

# **A Portrait of a President: Self-presentation of Biden Versus Putin in Times of Crisis**

*Dalia Hammoud* \*

## **1. Introduction**

During times of crisis, presidential speeches have various functions. They provide a forum for sharing crucial information with the public regarding the current state of affairs, the actions taken, and the future plans. They are also used to manipulate facts and shape public opinion to win them over to the presidents' side (Abdel Fattah 2015), through crafting various personas. As fear and uncertainty prevail during those times, such speeches aim to reassure the people and make them believe in the government's capacity to manage the crisis. "Calling something a crisis means to frame an issue as an urgent, structural threat that necessitates an urgent course of action to avert the danger" (Henderson 2014, 1). Such a definition applies to pandemics and conflicts among countries.

The 2019 Coronavirus disease had been a worldwide crisis which drove many leaders to give political speeches about it, attempting to decrease the anxiety of their people and to persuade them to accept the measures taken in the face of the pandemic. Some of the studies tackling such a crisis are Seixas (2020), Wang and Ge (2022), and Arcimavičienė (2023). Another significant crisis is the Russia-Ukraine conflict which started in 2014 with what was called the "Revolution of Dignity." It escalated in February 2022 and was described by the French President Macron as a "turning point in the history of Europe"; it is still ongoing at the time of this writing. Qureshi, et al. (2022) and Owhor-Chuku (2023) are examples of researchers who focused on that conflict.

This study attempts to fill in a gap by investigating the self-presentation strategies used by the presidents of the two superpowers US and Russia, Biden and Putin and the ideologies behind their choices. Both dealt with this crisis differently as conveyed through their speeches, reflecting their countries' interests. On the one hand, Biden has been supporting Ukraine's sovereignty. Being a close ally, he has been providing it with unlimited financial and military assistance, yet imposing sanctions on Russia and stirring other countries, together with NATO, against it. On the other hand, Putin regards Ukraine as part of Russia, thus taking all possible actions to maintain power over the region. He has been totally against Ukraine becoming a NATO member, considering it a direct national security threat to Russian territories, since it meant implanting the NATO weapons/personnel there.

It is crucial here to highlight the ideologies (i.e., cultural and social values and norms) behind both presidents as they play a significant role in the study. The

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\* Associate Professor, English Department, Faculty of Education, Alexandria University  
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Democratic Party is one of the two major political parties in the US, having Clinton, Obama and Biden as some of its famous presidents. At its core lies a liberal ideology, which supports the government's intervention in the economy of the country, provides broad social services for all sects of the society, and yet does not regulate social behaviours, based on a strong belief of the separation between the church and the state. Regarding foreign policy, Democrats prefer international and multilateral approaches. Putin, on the other hand, belongs to a militant, conservative, anti-Western, isolationist, and authoritarian regime. To him, Russia, the state, "is a separate and superior civilization...whose cultural codes are being passed down from generation to generation as part of the country's political DNA, [and which] has always been under attack by enviers and foes. [This war against Ukraine is] an existential war between the Russian civilization and the West" (Kolesnikov 2022, parags.1, 12, 13).

As Mor (2007) claims that "half of 'power politics' consists of image-making", it was essential to examine the self-presentation strategies these two figures use in their speeches delivered during the ongoing international crisis and to identify the impact their ideologies have on such a usage. This objective is addressed from the perspective of the Self-presentation theory and impression management, since both leaders seek to influence their people by strategically showcasing themselves and shaping their public images. Undeniably, "the attainment of *social power* is the major drive for the manipulation of impressions" (666). According to Tedeschi and Norman (1985, 293), "This chain of events, including self-presentations, the establishment of identities and the subsequent effects of those identities on the social influence process, places impression management firmly in the realm of social power."

In the following part, the paper provides a brief review of the relevant theoretical framework utilized in the study, with a focus on Goffman's theory of Self-presentation (1959), Jones and Pittman's (1982) impression management strategies, and Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory (SIT). It then delves into studies directly connected to both the framework and to the research itself. Subsequently, the data sample and the methodology are explained, followed by the analysis and discussion, and finishing with the conclusion.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

Goffman (1959) uses theatrical metaphors to explain the various ways in which people present the *self*. To him, life is a stage where the people are considered actors. Through their performances, they try to craft or exhibit personas to their audience which "serve to facilitate the effectiveness of more direct forms of influence, such as persuasion, threats and promises" (Tedeschi and Norman 1985, 293). Those actors attempt to manage a certain impression, a superior version of the self which suits the social and cultural expectations of the audience. Thus, the *self* changes with the situation, the environment and the target audience.

Like any theatre, life has two ‘regions of performance’, the *Front Stage* and the *Backstage*. The former is the formal and public stage, where people act a certain ‘persona’ or ‘personas’ which they would like others to view. Indeed, ‘impression management’ is one of the fundamental concepts in Goffman’s theory. On the other hand, a back region is a place where the performers’ impressions usually change. They step out of character, take off their masks and relax to rehearse and prepare for another performance. These regions carry within them conceptual ideas. Worry is a crucial feeling for performers as they eagerly wait for their audience’s reaction and judgement. That judgement shows whether the audience has accepted what was displayed as a problem or not (Edelman 1988).

Another factor influencing the actors’ performance is the audience design since the actors’ selected personas are often chosen based on those expectations. Realizing that specific people will be watching the actors influences the way they behave and forces them to decide whether they are in the front or backstage. Being in the former will drive them to distinguish between their true personas and the ones they would create to impress their audience, whereas on the backstage, they are themselves among those they are acquainted with. Other than acting, performers pay close attention to their physical appearance to impress their audience. In addition, they strive to hide their ‘secrets’ in an attempt to achieve their personal goals (Goffman 1959).

In the same way, while giving speeches, politicians create a make-belief world, an imaginary one, where they wear various masks to exercise power over their audience. Depending on the strategic goals of the administration, the venue (i.e. the setting of the performance) is chosen. This can be the parliament, a foreign country, a memorial, an economic forum, or a television broadcast. Not only do presidents depend on their appearance (attire, health, props, facial expressions, body language, etc.), but also on their manner (the way they speak, what they say, their attitude towards others, etc.). According to Schoor (2017), politicians “perform a play called ‘democracy’. The set is the location of the speech....The stage represents sociohistorical context....The roles of the actors differ....all politicians are their own director, more or less co-directed by their party. The script is offered by traditional ideologies, but actors can also choose to improvise their performance or use multiple scripts of different ideologies” (662).

To create a superior self-image or manage the desired impression, leaders follow strategies that are conditioned by their ideologies. Jones and Pittman (1982) suggest a taxonomy which includes five strategies that are utilized to exercise influence and power over the audience. (1) *Ingratiation*: the actors try to be viewed as friendly by providing their target group with whatever considered appealing. (2) *Exemplification*: the actors refer to moral qualities, like religious beliefs, political ideologies, and self-sacrifice. (3) *Self-promotion*: the performers try to present themselves as competent. It is worth noting that the intentions behind such a strategy may vary from one culture to another. For instance, Western cultures advocate individualism, so self-promotion is a means of personal achievement and success. In

contrast, collectivist cultures, such as many Asian ones, consider self-promotion less significant as it puts the person above the group. (4) *Intimidation*: actors try to be viewed as dangerous, leading to gaining social power and respect from the audience. (5) *Supplication*: By presenting themselves as helpless and weak, the supplicators seek to arouse sympathy. To sum up, while the exemplifier seeks admiration, the intimidator promotes fear. Meanwhile, the ingratiator wants to be liked, whereas the self-promoter tries to show competence. Finally, supplication is not used in the context of the study, since the presidents would never act as submissive weak characters.

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) is relevant for the examination of the impact of ideology on the selection of impression management strategies. Tajfel and Turner (1979) assert that belonging to social groups, like political parties, helps giving people a sense of identity. The individuals, in any of those groups, adapt their images to suit the beliefs, values, and ideology of that group and to conform to its expectations and norms. Group formation goes through three stages. *Social categorization* is where people classify themselves or others according to various variables, such as race, religion, nationality...etc. After that comes *social identification* where they regard themselves as part of that particular group, adopting its beliefs and values. The final stage is *social comparison*, where individuals compare their in-group to others, seeing it as superior, and at the same time, focusing on the negative aspects of the out-groups.

## 2.2. Previous Studies

Multiple studies have been conducted to examine political leaders' self-presentation, whether visual or linguistic. The former, not being of concern to the present research, is slightly highlighted. Being in a digital age, politicians rely much on social media to present themselves positively. This is tackled in the works of Goodnow (2013); Lee (2016); Russmann, et al. (2019); and Steffan (2020). Other studies focused on linguistic analysis of politicians' self-presentation. Diedkova (2024), drawing on personality theories, examines the self-presentation of US presidential candidates during the campaign from 2016 to 2020, focusing on their personality traits. She concludes that confidence and competence were the top attributes, while honesty came last. For instance, in his speech on fighting the COVID 19 pandemic, Biden uses many strategies for depicting a positive self-image. 'Actor description' is the most frequent one, where he "considers himself the rescuer of his people from the horrible coronavirus via beating it with vaccination" (Rhaif and Obaid 2023, 679). After analyzing Biden's inaugural speech, Tkhir and Sydoriv (2022) prove that the president introduced himself positively to maintain power in relation to teacher training policies through the use of various rhetorical devices, such as hyperbole, metaphors, and repetition. Using van Dijk's (1993) Critical Discourse Analysis theory, Vianica and Tanto (2021) study one of Biden's presidential candidate speeches to analyze the way he represents the Self and the Other (Trump). By relying on lexicalization and repetition, Biden's positive-self representation is highlighted opposing Trump's negative-other representation.

Furthermore, Schoor (2017) offers a set of tools to access ideological style based on three theories, one of which is Goffman's (1959) theory on the presentation of the self in everyday life. While Trump has a populist style, Sanders displays a populist-pluralist one, and Clinton an elitist-pluralist style. Ivanova (2016) does a language analysis of pre-election speeches of many Russian candidates, resulting in concluding that they use two kinds of speech strategies: positive and negative. Finally, in 2008, Johansson analyzes a debate between two presidential candidates, Ségolène Royal and Nicholas Sarkozy. She concludes that while Royal projects a self-image of an expert in social and political matters, Sarkozy accentuates being a reliable future president.

To conclude, previous studies about self-presentation in political speeches have shed light on some of the techniques and strategies used by politicians to craft their public image and manipulate their audience. However, there is still a gap concerning the role of ideology in selecting impression management strategies.

### **3. Data**

#### *3.1. Contextualization of Data*

The current paper studies eight speeches delivered by Biden and Putin in times of crisis. The sources of these speeches are the official Internet websites of the two prominent leaders: the websites of the White House and the Kremlin. The following section presents the contextualization of the data under investigation by providing some background information about the crisis which led to these speeches.

In Early 2021, the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy appealed to the U.S. to allow his country to join the NATO. The request was completely rejected by the Russian president. A year later, Putin recognized the independence of the two Ukrainian breakaway regions – the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic and authorized to send troops in eastern Ukraine. This action was seen as an excuse for a further invasion of Ukraine, hence leading to European condemnation. The U.S. imposed sanctions to stop any goods exchange in these areas. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian government launched military operations to regain control over these territories. On February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and after a 2-week ultimatum, Putin decided to have “special military operations” in Ukraine. Consequently, Western allies announced new sanctions, including restrictions on Russian banks and Russian oligarchs. Since then the tension has been ongoing as Russia has amplified its attacks, destroying Ukraine's critical infrastructure.

This major conflict has had a significant impact on the world. Other than resulting in conflicts among various countries, many humanitarian issues have appeared, such as the death and injury of thousands and the displacement of more. Such tension is leading to insecurities around the world, with the threat of a third world war, together with an economic predicament.

### 3.2. Selection of Data

As a convenience sample, four official speeches by each president were chosen. They were mostly delivered at different places, on different occasions and to different audiences, during the Russian-Ukrainian war. The speeches aim at shaping public opinion through using emotive words, grabbing the audience's attention to what is being said, and motivating them towards the required action. Hence, the speeches are a combination of both oral and written discourse, as they mainly tend not to be spontaneous, but partially planned and written by experts, and performed by the leaders. These speeches, arranged chronologically, are:

**3.2.1. Biden's Speeches.** On February 24, 2022, from the White House, Biden delivered a speech after meeting with his national security team and some world leaders following the military operation launched by Putin. He announced the sanctions he imposed on Russia and the restrictions executed on its access to technology and financial markets, stressing the importance of the NATO alliance. *Biden's Speech on Ukraine War (BS1)* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/02/24/remarks-by-president-biden-on-russias-unprovoked-and-unjustified-attack-on-ukraine/>.

On March 26, 2022, Biden delivered a speech at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Poland, addressing the president, prime minister, members of the parliament, Polish citizens and some Ukrainians. He described the conflict between Russia and Ukraine as one between autocracy and democracy. He also accentuated the NATO obligation to defend its ally. After mentioning Putin's name nine times, Biden ended his speech attacking him saying "this man cannot remain in power."

*Biden's Speech in Poland (BS2)* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/26/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-united-efforts-of-the-free-world-to-support-the-people-of-ukraine/>.

Outside the Royal Castle, in Warsaw, Poland, February 21, 2023, U.S. President delivered remarks ahead of the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He began his speech thanking the Polish citizens for hosting thousands of Ukrainians. Similar to the one given a year earlier, Biden then emphasized his commitment to supporting Ukraine.

*Biden's Speech in Poland Marking the One-year Anniversary of the War (BS3)* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/02/21/remarks-by-president-biden-ahead-of-the-one-year-anniversary-of-russias-brutal-and-unprovoked-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

As the second US President to visit Lithuania, hundreds of people gathered at Vilnius University's Grand Courtyard to hear Biden speak on July 12, 2023 during the NATO Summit to announce a Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine. Next to him stood Zelenskyy and G7 leaders, highlighting the importance of the NATO's military alliance to Ukraine.

*Biden's Speech in Lithuania (BS4)* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/07/12/remarks-by-president-biden-on-supporting->

ukraine-defending-democratic-values-and-taking-action-to-address-global-challenges-vilnius-lithuania/.

**3.2.2. Putin's Speeches.** Through a televised address on Feb. 21, 2022, Putin declared that the Ukrainian separatist regions of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic as independent regions. He also emphasized the origin of modern Ukraine, being created by Russia. Putin also expressed his concern regarding the threats awaiting his country if Ukraine is to join the NATO. *Putin's Speech on Ukraine's Events- Speech (PS1)* <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

Through another televised address delivered to the Russian people, few days after the previous speech (Feb. 24, 2022), Putin described Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a step taken by the West to invade and destroy his country. He attacked the US and the NATO for indirectly interfering in his country. He made reference to the various invasions led by the US in Arab countries, namely Iraq, Libya, and Syria, as proof of its aggressive attitude. *Putin's Speech of Declaration of War- Speech (PS2)* <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

Nearly a year after the Russian invasion, and one day after Biden's visit to Ukraine, Putin gave a speech which was simultaneously broadcasted on television, in schools, government buildings, as well as on large screens in public places in Russia and the occupied territories of Ukraine. It was addressed to the members of the Federal Assembly in Moscow. He stressed the idea of the West being a source of evil and chaos, presenting it as a villain and Russia as a victim. *Putin's Speech Addressing Federal Assembly- Speech (PS3)* <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70565>.

On February 29, 2024, Putin delivered a live speech broadcast nationwide addressed to the top officials of the government. He claimed that his invasion of Ukraine has been supported by most Russians. Referring to Russia's nuclear weapons, Putin asserted that any threats from the West will lead to a catastrophe. Most importantly, it came less than a month before the presidential elections with no true opposition. *Putin's Speech Addressing Federal Assembly- Speech (PS4)* <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/73585>.

### *3.3. Methodology*

It is significant to aim at identifying the various personas adopted by both presidents while acting on the *front stage* and explaining the ideology behind their choice, analyzing the strategies they employ to exercise power over their audience. The taxonomy proposed by Jones and Pittman (1982) includes exemplification, self-promotion, intimidation and ingratiation. Consequently, the study applies a qualitative research design, utilizing discourse analysis of the speeches given during the Russian-Ukraine crisis.

To detect instances of *exemplification*, explicit references to moral qualities, such as religious beliefs, political ideology and self-sacrifice are pinpointed. Similarly, to

spot *self-promotion*, language related to the presidents' expertise, unique qualities, or achievements is focused on to demonstrate how they present themselves as competent and capable. Aggressive or assertive language is explored to identify *intimidation*, highlighting how Biden and Putin project power and gain respect from their audience. Finally, *ingratiation* is identified through analyzing the language employed to sound friendly and build rapport with the audience. Thus, the presidents offer benefits and make promises to their target group to create a desirable image.

It is crucial to establish a connection between the identified impression management strategies and the ideologies of Biden and Putin. This is achieved through using the Social Identity Theory as a framework. To analyze *social categorization*, focus is given to the language used to reflect the way both leaders categorize themselves or others based on variables, such as national identity, ethnic group, political affiliation, or geopolitical interests. As for *social identification*, particular attention is given to examine the language utilized to position themselves as members of certain groups, reflecting shared values and beliefs. Additionally, to investigate *social comparison*, the language chosen by Biden and Putin, to present their groups as superior and to highlight the negative aspects of the other groups, is scrutinized.

#### 4. Analysis

The performance of Biden and Putin is shaped by adhering to distinct ideologies, aimed at accentuating their messages and maintaining public support. These ideologies are guided by cultural and societal values and norms. Henceforth, they choose tactics that would suit their aim. While Biden has a diplomatic approach, which emphasizes cooperation and unity and strengthens alliances for a better world, Putin is perceived as authoritarian, prioritizing Russia's national interests above everything and asserting it as a global power. In addition, being a democrat, Biden aligns with liberal values and calls for freedom and democracy whereas Putin is a conservative nationalist, stressing traditional values and a centralized government. Such ideology differences influence the various masks they wear on the political front stage.

##### 4.1. Frequency Counts of Keywords

This section highlights the frequency counts of the keywords repeated in the eight speeches of the two presidents and interprets their significance in relation to the objective of the study. AntConc 4 concordance software has been used as a tool for analysis.

**4.1.1. Biden.** A close look at Table 1 gives insight into Biden's beliefs. Since the speeches discuss the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the frequency of both names is anticipated. This reveals the great importance of such a war internationally, as evident through highlighting themes of 'aggression' (24 times) and 'conflict' (59 times). Surprisingly, Biden mentions the Russian president by name 43 times, unlike Putin who has not done so even once. It might be interpreted



that while Biden regards Putin as the sole villain, Putin completely disregards Biden to demonstrate that he is not influential to him and also to promote himself as an objective individual whose primary concern is the policies of the US and its allies, rather than Biden himself.

As Biden is a promoter of a multilateral approach to international relations, it is expected to identify frequent reference of words like ‘NATO’, ‘Europe’, and ‘allies’. Partnerships and alliances result in the unity needed to defend one another and to build a better world. Accordingly, these words occur frequently in his speeches. Such unity will help any of these allies to face any aggression or conflict. In addition, the repetition of ‘together’ indicates Biden’s emphasis on collaboration and cooperation, both domestically and internationally, to face problems and achieve common goals. Generally, the American government often includes others who may participate minimally in order to convince the world that the US is not an aggressor and that other nations are also providing assistance. The relatively high frequency of values, such as freedom, democracy and liberty resonates with Biden’s ideology, as they play a crucial role in shaping his policies; hence, he presents himself as a man of principles, an advocate of unity and a loyal ally (*explained later*).

**Table 1.** Frequencies in Biden’s Speeches.

	<i>Speech (1)</i> <b>2373</b> <i>words</i>	<i>Speech (2)</i> <b>3440</b> <i>words</i>	<i>Speech (3)</i> <b>2701</b> <i>words</i>	<i>Speech (4)</i> <b>2898</b> <i>words</i>	<i>Total</i>
Russia (ian)	39	43	23	7	<b>112</b>
Putin	18	9	11	5	<b>43</b>
Ukraine (-ian)	35	26	41	17	<b>119</b>
America (-an)	7	14	7	6	34
NATO	16	11	11	13	<b>51</b>
Europe(an)	5	13	10	5	33
World	8	17	20	30	<b>75</b>
Ally (ies)	15	3	5	6	29
Alliance (s)	2	1	2	5	10
Partner(s)/(ship)	7	1	5	10	23
United	15	8	4	14	<b>41</b>
Together	4	4	11	20	<b>39</b>
Force(s)	12	11	3	3	29
Aggression / attack /assault	12	2	4	6	24
War / conflict / fight /battle	4	29	18	8	<b>59</b>
Defend / Protect	12	5	5	11	33
Democracy (- ies) / (-tic)	3	18	10	6	<b>37</b>

Liberty	1	6	1	6	14
Freedom (s) / free	4	21	23	19	<b>67</b>
Build / building	4	2	2	6	14

**4.1.2. Putin.** Unlike Biden’s short speeches, Putin’s are much longer, hence the frequency numbers, in general, are extremely higher. Table 2 displays the repeated keywords in Putin’s speeches which indicate the priorities in his communication and policies. Across the four speeches, Putin consistently emphasizes the importance of his country and his people, with a total reference of 342 (Russia + country) and 263 (Russians + people). Other than prioritizing his nation, the immense frequency of the words related to ‘people’ suggests that he aspires to address their concerns and needs, to show that he understands and represents them. Related to this theme is the high frequency of the word ‘support’, as it shows his commitment to providing assistance to his people. This helps to build trust and win over the population, which will result in having them support his policies and future plans for the country. Based on what has been mentioned, one can claim that Putin poses as a populist, a finding which totally contradicts his frequent labeling as a dictator by American politicians and media. It seems that his main motivation is to secure public support and consolidate his power among a larger section of his people. Putin’s escalating use of the words ‘national’ and ‘nationalist(s)’ shows his attempt to play on the themes of national pride and the Russian identity. Moreover, the consistent reference to ‘military’ in all speeches demonstrates the high rank this institution holds in Putin’s mind and reflects its prominence and role in national security. This matches Putin’s militant ideology. Together with the army, he also focuses on the structure of his government, as revealed in his use of the word ‘federal’. Such a government has the authority over

**Table 2:** Frequencies in Putin’s Speeches.

	<b>Speech (1)</b> <b>7511</b> <b>words</b>	<b>Speech (2)</b> <b>3798</b> <b>words</b>	<b>Speech (3)</b> <b>13245</b> <b>words</b>	<b>Speech (4)</b> <b>15438</b> <b>words</b>	<b>Total</b>
Russia	60	28	66	79	<b>233</b>
Russian	22	5	31	28	<b>86</b>
National	-	-	16	36	52
Nationalist(s)	10	3	-	-	13
Federal	1	1	4	28	34
Military	20	11	22	21	<b>74</b>
People	30	23	64	60	<b>177</b>
West	6	4	24	4	38
Western	12	4	16	4	36
NATO	40	10	9	2	61
Ukraine	63	5	13	5	<b>86</b>
Country	28	13	37	31	<b>109</b>

War	7	12	16	3	38
Conflict(s)	2	-	8	4	14
Nuclear	3	2	11	5	21
Peace	-	-	5	-	5
Peaceful	-	2	4	1	7
Treaty	6	-	10	-	16
Stable	1	-	1	1	3
Stability	1	1	1	3	6
Support	10	3	21	28	<b>62</b>
Tradition (s)	1	2	3	2	8
Traditional (ly)	2	1	4	2	9

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various sectors of the country, such as the economy, law, foreign affairs, and more, all of which are associated with the communist ideology.

Because of the conflict with Ukraine, it is mentioned 86 times. At the same time, his constant reference to the ‘West’ and ‘Western countries with a total of 74 and NATO (61 times) underscores the way he perceives them as a threat to his country because of their interference in the region and promoting opposing values to his culture and traditions. He might also be presenting his country as an international force that stands on the same footing with the West. Furthermore, the higher frequency of words related to the theme of ‘war’ (73 times) compared to those to ‘peace’ and ‘stability’ (37 times) showcases the Russian military capabilities and readiness to counter any threat or aggression from other territories. This strategy challenges the self-image he portrays in his speeches as a peace-seeker, possibly indicating that he is taking these actions to defend his country from the US and the NATO.

#### *4.2. Impression Management Strategies*

The analysis of the sample speeches revealed the various impression management strategies utilized by both Biden and Putin. As stated earlier, these tactics are attempts to exercise influence and power on the audience. These are exemplification, self-promotion, ingratiation, and intimidation. Each of these strategies is analyzed thoroughly.

**4.2.1. Exemplification.** Exemplification involves the presentation of moral qualities, religious beliefs, political views, and ideological beliefs. The two leaders seek to enhance credibility by resorting to it as an impression management strategy. On the one hand, by refusing Russia's aggression and condemning the use of force to seize territory, Biden presents himself as a man of principles, a believer of solidarity, democracy, and freedom and also a defender of international values. He attempts to show that his commitment to these principles is an on-going process which will last as long as he is in his position. He provides concrete examples of

these beliefs which he intends on upholding as seen in the following quotes: “America stands up to bullies. We stand up for freedom. This is who we are” (BS1) and “The defense of freedom is not the work of a day or a year. It’s the calling of our lifetime, of all time” (BS4).

As an advocate of cooperation and unity, Biden’s speeches echo the importance of these values to face global threats and to have a better future for the whole world. By emphasizing that the safety and progress of others are linked to one’s success, he is stressing international collaboration and cooperation as a solution to global challenges. This is revealed in:

- We must remain unified today and tomorrow and the day after and for the years and decades to come. (BS2)
- The commitment of the United States to our NATO Alliance...is solid rock....An attack against one is an attack against all. (BS3).
- Our own success is bound to the success of others. When others do better, we do better as well....We have to come together to protect the rights and freedoms. (BS4)

These quotes are reflective of his ideological perspective which calls for liberal democracy and multilateralism.

On the other hand, opposing the Western liberal values, Putin poses himself as a guardian/protector of traditional values, encouraging morality, conservatism, and cultural preservation as a means of safeguarding the Russians’ identity. Playing on the national identity and pride of his audience also resonates with his ideology. Since Russia is a victim of Western deviant cultural and religious influence, it is Putin’s duty to protect his country and its children from any external threat and to preserve its traditions, as conveyed here:

- Kiev continues to prepare the destruction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate....New draft laws directed against the clergy and millions of parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate have been registered in the Verkhovna Rada. (PS1)
- They constantly lie, distort historical facts, do not stop attacks on our culture, on the Russian Orthodox Church, and other traditional religious organizations of our country. (PS3)

By exerting much effort to reach agreements with Ukraine and the NATO and to solve problems peacefully, Putin crafts an image of a leader who advocates stability and the safety of people, through demonstrating patience, persistence, and willingness to negotiate to reach an agreement with the NATO and maintain stability, as seen in:

- All these years, it has persistently and patiently pushed for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution. ( PS1)
- We will do everything so that the long-awaited peace returns to our land. (PS2)
- What we want for the future is a future of peace, a future of stability, not a future of blood. (PS3)
- We were doing everything in our power to solve this problem by peaceful means, and patiently conducted talks on a peaceful solution to this devastating conflict. (PS4)

These quotes highlight Putin's commitment to nonviolence and preference of diplomatic measures. It implies that he and his government have been through prolonged talks and negotiations to try to resolve the tension with Ukraine peacefully. This is contrary to the narrative Biden has been promoting about Putin as an aggressive, confrontational, and autocratic leader.

**4.2.2. Self-promotion.** Engaging in self-promotion as an impression management strategy, Biden and Putin focus on displaying their positive traits, strengths, and skills which suit the desired images they want to project on their audience. By using the self-promotion strategy, both leaders attempt to present themselves as competent and self-sufficient, thus worthy of their audience's respect and admiration. It is worth mentioning here that sometimes the division between *exemplification* and *self-promotion* is blurred, since people use ethics and morality in positively promoting themselves.

Biden wears the mask of a loyal ally, who is determined to support other countries, seeking their well-being and security. He expresses his commitment to respond to any threat as if it were pointed at him, for example “[our] commitment is to the people of Ukraine and the future of Ukraine” (BS3); “Our support for Ukraine will not waver, NATO will not be divided, and we will not tire” (BS3); and “The United States will defend every inch of NATO territory with the full force of American power....an attack on one is an attack on all” (BS1).

Another persona that Biden presents is that of an empathetic compassionate leader, who feels the suffering of others and is willing to do his best to alleviate it. Being humane, he identifies with the agony of the Ukrainians, as in:

- I refuse to believe that you welcome the killing of innocent children and grandparents or that you accept hospitals, schools, maternity wards that, for God's sake, are being pummelled with Russian missiles and bombs. (BS2)
- I didn't have to speak the language or understand the language to feel the emotion in their eyes, the way they gripped my hand, and little kids hung on to my leg, praying with a desperate hope that all this is temporary. (BS2)

Other than positioning himself as a caring leader who is determined to put an end to human suffering, and as an efficient statesman, Biden emphasizes what is best for his country's interests, stressing its national security. He poses as a decisive leader who is committed to protecting his country's interests and his allies and to protect his citizens by any means, including the use of military force and economic sanctions as a response to any Russian threat. The US leader also seeks to build a better world by bringing people together, ignoring any divisions, and working on cooperation and unity. Maintaining and strengthening key international alliances are essential for America's ability to lead the world. This is evident in:

- I've been so focused as president on rebuilding and revitalizing the alliances that are the cornerstone of American leadership in the world. (BS4)
- We continue working to build a world we want to live in and a world we want for our children. (BS4)

This resonates with his ideology of internationalism and multilateralism, opposing Putin's nationalism which strongly shows in his speeches, as in: "we all must unite, coordinate our efforts, our duties in order to maintain one historical supreme right – the right of Russia to be strong" (PS3); and "They do not need a big independent country like Russia around" (PS4). Since being patriotic entails cherishing, supporting and defending one's country, Putin crafts himself as a protector of the Russian people, consistently prioritizing his nation above all else. Indeed, in all his speeches, he makes reference to Russia and Russians.

Similar to Biden, Putin embraces the persona of a compassionate figure. Acknowledging the high risks and the stressful lives of those participating in the special military operation, Putin announces his responsibility to provide assistance to those in need. Such an action projects an image of a responsible leader who truly cares about the well-being of his military personnel. This will increase their dedication to and trust in their nation. The following extracts reveal such an empathetic attitude:

- ... all those taking part in the special military operation, including volunteers, must benefit from a leave of absence of at least 14 days every six months....This way, every fighter will be able to meet family and spend time with their loved ones. (PS3)
- Nobody was thinking about people, who were conditioned for slaughter and eventually became expendables. It is a sad dreadful thing to say, but it is a fact. (PS3)

Trying to focus on his positive traits, Putin chooses the image of a knowledgeable historian who explains the historic connections between Russia and Ukraine, especially during the Soviet Union era. He mentions particular historical facts with

specific dates to support his argument in justifying Russia's actions against its neighboring territory.

- Then, both before and after the Great Patriotic War, Stalin incorporated in the USSR and transferred to Ukraine some lands that previously belonged to Poland, Romania and Hungary. (PS1)
- I would like to recall that, in the 1930s, the West had virtually paved the way to power for the Nazis in Germany. (PS3)

Another positive image is that of a visionary leader who seeks to shape the future of his nation. He aims at promoting economic growth and national development through various infrastructure projects. Because of his nationalist ideology, Putin's priority is advancing Russia's progress and prosperity as seen in these lines:

- We ... will expand a major socioeconomic recovery and development programme for these new regions. It includes restoring production facilities, jobs, and the ports on the Sea..., and building new, modern roads. (PS3)
- Our next steps to reinforce the Army and the Navy and to secure the current and future development of the Armed Forces must be based on actual combat experience. (PS3)

**4.2.3. Intimidation.** Through the use of intimidation strategy, both presidents craft the image of fearless leaders capable of protecting their countries and taking decisive action whenever needed. By displaying strength and assertiveness, the presidents are showing power on the global stage and at the same time, attempting to gain respect from their audience, whether domestic or international. Following a multilateral approach, Biden and his allies are determined to suppress Russia economically, financially, and technologically as a repercussion for its actions, as in:

- We will limit Russia's ability to do business in Dollars, Euros, Pounds, and Yen to be part of the global economy....We are going to stunt the ability to finance and grow...the Russian military.(BS1)
- We have made sure that Russia is paying the price for its abuse....We'll hold accountable those who are responsible for this war. (BS3)

Conversely, matching his nationalistic ideology, Putin always speaks about defending only his own country and prioritizing its well-being. In reference to the war with Ukraine, he emphasizes that “[they] will do everything in our power to bring back the long-awaited peace to our land and ensure the safety of our people” (BS3) and “it is a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a

nation...a threat to...the very existence of our state” (BS4). In sum, these famous figures rely on forceful language to assert their dominance and power.

**4.2.4. Ingratiation.** On another level, Biden succeeds in connecting with his different audiences and building rapport by relying on ingratiation as an impression management strategy. While he praises his audience who belong to other countries, he also presents himself, being part of the NATO, in an agreeable manner. Concerning the former situation, in Speech (2) in Poland, Biden inspires the Ukrainian resistance to Russia by commending on the Polish people’s resistance to the communism imposed by the Soviet Union. He also praises this audience for “opening their hearts and their homes” to Ukrainian refugees. Through making local cultural reference to the first Polish Pope and how that event meant “the power of faith, the power of resilience, and the power of the people,” Biden establishes a strong tie with his ally.

By acknowledging and admiring the leadership qualities of Zelensky, Biden poses himself, in Speech 3, as a supportive ally and wins over his audience. He also admires the progress achieved in order to obtain freedom, as in the following quotes: “I have just come from a visit to Kiev, and I can report: Kiev stands strong! Kiev stands proud. It stands tall. And most important, it stands free” and “He found himself at war with a nation led by a man whose courage would be forged in fire and steel: President Zelensky.”

Furthermore, when addressing the people of Lithuania in Speech (4), the US president compliments their resistance to the Soviets to obtain freedom and how they “helped end the era of division through the power of connection.” He refers to those who died and to the others who were wounded to pursue liberty. At the same time, attempting to glorify his image, Biden focuses on the positive aspects and the shared values with the NATO. In Speech (1), he claims that “NATO is more united and more determined than ever”; “an attack on one is an attack on all”; and “Putin’s aggression against Ukraine will end up costing Russia dearly — economically and strategically. We will make sure of that.” In Speech (4), Biden highlights the values of freedom and democracy which he advocates with his allies, as seen in: “faced with a threat to the peace and stability of the world, to democratic values we hold dear, to freedom itself, we...stepped up”; “We will stand for liberty and freedom today, tomorrow, and for as long as it takes”; and “our freedom is something we can never, never, never, walk away from.” Truly, building strong ties, sharing principles, and expanding connections with other nations align with Biden’s ideology of multilateralism.

In contrast, in all his speeches, Putin praises his “men,” making no reference to other nations. He expresses gratitude to various groups of people who have played crucial roles in supporting the country and appreciating the sacrifices made by them. This helps him gain social and material benefits. He also creates a sense of connection and unity with the various sectors of the society, thereby building a positive rapport that strengthens solidarity and loyalty. This is evident in the following lines which echo his ideology and promote nationalism and patriotism:



- My deepest gratitude to the parents, wives and families of our defenders, the doctors and paramedics, combat medics and medical nurses that are saving the wounded; to the railway workers and drivers that are supplying the front; to the builders that are erecting fortifications and restoring housing, roads and civilian facilities; to the workers and engineers at defense companies. (PS3)
- We take a knee to all those who put their life on the line to assure victory. We pay homage to the mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, children, and in their memory....we also pay homage to the fighters who are part of the special military operations, those people who took arms as part of our partial mobilization, the fighters, representatives from the Ministry of the Interior. (PS4)

#### *4.3. Social Identity Theory*

According to SIT, within each political group, the individuals modify their personas to align with its ideology, values, and beliefs in order to meet its norms and expectations. This is evident through the various images crafted by both presidents as explained above, and further elaborated on in light of the three key elements of the theory. In relation to *social categorization*, Biden classifies individuals and nations into groups based on shared characteristics or attributes. In his speeches, a number of distinct groups are identified, like Ukrainians, the Russian military, the NATO alliance, the people of Estonia and Latvia, the US and its allies, and Putin. These groups reflect Biden's opposition to the Russian authoritarian regime and his support for multilateral alliances and democratic movements. Conversely, Putin presents different groups in his speeches. He mainly categorizes the Ukrainian authorities either as the "neo-Nazi regime" or the "Kiev regime" which is separate from the Ukrainian people. Other negative entities are the West, the US and the NATO, which are sources of external threats to Russia. Meanwhile, Putin forms positive groups based on their roles and affiliations when it comes to his own people, like workers, engineers, doctors, teachers, and soldiers. He emphasizes the significant roles played by these groups in the society; this also aligns with his sense of patriotism and national pride.

Social Identification pertains to the process where individuals associate themselves with a specific group and adopt its identity as their own. Through expressions like "the United States and our Allies," "our NATO Allies," and "our Allies and partners," Biden stresses the collective identity of the US and its allies, as they share the same goals and oppose the same enemy "The Russian military" and "Vladimir Putin." He also identifies himself as a member of distinct social groups who have suffered from the Russian aggression, showing solidarity with those pursuing freedom and democracy: "proud to call Lithuania a friend, partner, and Ally" and "The United States and our partners stand with Ukraine's teachers, its hospital staff...its workers in cities." At the same time, regarding Putin, in all his

speeches there is a strong social identification with Russia as a defender and guardian of its people. He also identifies himself as one of his people, “our people,” “our citizens,” “our country,” and “our Motherland” reflecting a sense of belonging.

In addition, an essential stage for group formation is *social comparison*, where the superiority of the in-groups is highlighted. This is achieved through the self-promotion strategy (Refer to 4.2.2 for positive aspects); yet, the negative aspects of the out-groups are also stressed. Consequently, it is not surprising to hear Biden using harsh words in reference to Putin, depicting him as a liar, an autocrat, and a dictator. In Speech (1), “We saw a staged political theater in Moscow...[that] Ukraine was about to invade and launch a war against Russia”; “Putin declared his war”; “It was always...*about Putin’s desire for empire by any means necessary*”; “*Putin’s actions betray his sinister vision for the future of the world*”; and “*tyrants like Putin.*”

However, when the Russian president attacks the out-groups, the United States and NATO (i.e., the West), not Biden, are the ones being criticized for being untrustworthy and the source of chaos in the world. For instance, they “mastered the future theatre of war during war games”; “The concepts of honor, trust, and decency are not for them”; “the Western elites have become a symbol of total, unprincipled lies”; “They were the ones who let the genie out of the bottle, plunging entire regions into chaos”; and “They ...continue to rob everyone under the guise of democracy and freedoms” (PS3). Furthermore, other than focusing on the negative traits of the out-groups, Putin’s use of strong words, like “destruction,” “degradation,” “perversion” conveys an image of the West as a source of moral threat, which underscores his anti-Western ideology, as in:

- We will protect our children from degradation and degeneration. (PS3)
- ...attempts have not stopped to use us in their own interests, destroy our traditional values and impose on us their pseudo-values that would corrode us... those attitudes ... which directly lead to degradation and degeneration, because they contradict the very nature of man. (PS2)

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article tries to fill in the gap concerning the connection between self-presentation and ideology. Building on Goffman’s theory, impression management strategies, and SIT, it is clear that both Biden and Putin embrace multiple personas when delivering their speeches in times of crisis. Biden presents himself as a principled leader who stands against aggression and promotes solidarity, democracy, and freedom. He advocates international cooperation and unity to face any threats. Moreover, he portrays himself as a loyal ally and a compassionate person who feels the suffering of others. Similarly, Putin poses as a compassionate leader as well; yet unlike Biden, he positions himself as a guardian of traditional values and the Russian identity. He seeks to protect Russia from

Western influences. Putin also highlights his role as a visionary leader promoting economic growth and national development.

These personas are influenced by their ideologies and are shaped by the different political systems they belong to, and the diverse audiences they target. Inspired by the idea of the American Dream, Biden advocates equality and freedom for all. In contrast, Putin seems to dwell on past glory, when the Soviet Union was a superpower. Having a rich cultural heritage, abundant natural resources, and a geographical asset as the largest country in the world, all form Putin's biased perspective. While the findings of the keywords frequencies shed light on Biden's beliefs, commitment to his allies, and multilateral approach, they focus on Putin's nationalistic, militant ideology. Concerning their use of impression management strategies, it is evident that they rely on the same strategies to craft numerous self-images to manipulate their different audiences. As Orwell says "Man serves the interests of no creature except himself" and so did these two leaders in their speeches.

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