

# Phobic and Affective Language in Far-right, Nationalist Discourse Rhetoric in Brexit Speeches

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## Introduction and Background

In this study, I explore the discursive strategies far-right populist politicians in the UK used to influence public opinion to get the British public to vote to leave the European Union (EU)—known as Brexit (the exit of the UK from the EU) and the ‘Leave Campaign’. My focus is on how the use of phobic and affective language was employed to mobilize supporters to go to the polls. The events under consideration took place roughly between 2012 and 2016, when the British people went to the polls to cast their ballots. My current interest in those events, however, began while watching and reading the international news, particularly calls from different sections of the British society to have another chance for a referendum. Those calls occurred during the chaotic years of the Brexit negotiations. This study, hence, was inspired by the desire to understand why and how the majority of the British people decided to vote to leave the EU in 2016.

In order to do so, there was a need to explore the speeches of the politicians who opposed the UK’s membership of the EU and identify the discursive strategies they used to influence public opinion. Those politicians belong to the radical far-right—a movement that started to rise in Europe and the United States initially following the September 11 events, leading to xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and anti-refugee sentiments among the people (Oner 2014). Those sentiments developed to more extremes following the financial crisis of 2008 (Angouri and Wodak 2014; Bergem and Bergem 2019). In the aftermath of this crisis, people in many European countries suffered from economic hardships, which triggered far-right politicians to lay the blame for the people’s suffering on immigration for negatively affecting their economies. In the case of the UK and in similar ways, the anti-immigration, populist parties built on the people’s suffering and their negative feelings towards immigration to mobilize public opinion against the UK’s membership of the EU, leading to the Brexit movement and the actual departure of the UK from its membership of the EU in 2020.

In reaction to this backdrop, the leadership of far-right, nationalist, anti-immigration parties such as UKIP (The United Kingdom Independent Party) and the Conservative Party began to lay the blame on the EU for all the problems the country faced. To do so, they used different tactics in their speeches including arousing fear and anger among the people. They, thus, built on the people’s suffering to mobilize

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*Cairo Studies in English* – 2024 (1): 76–99. <https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/>  
DOI: 10.21608/CSE.2024.284216.1160

public opinion against the UK's membership of the EU, leading to a vote in a nationwide referendum to leave the EU which took place in June 2016. The context of the present research, therefore, is the strife of far-right parties in the UK to get the government of the UK at that time, whose Prime Minister was David Cameron of the Conservative Party, to agree to a referendum to leave/stay in the EU.

Given the above socio-historical, socio-political and contextual background to the topic, the purpose of the present study is twofold. First, the study attempted to identify the discursive strategies used in the speeches of far-right, populist leaders to galvanize the people against the UK's membership of the EU. Second, the study aimed to explore the affective strategies far-right political readers used to manipulate the public and lead them to vote for the UK to leave the EU.

### **1. The Discourse of the Far-right**

Traditionally, western politicians obeyed the conventions of political correctness (PC), which dictate a mode of using language that avoids excluding, disempowering, marginalizing or offending minorities or different groups of people (Szilagyí 2017). Obeying the rules of political correctness was the norm in political language and discourse for many years. Gradually, some politicians began to argue that PC became a means to censor or gag politicians and prevent them from voicing their opinions. Those politicians blatantly broke the rules of PC—arguing that those rules were dictated by elitists who arbitrarily imposed their agendas and enforced their biases (Szilagyí). One of the leading politicians who openly attacked PC and quickly became a role model to follow for radical right-wing politicians is Donald Trump. In his 2016 presidential campaign, he argued against PC by using the metaphor of affordability “We can't afford anymore to be politically correct”. Many of the European far-right politicians followed suit. Szilagyí suggests that by employing metaphors of affordability and eliteness (to describe liberal politicians), far-right politicians successfully argued that PC was an extravagance used by elitists who were out of touch with the people's suffering. For this reason, and very importantly, those politicians presented themselves as members of the average, working-class people—which is the hallmark of populist politics. This last point falls at the heart of the construction of far-right discourse. In the UK, Nigel Farage, the UKIP leader, presented PC as tyrannical to the extent that it aroused fear in the common people when he argued that British politicians were concerned about PC while the British people were losing jobs and “terrified of causing offense” (Szilagyí).

Even though far-right populist, nationalist politicians have used different approaches in different countries, researchers attempted to explain why populism has resurged in different parts of the world and identify those features that define far-right populist politics, e.g. whether their unifying features were in terms of a set of policies and political views or in terms of their styles of communication. Kaufmann (2019) identified immigration as the driving force behind these movements. Other researchers have suggested that populism is centered around the presence of a charismatic leader. Yet, one of the typical features of populism that all researchers agree on is how they identify with the people, their suffering, and their aspirations

(see Taggart 2004; Breeze 2019). Features of populist discourse, as a result, were investigated in some studies. Moffitt (2016), for example, proposed that in constructing their claims, populist leaders employed the affective discourse practices of in- and out-grouping to create out-groups as the enemy and stigmatize their actions while sympathizing with the suffering of the disgruntled people. Along similar lines, Breeze (2019) focused on how these leaders employed affective language to present their political vision and ideological views. Utilizing affective language was also examined by Wodak (2021), who used the term ‘politics of emotions’ to describe how those politicians drew on their ‘arrogance of ignorance’ by appeals to intuition and resentment rather than using fact-based evidence.

Many recent studies have examined the resurgence of far-right populist politics in the USA and Europe focusing on aspects of their discourse. In their study, Angouri and Wodak (2014) attempt to relate the re-emergence of the far-right to the financial crisis in Greece, which had a severe impact on the economy, leading its unemployment rate to reach 27.8%. In doing so, they examined the discourse strategies of attributing or resisting blame in the online postings from the *Guardian* discussion board. The study attempted to find out how laying the blame for the crisis led to the rise of the Greek far-right party, Golden Dawn. Analysis of the posts showed that several actors were blamed for the crisis and the rise of Golden Dawn was both a product of and reaction to the crisis.

Financial and economic downturns, thus, are two main factors that have led to the resurgence of the far right in many countries. In their attempt to lay the blame for economic problems, far-right leaders found immigration to be an easy target. Several studies have addressed immigration and how it was weaponized by the far-right (see Pascale 2019). These studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between the presence of high numbers of immigrants, the presence of far-right, nationalist movements and the success rates of anti-immigration politicians in elections (see Otto and Steinhardt 2014; Sekeris and Vasilakis 2016). Most research on immigration, furthermore, found a positive relationship between the inflow of migrants, anti-immigrant attitudes and the resulting associated tendency to vote for right-wing parties (Bracco et al. 2018). Far-right politicians have targeted immigration to gain the support of the public by instigating hate and fear as discussed above (see also, Parvaresh 2023). A UN report published in the *Guardian* (August 26, 2016), for instance, documented a surge in hate crimes during and after the Leave referendum campaign in the UK. The report accused politicians of creating prejudices that emboldened individuals to carry out “acts of intimidation and hate towards ethnic or ethno-religious communities and people who are visibly different”.

While most research examined the effect of the presence of immigrants in giving rise to far-right movements, i.e. presenting them as reactionary movements, Bracco et al (2018) address the far-right from the opposite perspective: how the presence and behavior of immigrants are influenced by populist parties. Bracco et al.’s study collected data from mayoral elections between 2002 – 2012 in northern Italy, where most immigrants settled and where, as a consequence, far-right politicians

particularly those belonging to the anti-immigration Lega Nord targeted their presence as a threat. Their anti-immigrant discourse resulted in discouraging migrants from moving to the north of Italy, thereby to smaller numbers of immigrants settling there following the election of a Lega Nord mayor. Significantly, the findings of this study suggest that migrants' location decisions, i.e. settling in or moving away from certain municipalities, are affected by the presence of far-right discourse.

The type of language employed by far-right leaders is another strand in this area of research. To influence public opinion and mobilize the members of the public to vote for their policies, far-right populist leaders use a type of discourse that employs simpler language than that used by the elite mainstream leaders (McDonnell and Ondelli 2020). Their discourse heavily utilizes affective and emotional aspects of language or what Breeze (2019) terms "affective discourse practices". In her study, Breeze examined how two opposition parties in the UK, UKIP and Labour, utilized affective and emotive language to influence public opinion. Her rationale for examining the discourse strategies of both parties, which have very different political and ideological orientations, was that during elections opposition parties aim to discredit the governing party, typically utilizing the emotive language of anger and indignation. Affective and emotive language exploits people's emotions such as fear, anxiety, and anger to shape their opinions and lead them to vote on issues. Towards that end, Breeze examined the discursive strategies used by those parties. Her findings indicate that both parties used language that invoked fear, expressed anger, and invited or expressed concern.

With a similar focus on British politics and the rise of populist parties, Engström and Paradis (2015) focused on self-presentation and the construction of immigration by two populist parties, UKIP and the British National Party (BNP). Their findings show that both parties resorted to similar discursive strategies of self-presentation using claims such as being competent and unique. It was interesting that both parties showed a similar trend for self-presentation of using the pronoun *we* more frequently than using the party name, which suggests that they wanted to identify themselves with their voters as one (*we*). In constructing immigration, they resorted to in-group and out-group dichotomies, and in representing immigration their emphasis was on aspects such as legal status, number and origin (whether the migrant was a refugee, asylum seeker or immigrant). Linguistically, nomination and predication were examined to identify collocations and their functions. Predication was employed as a discursive strategy to attribute negative characteristics to the immigrants.

Modern information technology and particularly the internet offers a convenient space for politicians and their supporters to voice and share their extremist ideas (Caiani 2014). Another hallmark of populist politicians, therefore, is their media savviness (Mjelde 2019), and taking advantage of opportunities for exposure to the media by using it as a "crowning moment" to get recognition as savvy politicians and gain more popularity. Remarkably, far-right populist politicians do not limit their political skills to language use. Realizing the importance of the internet and social media, they have resorted to using visual images to mobilize supporters to get around the fact that mainstream media were reluctant to post what can be regarded as racist

material. Doerr (2017) investigated their use of visual images by examining how the far-right Swiss People's Party in Switzerland used a cartoon (known as the 'black sheep' cartoon) to poke fun at immigrants in Switzerland and, by doing so, constructing a bond of solidarity with the Swiss public. Knowing the position of mainstream media in this regard, leaders of the Swiss People's Party resorted to social media platforms on the internet for posting their posters, thereby, reaching out to and facilitating communication with their base. Populist politicians in several European countries, such as Italy and Germany, followed their Swiss counterparts' suit and used their own racist black sheep versions of the cartoon to create immigrants as the unwanted 'other'. In the following sections, I also show how UKIP used a similar approach in its attempt to rally the people to vote to leave the EU.

The use of social media by the far-right, particularly online discussion groups, as a venue to attack and dehumanize immigrants and arouse the public's negative emotions and resentment was discussed in Wahlström et al (2021). In their study, Wahlström et al explored how those groups motivated and legitimized violence against immigrants by constructing immigrants as violent criminals committing crimes against the vulnerable citizens of their host country. This representation was used as a springboard for calls to deport them. The authors further argue that the use of these accusations combined with dehumanizing language instigated negative emotions among followers, leading to violent actions against immigrants.

The rhetorical aspects of far-right discourse were addressed in several studies. Wodak (2021), for example, focused on how far-right populist leaders use rhetoric to construct a dichotomy that divides people into groups, such as 'the people' and 'the elites', where the elites are the enemy who exploit and neglect the people and their needs. To legitimize actions against immigrants, far-right politicians employ what Wodak calls 'moral evaluation' or the use of culturally based principles to legitimize othering. Durrheim et al (2018) discuss how far-right leaders use racist language as a means of mobilizing support. Along similar lines, Lindekilde (2014) terms the discourse of far-right populist politicians 'intolerant discourse'. This discourse occurs in a cycle or sequence of events, the far-right leader makes a racist statement, and in reaction, harsh criticism is directed to those leaders, in reaction to which far-right leaders claim victimization, hence turning the accusation into rhetorical advantage. This suggests, as Durrheim et al argue, that these leaders practically invite accusations and use them as a starting line to further their claims.

## **2. CDA and The Discourse Historical Approach**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or critical discourse studies (CDS), according to Wodak (2015), examines texts beyond the sentence level, including visuals and sounds as methods of meaning-making, with the aim of exposing "noninclusive and nonegalitarian" discourses. Reisigl and Wodak (2017) identify three key concepts of CDA, critique (adopting a critical stance), power (an unsymmetrical relationship among members of a group or society) and ideology (a one-sided perspective shared by members of a given group). Wodak (2015) characterizes the Discourse Historical

Approach (DHA) as being interdisciplinary, problem-oriented, integrating a number of theories and methods, incorporating fieldwork and ethnography, moving between theory and empirical data, and taking the historical context into account in interpreting data. Significantly, Wodak adds that the analytical categories and tools are not fixed but have to be justified for each issue being studied. An integral feature of the DHA is its methodology of triangulation, combining theory, data, method, and contextual information—which ultimately helps the researcher avoid subjectivity. Drawing on the principles of critical theory, Wodak proposes that the goals of DHA are to uncover text- or discourse-internal inconsistencies and contradictions and the manipulative features or components of discursive practices. Within this framework, ideology is viewed as a worldview involving attitudes and opinions shared by a similar-minded group of people. Ideology exploits discourse to produce unequal power relations, thereby establishing hegemonic discourse narratives. To perform a DHA analysis, the linguistic textual context, the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships, the extralinguistic variables and the historical context for the text must be taken into consideration.

Since the DHA is problem-oriented, the text represents only one component of the study of discourse, to be supported by an understanding of the socio-political and socio-historical context and using a variety of data from multiple sources is central to carrying out research in this field. The idea of the situatedness of the text relating to these interrelated aspects constitutes DHA as a multidisciplinary, triangulated research field. Angouri and Wodak (2014) propose a four-level analytical model consisting of the historical context, the current context, the text-internal co-text, and the interdiscursive context (see also Reisigl and Wodak 2001). The DHA is also interested in how the self and other are constructed or, more technically, the positive-self and negative-other representation and semiotic means used to construct those representations. The analytical tools used to unveil these aspects of representation are nomination and predication. Nomination reveals how people and events are represented and predication shows how elements of nomination are described.

Different strategies are employed in discourse to produce certain effects. Angouri and Wodak (2014) single out some of these strategies such as perspectivization (revealing the writer/speaker's involvement through the use of metaphors or deixis) and argumentation (how specific claims are justified or legitimated). Argumentation allows the production of discourse that either presents a sound or distorted representation of events or people and, consequently makes it possible for ideologically framed ideas to be expressed and circulated. Additionally, argumentation conveys the means by which subtle modes of expressing power can be used for positive-self and negative-other representation.

The contribution of the HDA to CDA, according to Angouri and Wodak (2014), is in how it seeks to uncover the underlying components of discourse as it is placed in a given moment in history. The textual analysis helps understand the structure of the text. Contextual analysis aims to understand the historical context in which the text was produced from different perspectives such as the political, economic, and social contexts. The discourse analysis component investigates how language

constructs and shapes power relations and identities. The ideological component identifies and critiques the dominant ideologies and explains how they are constructed and perpetuated through language. Intertextuality analyzes the relationships among different texts and how texts influence one another. Finally, agency and resistance explore how individuals and groups negotiate, resist, or subvert dominant discourses and how these aspects of agency and resistance are reflected in texts.

### **3. Data and Method**

The data for the present study was collected from speeches by the leaders of far-right parties in the UK. The choice of analyzing speeches rather than newspaper editorials or published opinion articles is based on the idea that speeches represent a type of discourse that allows the speaker to offer arguments and accusations without their ideas and arguments being interrupted or contested (Doerr 2017). In that way, speeches can be seen as an effective tool for influencing public opinion by making it possible for the speaker to put forth uncontested arguments commonly full of false statements and even flagrant lies. Speeches make it possible for politicians to present their ideologies of laying the blame for all the problems the people suffer from (the US) on a scapegoat (the Other), e.g. immigration and the EU. In addition, in their speeches, far-right politicians typically exploit incidents and minor crimes committed by migrants to create a phobic atmosphere among the public and use these incidents to dehumanize the immigrants and exaggerate the dangers their presence poses to the citizens of the host country and consequently create an atmosphere of fear among the people. This method of framing immigrants was termed by Wodak (2021) as the ‘politics of fear’.

To come up with a list of far-right populist leaders in the UK during the Brexit controversy, I searched newspaper headlines and editorials as well as the internet and YouTube. Several names were identified including Nigel Farage, the leader of UKIP, Dominic Cummings and Boris Johnson of the Conservative Party, and Matthew Elliott, the chief executive of VoteLeave. Speeches were searched on YouTube and the ‘show transcript’ feature was used to see and download the transcript of each video. The British Political Speech site (<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm>) was also searched and several of the speeches were downloaded and copied onto Word files. Each file was saved by the name of the speaker and the date of the speech. In total, forty-eight speeches delivered between 2012 and 2016 were downloaded for the present study. The corpus consisted of 29,194 words in total.

An ever-growing number of studies have combined the methods of CDA and corpus analysis. Baker et al. (2008), for example, argue that combining both fields results in a successful methodological synergy. For the analytical component, the present study used Lawrence Anthony’s AntConc software program—a freely available and downloadable concordancing software—for the frequency analysis.

The program is at: <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>. For the contextual analysis, the extended contexts of each item were examined.

Arousing fear in the public can be achieved through different strategies. To identify and analyze these strategies, a thorough reading of a random sample of the downloaded speeches was done to identify some of the keywords used in the speeches. Once the keywords were identified, the corpus was searched for these words to identify their collocations. However, it should be pointed out that due to small size of the corpus, the collocation analysis was not helpful. This was followed by a discourse analysis and an argument analysis of the extended contexts of these items to reach an understanding of how these leaders manipulated the emotions of the public to get them to vote for leaving the EU. Therefore, there are two parts to my study, a quantitative one based on corpus analysis and a qualitative one to help interpret the findings of the quantitative data. A critical discourse analysis part, adopting the Historical Discourse Approach, was applied to examine the discursive and rhetorical strategies employed to mobilize and shape public opinion.

The textual analysis applies the HDA as described above to identify the discursive strategies the different speakers used to influence public opinion. The analysis is based on the socio-historical political context of Brexit, focusing on text-internal context and the wider context that led to the Brexit movement. My analysis focuses on the discourse strategies of instilling fear, anger, and anxiety among the public. Through the micro-analysis of keywords in the different leaders' speeches, combined with a macro-level analysis of the context (applying a discourse-historical approach) such an understanding can be reached. The mobilization of contentious issues that contrast the political and economic decision-making of the EU in different parts of Europe to those in the UK to create anger among the people about the dangers the EU is putting the UK in the British public is one of the main features of their discourse.

Following the discourse-historical approach, I attempted to explore the different strategies far-right leaders employed during the period leading up to the 'Leave/Stay' referendum in the UK. My analysis focuses on the discursive strategies used by far-right, Eurosceptic leaders to instill fear, anger, and anxiety among the public relating to the EU and its policies. A combination of the micro-analysis of keywords in the different leaders' speeches, combined with a macro-level analysis of the context (through the HDA) was used to reach an understanding of how those speakers were able to manipulate public opinion.

The analysis of the "Breaking Point" posters was based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal analysis, which purports to analyze texts that integrate different semiotic modes of communication. Multimodal analysis is interested in how different modes of communication are integrated to produce a coherent communicative event (Van Leeuwen 2015). In analyzing visual material, Kress and Van Leeuwen apply Halliday's theory of transitivity. A picture thus can be analyzed in terms of participants (the figures that appear in the visual), processes (how the participants are linked together) and the circumstances (for my analysis, textual material in the posters constitutes this aspect). The Breaking Point posters, as a form



of communication, included visual and textual modes of communication. The analysis focuses on the visual composition of the posters, including the placement of the textual elements in the posters and attempts to explain how textual and visual aspects work together to have a propaganda effect.

#### **4. Analysis**

##### *4.1. Discursive Strategies Employed*

The analysis begins with identifying the keywords used in the corpus, which consists of speeches retrieved from YouTube and the British Political Speeches site. The dates of these speeches range from 2012 to 2016. The last, June 23, 2016, represents the date when the UK went to vote on the referendum. An interesting aspect of speeches is that they are one-sided, which makes it possible for the speaker to freely make claims and accusations without being contested.

The analytical part of this study focuses on six discursive strategies identified in the data. These are positioning; positive self-presentation and negative other presentation; employing nomination and predication as tools of othering and instilling suspicion and fear in the public; argument structure (how syntactic structures are formed to create doubt, resentment and fear in the recipients); juxtaposition of conditions under the EU and after leaving it; and the use of visual images to heighten the people’s fears of the EU’s immigration policies.

**4.1.1. Use of First-person Pronouns.** Since most available research on far-right populist leaders’ use of language pointed to their presenting themselves as one with the public (as discussed in the literature review, particularly Engström and Paradis 2015), the first item directly of interest was to find out the frequency with which the first-person plural pronoun *we* occurred in the corpus, compared to its single counterpart *I*. It turned out that both pronouns were very highly frequently used, with *we* occurring with a frequency of 521 and *I* with a frequency of 831. Given these high frequencies, it became necessary to find out how each pronoun was used and what function it played. To find out how the first-person singular pronoun *I* was used, it was necessary to identify the grammatical context in which it occurred. The corpus data showed that it occurred with verbs that have a particular discourse function in spoken discourse. The total frequency of these was 379 out of 732 occurrences of this pronoun. Table 1 presents the frequencies of verbs co-occurring with the first-person singular pronoun *I*.

**Table 1.** Frequencies of the first-person pronoun *I* with verbs

<b>I + verb</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
I think	182
I mean	86
I believe	28
I’m sure, afraid, going, etc.	172
I don’t feel, know, think, etc.	148

I've	72
I was	1

Speeches are a spoken type of discourse. The use of all these verbs with the first-person pronoun indicates a pragmatic function of speech, where these verbs serve as discourse or pragmatic markers that allow the speaker to express different levels of certainty and uncertainty. In that way, they can also be assumed to allow the speaker to hedge the proposition embedded in the structure, rather than presenting it as an absolute fact. In other instances, repetition of the first-person singular pronoun indicated hesitation, which is a normal feature of spoken language. In several instances, the speaker would show hesitation as in: *I I I mean* or *I mean I mean I mean*. In other instances, the speaker used it to present him-/herself to the public.

1. But **I** am your public servant, standing here, wanting to make our country so much better - for your children and mine.
2. **I** love this country, and **I** will do my duty by it. We've got the track record, the right team
3. Shortly after early October but **I** forget
4. As **I**'ve said before you've all thought it was terribly funny. You stopped laughing in 2016. But my view has changed of Europe since **I** since **I** joined in 2005 **I** saw the Constitution that had been.

The first-person plural pronoun *we*, occurs with a frequency of 525. Table 2 shows the verbs that occurred with *we*.

**Table 2.** Frequencies of the first-person pronoun *we* with verbs

<b>We + verb</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
We will	52
We've	50
We're/we are	66
We have	32
We can	24
We get	17
We want	16

The pronoun *we* was employed as an inclusive tool to position the speaker as one with the public together, which was a successful strategy, as pointed out in the literature, that made it possible for the speakers to use affective strategies (i.e. appealing to the hearers' emotions), and seductive strategies (i.e. elements of persuasive arguments) to reach their goals. In both affective and seductive strategies, the speaker employs elements of persuasion to appeal to and influence the hearers. Persuasion is accomplished by two main components rhetoric. The first is affect or *pathos*, that is appealing to the emotions of the recipients by stirring their feelings

and ensuring their involvement in the topic the speaker is presenting. The second, seduction or *ethos* which refers to how the speaker presents him-/herself to the recipients in terms of being credible, trustworthy, caring, and passionate about the topic (Hammer 2010; Peng 2019).

The main difference between both pronouns, as is shown in Tables 1 and 2, is that while *I* is used as a discourse marker to modify the following clause (as in *I think I mean I don't think with our ...*), *we* is followed mostly by auxiliary verbs that introduce the predicate of the sentence (as in *we can do that if we have the political will*). Employing predication with *we* was a central argumentative strategy as the analysis shows.

#### **4.1.2. Seductive Strategies.**

##### **Excerpt 1:**

If we leave the EU,

- We will be **free**
- we will be **sovereign**
- we will be **proud**
- we will be **independent**

##### **Excerpt 2:**

- The **only way** this can be dealt with is by **leaving the EU**.
- I believe that **leaving the Union** and **reclaiming our destiny** will create the most exciting opportunity for **national renewal** in our lifetime. [...]
- We get our **money back**.  
We get our **borders back**.  
We get our **Parliament back**.  
We get back **the ability to strike free trade deals**.

The examples in both excerpts show how the speakers presented themselves as one with the people, which is a shrewd strategy that made it possible for the speaker to pose as a member of the public who shared their suffering, predicaments, and also importantly their hopes and aspirations for a better future. The excerpts also show how the EU is constructed as the other, the out-group, and specifically as the enemy, who does not serve the interests of the British people through utilizing accusatory language.

The use of predication is remarkable in both excerpts. In the first excerpt, the speaker uses adjectives skillfully to create a picture that triggers the patriotic pride of the British people in regaining their freedom, sovereignty, pride, and independence. At the same time, the use of these terms constructs an image of the UK and its people as being deprived of all these values under membership of the EU. This kind of representation allows the speakers to masterfully create the US as the

people and the evil Other, the EU, which has taken away all these values from the British people.

In the second extract, the speaker begins by limiting the people's choices to one—that of the inevitability of leaving the EU. This is followed by a pragmatic marker, *I believe*, indicating certainty and inevitability. The juxtaposition of “leaving the Union” and “reclaiming our destiny” through the use of the conjunction *and* creates an interesting equation: leaving the Union means reclaiming our destiny, which suggests that their EU membership has deprived them of owning their destiny. The use of the object form of the first-person plural pronoun *our*, in *our destiny* and *our lifetime*, resonates with the tendency of far-right leaders to present themselves as one with the people and show that together with the people they can reap the benefits of leaving the EU.

The last four arguments in this excerpt employ parallel sentence structures consisting of *we* + the predicate consisting of *get our* + the predicate, with a slight variation in the last sentence. The four predicates brilliantly and seductively describe the fruits of leaving the EU, i.e. they regain their sovereignty and get their money back, regain their physical (borders), political (parliament), and economic independence (be able to strike free trade deals). Indirectly, the EU, the Other, is understood as the culprit who deprived the UK of all those things.

**4.1.3. Affective Language and the Mechanisms of Invoking Anger.** The three components of the HDA are con/text, discourse, and discursive strategies. Conflict talk involves using “argumentative moves” which employ “topoi and fallacies” (Reisigl and Wodak 2001) to make accusations against the opponent. The following excerpts show how far-right leaders employed affective language as a persuasive tool by emphasizing the poor governance of the EU and bringing support to their arguments to leave the EU. One interesting mechanism far-right populist used was interrogative structures to question and raise doubt about the intentions of the EU. Argumentation moves/strategies reveal how claims are justified or legitimized. Claims are employed to create a perpetrator-victim representation that contrasts what the EU governing body is planning for other parts of Europe with the situation on the ground in the UK. Representation of the EU as the Other and specifically as the enemy, who does not serve the interests of the British people is accomplished through accusatory language. Affective and seductive language helps emphasize the poor governance of the EU and bring support to their arguments to leave the EU.

### Excerpt 3:

- **Why should British taxpayers pay for new sewers in Budapest? For a new underground system in Warsaw, when **our** own public services are crumbling in London?**

- **Why should we pay, why should **we** pay a penny into **an organization** whose accounts have **not been signed off for the auditors** for the last 11 years in a row?**

Questions with “why should” are employed to express the unfairness of a situation or an action and, hence, can express and also invoke anger. In the speeches of far-right leaders, this type of question was used effectively to invoke anger and resentment in the audience. In the first extract in Excerpt 3, British taxpayer money is presented as being exploited by the EU to build new sewers in a far-away European country, Hungary, and a new underground system in another distant East European country, Poland. This is juxtaposed with the conditions at home in the UK, where public services are crumbling. The contrast paints a clear picture of unfair treatment: the UK money is being spent on other countries, while the British people are being denied spending their own money on public services at home. Notably, the use of *our* in “when our own public services are crumbling in London” enhances the contrast and makes it more glaring through the use of the names of foreign capitals as contrasted with their own capital city, London. The example also continues the same pattern of presentation of the EU and its policies as the unfair, dominant Other and the UK citizens as the victims of those policies.

The question is effectively followed immediately by an adjunct time clause. The subordinate clause juxtaposes how British taxpayers are paying for other faraway countries to bolster their infrastructures with how these taxpayers’ own infrastructure is crumbling. The structure successfully leaves the audience with the painful reality of how bad things are under the EU governance. This type of argument structure obviously triggers anger, hate and fear in these taxpayers. Note also that the speaker is contrasting *new* = for ‘other’ and *crumbling* = for ‘self’ to emphasize the underside of being a member of the EU. The use of predication is quite effective in allowing for juxtaposing how British taxpayer money is paying for new public services in faraway countries, while those of their own are debilitated.

The second example continues this representation by using the “why should we” interrogative structure. Using metonymy, the EU is referred to as “an organization” and is accused of economic mismanagement, bad bookkeeping, and even fraud since its accounts have not been reviewed by auditors in eleven years.

Through using these rhetorical questions that place the other and self side-by-side, thus, the speakers successfully presented the self as the **victim** under their membership of the EU and the EU as the **perpetrator** and cause of all the suffering people are experiencing.

**4.1.4. Immigration as a Ploy to Invoke Fear.** Immigration is repeatedly employed by far-right populist leaders as another Other or out-group to invoke fear, resentment and hostile feelings in the public. In the following extract, David Cameron, the Prime Minister at the time, is attacked for allowing migrants into the country.

#### Excerpt 4:

- All the parties now talk tough on immigration. David Cameron said he would bring it down to the tens of thousands. There are still half a **Ten thousand** a week. **Half a million** a year. **Five million economic migrants** in ten years coming to this country. **Unprecedented.** Never happened before.

Even though the speaker (Nigel Farage) admits the government's attempt to bring down the number of immigrants, he cleverly uses numbers to create a scary picture of immigrants flooding the nation. The numbers grow staggeringly from ten thousand, to half a million to five million in a ten-year span. But those are not refugees or asylum seekers; they are "economic migrants" who seek to threaten the livelihood of the people and add to their economic woes.

The idea of blaming immigration for economic problems and the debilitated infrastructure at home continues in this extract.

#### Excerpt 5:

- The effects are obvious. In every part of **our national life**. The **strain** these numbers are putting on **public services**. **Schools**. The **shortage** of school places in primaries and secondary schools. The **NHS**. **Wages** are **driven down** by the massive **over-supply of unskilled labour**.

Here, the speaker continues describing the repercussions of allowing immigrants into the country. The effects are obvious in all aspects of "our national life", where the speaker uses the plural form of the first-person pronoun to include him-/herself with the public. Immigration is constructed as a "strain" on public services to which the people are entitled. These public services are listed using grammatical constructions alternating between one-word phrases, long phrases, and complete sentence structures. The first item is schools, which stands alone as an utterance but is then followed by phrasal elaboration emphasizing the shortages of places in schools. This hits home the suffering of the British people in finding a place for their children at schools. This is followed by the second item that affects the people the most, the NHS (the National Health Service) in the UK. The list goes on to include the effect of immigration on driving down wages, which again is reflected in the poor economic conditions of the people. The excerpt ends significantly with an elaboration on the type of people who are threatening the livelihood of the British people in all aspects of their lives, schools, health service and income. Those immigrants are "unskilled" workers who do not deserve to be allowed all those privileges in the UK.

Regarding where those immigrants are coming from, the answer is offered in the next excerpt.

### Excerpt 6:

- And from the 1st of January next year, the **risks increase massively**. The seven-year period is up and nearly **30 million of the good people of Bulgaria and Romania** have open access to **our country, our welfare system, our jobs market**.

Under the EU governance system, the UK's borders will be open to migrants from the farthest and poorest European countries, which have become members of the EU: Bulgaria and Romania. To arouse fear among the people, the speaker notably uses the exacerbating figure of 30 million to exaggerate the enormity of the threat of the EU immigration policies. The predicate of the second sentence in the excerpt uses *our* to show the people that those millions of people will have access not only to "our country" but also "our welfare system" and "jobs market". Mentioning the welfare system before the jobs market is significant in insinuating that many of those immigrants are lazy people who are after abusing the British system by seeking welfare coverage without working.

Reference to migrants is a common theme in far-right leaders' speeches. In the following excerpt, the focus is on immigrants from Romania. Note how the speaker uses the passive to emphasize "by Romanians" by placing it at the end of the sentence.

### Excerpt 7:

- There is a **dark side** to the opening of the door in January. London is already experiencing a **Romanian crime wave**. **92 per cent of ATM crime is committed by Romanians**. This gets to the heart of the immigration policy that UKIP wants, **we should not welcome foreign criminal gangs** and we must **deport** those who have committed offences.

Immigration does not simply threaten the livelihood of the people as presented in Excerpt 6. There is a horrifying "dark side" to it. The noun phrase "a dark side" is a predicate that captures the attention of the audience as the new information offered in the utterance. Predication is also used in the sentence that follows "a Romanian crime wave". The passive is used in the next sentence to highlight both the subject "92 percent of ATM crime" and the predicate "by Romanians". Presenting migrants from Romania as criminals is employed as a preamble for the argument that wraps up this part of the speech which argues for not allowing criminals into the country and deporting migrants who commit crimes.

In Excerpt 8, the speaker uses emotional language to describe the position of their country under the rule of the EU.

**Excerpt 8:**

- Britain is now isolated and alienated. We are completely alone within the European Union

As a member of the EU, Britain is presented as being isolated and alienated. This is very interesting since we know that Britain is a European country. But the speaker is deliberately setting Britain apart from other European countries by using very strong adjectives “isolated”, “alienated” and “alone”. The speaker’s argument culminates with “we are completely **alone** within the European Union”. The idea here paints a picture of the UK as a neglected member of the EU, which contributes and adds to other arguments to the effect that the EU is exploiting British money to build the infrastructure in other European members, which naturally invokes the resentment of the people.

In the following excerpts, the speaker is creating a picture of the EU as a false, artificial creation or entity. This is used as a backdrop to justify their argument for the necessity of leaving the EU. In all excerpts, the speakers use metonymy to construct the EU as the other in which the UK is not well-treated and from whose membership the UK must depart.

**4.1.5. EU Alienating Strategies.**

**Excerpt 9:**

- Belgium is not a nation it's an artificial creation.

Reference to Belgium is an instance of metonymy to stand for the EU since it is where the EU administrators reside. The EU is presented as “an artificial creation”, thereby doubting the foundations of the EU as a legitimate entity. It is no more than an “artificial creation”. By constructing the EU as lacking the essence of a nation and as an artificial creation, the speaker attempts to instill doubt in the audience about the legitimacy of the EU and the need for the UK to be part of this artificial entity. Elsewhere, the EU was also referred to as “some bizarre notion of Europe”, in which the idea of the union itself was presented as bizarre.

**Excerpt 10:**

- We want to live in nation-states not false artificial creations

There is repetition here of the idea of the EU as an “artificial creation” but the speaker begins the utterance with the pronoun *we* which helps present his/her argument as representative of the people’s thinking, voicing their demand to live in their own nation-state, not be part of a “false artificial creation”.



**Excerpt 11:**

- I'm hoping I'm hoping this begins the end of this project. It's a bad project. It isn't just undemocratic; it's anti-democratic and it puts in that front row it gives people power without accountability, people who cannot be held to account by the electorate

Here, metonymy is also employed again “this project” to refer to the EU, the bad Other. Predication is used to construct a negative picture of the EU, using unsupported and perhaps also false claims. Thus, it is presented as “a bad project” and “anti-democratic” and, significantly, as giving people (metonymy for EU administrators) power without accountability” to the electorate. This negative representation is used as a seductive strategy to add to the resentment of the people and lead them to think of the futility of Britain’s membership of the EU. The EU is an entity to which the UK “surrenders billions of pounds of taxpayers’ money and get[s] nothing in return”—which highlights the worthlessness of their membership of the EU.

**4.1.6. Emotionally Charged Language as a Mobilization Ploy.**

**Excerpt 12:**

- Westminster became utterly detached from **ordinary people** in this country and **those people** started to speak. **These people** started to rise. **Those people** forced a referendum. **Those people** forced a general election of **those people**. Despite all the flaws in our system, for the first time in history **the people** have beaten the establishment. The real winner tonight the real winner tonight is democracy

Populist leaders are known to position themselves as anti-establishment figures fighting against the political elite by positioning themselves as the voice of the people. Their use of emotionally charged rhetoric and simple language helps them gain the support of the people, which in turn bolsters their popularity. In this excerpt, the speaker describes the power of the people in forcing the UK government to agree to hold the referendum, the Stay/Leave referendum. The people are talked about using the third person, alternating between demonstrative pronouns (*those* and *these*), the definite article (*the*) and an adjective (*ordinary*). Yet, the people are constructed as the active agent that pushes change. The agent is followed by a series of powerful verbs: *speak* and *rise*; then, the verb *forced* was used twice, followed by *have beaten*, which represents their real victory.

Using metonymy twice, the UK government (Westminster) and political elites or (establishment) are constructed as the Other that is not mindful of the people’s suffering and needs. The rest of the excerpt uses emotionally charged language to

represent how the people reacted to the detachment of the government by performing a list of actions. They started “to speak”, “started to rise”, “forced a referendum” and “forced a general election”. The people are constructed as revolting against the government and forcing the government to do what they demanded. A variety of pronominal tools (the, those, these) were effectively used in nomination representing the Us to modify the people and construct them as an undermined force that revolted against, and was eventually able to defeat, the powerful establishment. Perspectivization is employed here to frame the people as the driving force of change.

#### *4.2. Visual Images as a Source of Invoking Fear*

Populist leaders are known to use immigration as a potent tool and rallying point to garner support and gain votes typically by framing immigrants in a way that resonates with the concerns and fears and insecurities of the people. As the excerpt analysis has demonstrated, they resort to different tactics to achieve this end, including scapegoating, that is, blaming immigrants for all social and economic problems, particularly unemployment, crime, and shortages in public services. Appeal to national identity is another tactic these leaders use to portray immigrants as a threat to their way of life, cultural values and traditions. Immigration is also typically framed as a security issue, highlighting fears of terrorism and crime. This allows those leaders to position themselves as the defenders of people’s security. A few days before the “Leave” referendum in 2016, Nigel Farage, the leader of UKIP, produced a series of posters, known as the Breaking Point Posters. The obvious goal of those posters was to reach members of the public who still were undecided regarding which way to vote.



**Figure 1.** Breaking Point Poster (Version 1). Nigel Farage with the Poster. (The Guardian, June 16, 2016) <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants>



**Figure 2.** Breaking Point Poster (Version 2). Nigel Farage with the Poster. (Newsweek June 16, 2016. Updated on June 21, 2016, at 8:15 AM EDT) <https://www.newsweek.com/brexit-eu-immigration-ukip-poster-breaking-point-471081>

Figures 1 and 2 represent two versions of the Breaking Point Poster. The same text appears in peripheral areas in both posters: “Breaking Point” appears in the blank

green space. “The EU has failed us all”, “We must break free of the EU and take back our borders”, and notably a banner saying, “Leave the EU”. These short texts are telling in that they summarize the demands of the “Leave Campaign” and occupy peripheral parts of the posters so that the visual impact of the figures that appear in the posters is not obliterated. The texts reiterate the same ideas presented in the speeches, representing arguments against the UK’s membership of the EU. The EU has failed all UK citizens, who feel they have reached a breaking point and cannot take the way the EU treated them anymore. Under the EU, they have no control over their borders and now they want to take back control of their borders.

All these are familiar ideas repeatedly occurring in far-right leaders’ speeches. The figure of Nigel Farage in both posters is foregrounded as the leader who defends his country against the EU and the influx of migrants. In one, he points at the immigrants, as if telling the people “This is what you get from your membership of the EU”, and in the second, he stands proud as the leader who aims to free the country and his people from those immigrants. Visually, the only difference between both posters is that in one there is a close-up shot of the immigrants, while in the other a long shot displays a winding, endless line of people, emphasizing the endless flow of immigrants into the UK.

What is not expected, however, is the identity of the immigrants in the posters. In the context of Brexit, in none of the speeches of far-right populist leaders was there any mention of immigrants from the Middle East, whom both pictures in the posters represent. When immigration was a rallying point in their speeches, it was about the threat to jobs, services, and security from immigrants from other European member states in the EU. Yet, to rally his base to vote to leave, Farage used an endless line of Middle Eastern immigrants to invoke fear and xenophobic feelings in the masses from those people in particular, as they invoked in the public Islamophobic fears and dread of terrorist attacks. This is the reason perhaps why these posters were called racist and accused of “scaremongering racism”, as reported in dozens of British and international newspapers (See Durrheim et al. 2018, for a full list of these sources). The posters represent, thus, a model of racist ideology and propaganda, which in as far as it implemented its purpose was very successful in mobilizing undecided voters or what Durrheim et al. called “the duped masses”.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

The analysis of the speech excerpts indicates that far-right leaders blamed the UK’s membership of the EU for many of the woes of the British people, such as allowing citizens from EU countries to freely travel, live and have jobs in the UK, which directly threatened the jobs available for the UK workforce and their economic wellbeing as a result. This freedom of movement within the EU was also blamed for the rising crime rate in the UK. The EU itself and its policies were blamed for certain regulatory laws that constricted British fishing, raising cattle and sheep as well as other restricting trading in other commodities. These laws were described by far-right politicians as attempts by the EU to control and interfere in the UK’s business.

The British far-right leaders also claimed that these laws had disastrous effects on the UK's economy.

The analysis, in addition, brings out the affective discursive strategies used by radical far-right, populist leaders in the UK during the Brexit campaign to influence public opinion and galvanize the people to vote to leave the EU. A general tendency in these speeches was to show that their homeland was under threat (Breeze 2019). This ethno-nationalist approach allowed far-right politicians in the UK to present their country and its people as alienated within the EU. The affective discursive practices these leaders used were mostly successful in invoking negative emotions towards the EU and its leadership by portraying EU policies as being harmful to the UK citizens and their well-being. The arousal of fear and anger in their audiences were the ploys far-right politicians used to influence public opinion. At the same time, arousal of positive emotions was also at play when these leaders portrayed the kind of reality the British people would experience after leaving the EU, by emphasizing the seductive feelings of independence and national pride. The EU was framed as a threat to traditional British values, culture and security. In their rhetoric, populist leaders laid the blame for all domestic problems in the UK on the EU, where the EU was constructed as the exploiter of the British people. Othering the EU created an out-group against which these leaders legitimized negative emotions (Wodak 2021). Such representation can easily promote in recipients the negative emotional reactions of resentment, anger and fear.

While immigration and the EU immigration policies were recurrent themes in far-right leaders' speeches, it is striking, nonetheless, that in the context of Brexit, none of the far-right politicians referred to migrants from the Middle East or third-world countries in general in their speeches. This obviously was due to the fact that the context was that of the European Union, European member countries and people living in those countries. In their speeches, immigration from Europe was framed as a threat to British people's jobs and security. To mobilize the people to go to the poll stations and cast their ballots to leave the EU, however, images of migrants from non-European countries were exploited for obvious reasons. This provocative employment of visual media is a clear example of how those politicians invoked the sentiments of the electorate against particular groups of immigrants (Doerr 2017). One cannot help but agree with Durrheim et al. (2018), who used the term "identity performance" to describe the employment of racist images as "a mobilizing plan".

Finally, it would be relevant to reflect on how charismatic politicians succeed in achieving their ideological aims by influencing public opinion on vital issues that touch people's lives and well-being. Leaving the EU was framed in their rhetoric as the solution to all domestic problems in the UK. This kind of rhetoric can be appealing to vulnerable recipients who are suffering from economic hardships and who would not seek fact checks and are just after simple solutions to their complex problems. These people, hence, are an easy target to exploit their nationalist and even xenophobic feelings to garner support. The UK completed its divorce from the EU on February 1, 2020. Three years later, Nigel Farage himself admitted that "Brexit

has failed” (Mathers 2023). None of his rosy promises to the British people was fulfilled. In a recent article in the New York Times (Goldberg 2023), the UK’s leaving the EU was described as a grave error, and that “it led to inflation, labor shortages, business closures and travel snafus.” In the same article, the economic damage Brexit has caused was described by British government officials as “of the same ‘magnitude’ as that of the Covid pandemic”. The pain and hassle Brexit has created, the article continues, has resulted in an anti-Brexit majority in the UK. So, in the end, the duped people continue to suffer and the populist leaders get away without punishment.

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