**resolutely** win the fight” (Xi Jinping). Only one male leader contextualised this metaphor in his reference to collective action and empathy, namely Justin Trudeau’s reference to the “**strength** of our country” as “our capacity to come together and care for each other.”

The female leaders, with almost three times lower coverage of the STRENGTH metaphor, continued their focus on the collection action as strength, e.g.

#### **STRENGTH (FEMALE)**

- (10) Be **strong** (Jacinda Ardern, 1 reference). <> If we remain united and **resolute** (Queen Elizabeth II, 2 references). <> The people of Europe are showing how **strong** that can be (Ursula von der Leyen, 5 references).

The female leaders used the STRENGTH metaphor in a more generalised manner to highlight the importance of collective action during the pandemic.

The last two interrelated metaphors to be discussed in this section are the RELATIONSHIP and PARENTING metaphors. Political leaders were trying to establish an emotional connection with their audience by using the RELATIONSHIP metaphor. This is done by infusing the lexical representation of interpersonal connections that involve feelings and behaviours into the context of the government pandemic policy.

The male leaders focus on the patriotic sentiment expressed by the RELATIONSHIP metaphor, i.e. a call “**to take responsibility for** < ... > **our country**” (Stefan Löfven), “**love your homeland**” (Gitanas Nausėda), “**put the well-being of America first**” blends national identity with an individual identity and results in the conceptualisation of the State As the Self. At the same time, this metaphor allows political leaders to unilaterally engage citizens with their responsibilities for the state, as “**we all have a role to play**” and “**we’ll do our bit**” (Scott Morrison), or “**your efforts for** < ... > **Sweden**” (Stefan Löfven).

By contrast, in the female speeches, this relationship is bilaterally engaging. The people-to-people and state-to-people relationships are enacted by such metaphorical expressions as “help **each other**,” “rely on **one another**” (Ursula von der Leyen), “looking out for **each other** (Nicola Sturgeon),” while the state-to-people RELATIONSHIP is evoked by the following “**A Europe that is there** for its people” (Ursula von der Leyen), “show **love** and **solidarity** for our fellow citizens” (Nicola Sturgeon). In addition, the metaphorical relationship between the virus and the people is described, as “how to **live with** the virus” (Sanna Marin). Such

metaphorical use contributes to a less confrontational narrative highlighting communal share and collective well-being.

Another piece of evidence for more confrontational rhetoric among the males is the PARENTING metaphor, semantically representing the RELATIONSHIP thematic scenario. In the collected data sample, seven male political leaders and one female leader resorted to this metaphor with a varied degree of expressed care and nature of protection. The narrative of the government-as-a-parent care and support is illustrated by such uses as “we are prepared to **see Canadians through this time**,” “our government is doing everything it needs to **keep you safe**” (Justin Trudeau), “the state **will protect the health of millions of other citizens**” (Volodymyr Zelenskyy), “**receiving** the state **support**,” and “government **assistance**” (Vladimir Putin). With this metaphor, male political leaders also project populist sentiment by evoking the concept of the collective self, e.g. “**the state takes care of** the health and lives of all Argentines” (Alberto Fernández), “What the Lithuanian **state has done and will do for its people**” (Gitanas Nausėda), “**unify together as one nation and one family**” (Donald Trump). Finally, there are instances of the government-as-a-strict-parent metaphor, namely Xi Jinping’s “**punished** by discipline and law” and Vladimir Putin’s self-centred projection of his governance “Let me add that I propose < ... > **to support** families with children and **help** people.”

The analysis of IN-GROUP metaphors has demonstrated how male political leaders’ communication style has resonated with the concepts of higher mobilisation, populism, patriotic sentiment, competitive individual and competitive collective strategies. By contrast, female leaders’ IN-GROUP metaphors highlighted the aspects of collective responsibility and community care network in a time of crisis.

## 6 Concluding discussion

The research reported in this article examines how male and female political leaders communicate about the lockdown measures and other national changes at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Broadly, the findings suggest that both male and female political leaders frame their messages by appealing to similar conceptual metaphors that contextually serve different ideological purposes. The analysis of these metaphors can help to explain strategic patterns of political communication in a time of crisis.

This study suggests that male and female political leaders prioritise different aspects of the problem frame while communicating similar messages in terms of content. The theoretical implication is that female speakers allow themselves more to focus on emotional intelligence, positive reinforcement, and social empathy which are stereotypically viewed as a lack of political competence. By contrast, male speakers tend to resort to traditionally marked patterns of expressed masculinity defined by more explicit antagonism and competitive rhetoric.

Male competitive rhetoric is mainly associated with their use of the WAR metaphor when male political leaders mobilise their citizens in the nationally declared war against the virus. This narrative line has allowed the male speakers to foreshadow and attribute blame to severe circumstances and maximise the social agentivity of the virus. By contrast, the female speakers use the WAR metaphor in the most generalised sense of ‘the fight’ without any specific references to explicit antagonism.

Another difference is seen in the male speakers’ attempts to heighten a sense of uncertainty that naturally produces fear. By using the THREAT, STRUGGLE, and NATURAL PHENOMENA metaphors, male leaders accentuate how unpredictable the (economic) future is. By contrast, female leaders recurrently evoke the thematic aspects of collective action and social empathy as protective measures against upcoming threats. Similarly, the MOVEMENT metaphor has shown how male leaders shift their focus from a lack of control over the situation to an uncontrollable movement of the virus. By comparison, female leaders emphasise the importance of collective responsibility in ‘slowing down the spread’.

In addition, both male and female political leaders associate themselves with a collective identity of the nation, though with different ideological purposes. The male speakers try to raise the collective morale for mobilisation purposes against the virus and other upcoming ‘threats’. By contrast, female leaders use the same metaphors for establishing an emotional connection and trust with their audience. Additionally, to sound

right, the male political leaders raise public morale in the populist context of national superiority and people's love for the homeland. Female political leaders focus on a sensitivity and nurturance frame aligned with collectively shared responsibility, whereas male political leaders activate a standardised competitive frame with their emotional moments aimed at a more aggressive response to the pandemic.

The findings have also supported the claim that the populist sentiment, as in the case of the male political leaders, is underpinned by the negative emotions of fear and anger (Rico, Guinjoan and Anduiza 2017), being the constituent elements of the politics of fear (Wodak 2015, 2021). It has been thus clarified that crisis in political discourse is not that much affected by gender double bind, and female political leaders openly display their femininity by focusing a lot on sensitivity and nurturance, which are generally devalued due to the stereotypical ideas of political competence (Lawless 2015, Teele et al. 2018).

Admittedly, this study suffers from some limitations in terms of generalisability. This study has addressed an issue of gender-related metaphor use from a genre perspective – national lockdown addresses, with the main purpose of comparing male and female political leaders' crisis communication. Specific contextual differences such as leaders' political culture, representative regime, and their term in office were not considered. The data were analysed without using the corpus-based method for generating source domains (Deignan 2005, Stefanowitsch 2020), which might provide more empirical evidence for analysing semantic patterns of systematic metaphor use (Musolff 2016) and lexical relations within a metaphorical mapping (Stefanowitsch 2020).

Despite these limitations, the findings have provided further support for metaphorical war announcements with a competitive streak (Musolff 2022), mainly articulated by male political leaders. It has also been clarified that the politics of fear can be consistent with the populist sentiment (Rico et al. 2017), specifically expressed by male political leaders. By contrast, female political leaders have chosen a path of displaying the values of higher nurturance and collective empathy in their representation of national health policy during the pandemic. Future research should continue to explore how political leadership characteristics, beyond gender, may influence crisis communication.

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