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JM14476

Emotional Framing of Emotional Deviants as a Political Strategy for Strengthening Collective Emotional Resilience

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.22.1.02

Keywords:
Emotional Framing; Emotional Deviants; Collective Emotional Resilience; Critical Discourse Analysis; USA; UK

Abstract: This article examines how leaders in the United States and the United Kingdom used rhetoric to frame emotional deviants and strengthen collective emotional resilience during two crises in 2024. Drawing on emotion management theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA), we analyze House Speaker Mike Johnson's response to the Columbia University protests and Prime Minister Keir Starmer's address during the Southport riots. Both leaders framed dissenters as emotional deviants, deployed emotional dichotomies, and constructed "others" to consolidate solidarity. We demonstrate that emotional framing functions as a political strategy used to foster cohesion within the dominant group, suppress dissent, and narrow the boundaries of legitimate political expression. Our comparative design reveals

Funding Information: Not applicable. **Conflicts of interest:** None. **Ethical Considerations:** The authors assure that no violations of publication ethics have occurred and take full responsibility for the content of the publication. **The percentage share of the authors in the preparation of the work is:** All authors (AZC, GN, and KŚ) contributed equally to this article. **Declaration regarding the use of GAI tools:** ChatGPT-5 was used for language refinement and coherence review. All outputs were verified and edited by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the content.
Received: 2025-07-16 Verified: 2025-09-01 Accepted: 2026-01-05

cross-case convergence in the use of discursive mechanisms (feeling rules, othering, and surface/deep acting) despite divergent institutional roles and rhetorical situations. This convergence underscores the structural nature of emotional framing and reveals that it is part of the governance toolkit that leaders use in mass-mediated democracies. We contribute to political sociology by showing that collective emotional resilience is not only discursively constructed to facilitate cohesion but is also employed as an exclusionary practice that marginalizes dissent and reinforces existing power hierarchies. In doing so, we highlight the ethical dilemmas of emotional governance, including the risks of inequality, alienation, and the foreclosure of authentic political expression.

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Political emotions are defined "as lasting affective predispositions supported reciprocally by the political and social norms of a given society, playing a key role in the constitution of its political culture and the authoritative allocation of resources" (Demertzis 2020:22). Emotions shape political behavior and social structures by influencing power, governance, and political identity. Although emotions are fundamental to understanding how political life is experienced and practiced (Berezin 2002; Demertzis 2020; Ciulla 2023), they were largely overlooked by mainstream political sociology until the 1980s. Since then, scholars have increasingly studied social movements, nationalism, and crises through the lens of emotions such as fear, resentment, and hope.

Researchers such as Gould (2009), Hochschild (2016), and Ahmed (2004) have significantly contributed to this growing interest in emotions by linking them to political actions. Emotions can be conceptualized as either individual or collective experiences. Collective emotions are defined as "a macro-level emotional response to a specific situation by multiple individuals who are interacting with one another" (Goldenberg 2024:183). The role of political leaders in shaping collective emotions has attracted increasing attention in academic literature, particularly in contexts of social crises, political polarization, and widespread dissent (Boin et al. 2005; Ansell, Boin, and 't Hart 2014; Troth, Jordan, and Ashkanasy 2023; Gigliotti 2024).

One promising line of inquiry concerns the influence that political leaders exert on collective emotional resilience, which is understood as a community's capacity to adapt and maintain emotional stability in the face of adversity (Walker et al. 2004; Hollnagel, Woods, and Leveson 2006; Garcia and Rimé 2019). These studies assert that collective emotional resilience is vital to the preservation of social cohesion and democratic stability (Aldrich 2012; Sousa et al. 2013; Teo, Lee, and Lim 2017; Sanfuentes, Valenzuela, and Castillo 2021). Political leaders, through rhetorical and discursive strategies, play a pivotal role in constructing the emotional narratives that support this resilience (Laclau 2005; Fairhurst 2011; Wetherell 2012; Yorke 2020; Zubrzycka-Czarnecka 2024).

The study of political discourse is essential because it links culture, language, and social organization to emotional experiences. Language is not merely a tool for expressing emotions but also a force that actively contributes to their production and transformation (Illouz, Gilon, and Shachak 2014). The extant literature emphasizes the positive aspects of collective emotional resilience such as its capacity to foster hope, trust, and a shared sense of purpose (e.g., Meneghel, Salanova, and Martínez 2014; Zubrzycka-Czarnecka 2024), while ignoring how emotional resilience can also be discursively constructed in ways that marginalize and delegitimize dissenting groups by portraying them as threats to societal stability and emotional well-being. We narrow this gap by examining how political leaders cast dissenters as emotional deviants and subject them to emotional framing.

We employ a theoretical framework that conceptualizes emotional framing as a political strategy and utilize Fairclough's (2003; 2013) critical discourse analysis (CDA) as our methodological approach as we investigate the interplay between discursive political strategies and collective emotional resilience as two political flashpoints ignited in the United

States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) in 2024. Our selection of these cases was motivated by an intriguing and somewhat unexpected observation: Leaders in both countries drew on emotional framing as a tool of governance, albeit within distinct rhetorical contexts defined by their roles, audiences, and immediate challenges. We identify the specific mechanisms of emotional framing deployed in political discourse, irrespective of situational variation. Although we focus on how political leaders use emotional language, we do not attempt to assess the characteristics or perspectives of protest groups except for the narrow purpose of establishing the study's background context. We begin by presenting the theoretical foundation of our research, then move to the study's context, methodology, empirical findings, and discussion.

While we analyze how leaders strategically deploy emotion-laden rhetoric, we do not in any way attempt to justify or legitimize any form of hate speech, antisemitism, incitement to violence, or dehumanizing rhetoric, regardless of its origin. Neither do we attempt to validate the actions or arguments of any political leader or protest group. In keeping with the ethical standards of social research and academic discourse, we categorically condemn all expressions of antisemitism, racism, and ideological extremism that have emerged either within or alongside protest movements. The presence of such rhetoric within broader dissent poses a serious threat to democratic values and undermines legitimate struggles for justice and human rights. The sole purpose of our work is to understand how political leadership navigates these emotionally charged and morally complex situations, not to diminish the seriousness of the aforementioned concerns or their ethical implications.

Theoretical Framework

Our work contributes to the growing literature in political sociology and the sociology of emotions, which emphasizes that emotions are not private states but socially constructed, culturally embedded, and politically consequential phenomena (Berezin 2002; Illouz 2007; Demertzis 2020). Following Stets and Turner (2006), we adopt a cultural theory of emotions, which stresses that emotions are shaped by social norms, institutional arrangements, and political discourses rather than by universal psychological mechanisms. This perspective allows us to see emotional life as contingent on cultural contexts and open to political manipulation. In particular, we underscore how political leaders intervene in collective emotional life by privileging feelings that promote social cohesion (unity, resilience, and trust), while devaluing those that tend to disrupt it (anger, grief, and indignation) (Jasper 2011; Flam and Kleres 2015).

Within this framework, rhetoric is understood as the public use of language by political leaders to shape emotions and social norms. Rhetoric is more than just an ornamental style; it is a performative act that redefines situations through word choice, moral and emotional figures, and the way leaders simultaneously address multiple audiences (Charland 1987). Political rhetoric thus operates as a mechanism of emotional governance, shaping which emotional expressions are deemed appropriate, legitimate, or pathological in the public sphere.

The concept of discourse, which resembles rhetoric, broadly refers to the system of meanings, narratives, and cultural norms within which leaders' statements are embedded. Consistent with Fairclough

(2003; 2013), we understand discourse to be a communicative practice that does not simply reflect reality but actively constructs it. Political discourse is not reducible to a single speech but constitutes a repertoire of interpretive strategies that draw on established values and culturally available emotional frames. Discourses about dissent, violence, and resilience determine which groups are entitled to sympathy and which are stigmatized as irrational or dangerous (van Dijk 2011; Wodak 2015).

In what follows, we use the term "strategy" to refer to the deliberate and recurrent ways in which leaders deploy rhetorical and discursive practices to achieve political objectives, particularly in moments of crisis. Strategy designates how leaders portray opponents as emotional deviants to isolate them from public debate and strengthen in-group cohesion. When employed as a strategic practice, emotional framing reinforces social solidarity and simultaneously delegitimizes alternative interpretations of crisis events (Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000).

Central to this perspective is emotion management, a concept elaborated by Hochschild (1979; 1983), who defines it as attempts to change the quality or intensity of feelings in accordance with cultural "feeling rules." In political life, emotion management alludes to practices that leaders use to prescribe the boundaries of "appropriate" and "inappropriate" emotions in the public sphere. Leaders practicing emotion management strategically deploy both explicit statements (e.g., condemning hate) and implicit signals (e.g., praising the courage of certain groups). Within this process, feeling rules serve as normative instructions that guide audiences toward sanctioned emotions and away from proscribed ones. Leaders enforce these rules through rhetorical strategies that involve both surface acting—controlled performative outward expressions of emotion—and deep acting, which involves attempts to genuinely experience and project emotions to signal authentic moral alignment.

Another mechanism is othering, the rhetorical process through which certain groups are depicted as moral, emotional, or social outsiders. Othering stabilizes the political community by constructing boundaries of belonging and exclusion (Laclau 2005). In this way, opponents are not only politically delegitimized but also discursively positioned as emotional outsiders. When leaders employ othering, they categorize groups as emotional deviants whose affective expressions fall outside dominant cultural expectations. Protesters who express anger, indignation, or despair may thus be labeled "radical," or "extreme," which stigmatizes their emotions as illegitimate and strengthens solidarity among the majority (Thoits 1985; Ahmed 2004). This discursive labeling simultaneously discredits dissenters and consolidates the authority of leaders by affirming their role as custodians of emotional order.

Finally, scholars sometimes define framing as "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (Entman 2007:164). Because political events are open to alternative interpretations, frames naturally play a role in political discourse by signaling "how politics should be thought about" and by "encouraging citizens to understand events and issues in particular ways" (Kinder 2007:156). Although the framing literature is voluminous and longstanding, some scholars have lamented its conceptual ambiguity and the confusion that follows when the same label is attached to different phenomena (Druckman

2004; Mintz, Valentino, and Wayne 2021). Unlike the equivalency framing associated with Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory, our usage of "framing" more closely resembles the value or issue framing common in the communications literature—"emphasizing a subset of potentially relevant considerations, a speaker leads individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions" (Druckman 2004:672). But even so, the fit is less than ideal. Although the aforementioned conceptual definition appreciates how messages can advance specific interpretations through emphasis, it fails to appreciate the distinct nature of emotion-laden rhetoric, which often couches the object of the communication in moral terms, which may well impact the magnitude and duration of the framing effect. Clifford (2019), for instance, found that the effects of a single exposure to moralistic frames produced durable changes in how people thought about political issues, persisting for at least two weeks. Furthermore, much of the literature that employs the aforementioned definition is rooted in cognitive psychology, which is at odds with the cultural theory of emotions that we leverage here. Therefore, we advance a new concept that is a better fit with our theoretical framework, which we call "discursive emotional framing." We define this type of framing as a strategic, rhetorically enacted, language-based selection that amplifies moral-affective meanings through which leaders prescribe "feeling rules," dichotomize acceptable and deviant emotions, and position opponents as emotional outsiders to organize public sentiment and consolidate collective emotional resilience. Unlike visual, institutional, and purely cognitive forms of framing, it operates primarily through moralized affect (e.g., hope/unity/resilience versus fear/anger/hate) that not only encourages audiences how to think about events but also how to feel and how to judge others' feelings, thereby shaping the magnitude and durability of downstream effects on cohesion and dissent.

Although frames can be impactful, their effects are moderated and conditioned by a variety of factors. A vast body of literature transcending several cognate fields, thoroughly discussed by Ladd (2010), indicates that people are more inclined to rely upon information from sources they perceive as credible, knowledgeable, and like-minded. Framing effects are, therefore, more likely to manifest when the audience perceives the message's source to be trustworthy or ideologically congruent (Druckman 2001; Hartman and Weber 2009). As such, the influence that a given frame can exert is contingent on people's pre-existing attitudes and opinions, as people have a greater tendency to resist frames that are incompatible with their worldview. Frames also compete with each other, so that when multiple frames are simultaneously present within the political environment, the impact of a given frame can be diminished (Druckman 2004), and strong frames tend to prevail over their weaker competitors (Chong and Druckman 2007). Similarly, some studies show that the politically sophisticated are more resistant to framing, presumably because they have been inoculated against the argument at hand, are less moved by novel information, and possess cognitive resources that allow them to refute counter-attitudinal messages (e.g., Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997:227). And although the matter is far from settled, some scholars have either argued or demonstrated that framing effects are fugacious (for a thorough discussion, see Baden and Lecheler 2012). Finally, and more crucially, discursive emotional framing does not necessarily reshape how dissenters themselves feel; rather, it influences how the broader public perceives dissenters and their af-

fective claims, organizing the "emotional common sense" of a community.

Our theoretical framework assumes that emotional framing operates through three primary discursive elements: (1) delegitimizing dissent, (2) establishing emotional cohesion, and (3) defining the "other." First, by framing dissenters as emotional deviants, leaders diminish their credibility and curtail their ability to influence public discourse. Dissenters are often depicted as "overly emotional," "irrational," or "ideologically extreme" to delegitimize their grievances and diminish their impact on political narratives. This marginalization of dissenting voices stabilizes emotional dynamics within the majority and encourages emotional control and alignment within the dominant group. Second, leaders promote emotions like hope, trust, and resilience while discouraging negative emotions such as fear, anger, or despair. This creates an emotional climate conducive to the community's emotional resilience, solidarity, and sense of purpose during times of crisis. Such regulation of emotions aligns public sentiment with the leadership's policy goals and reinforces the perception that these objectives are valid (Hochschild 1983; Lively 2024). Third, by constructing dissenters as the emotional "other," leaders demarcate the boundary between the in-group and the out-group, which reinforces social cohesion and emotional resilience within the majority while simultaneously isolating and discrediting the opposition. This process highlights how the creation of an "other" enables political communities to consolidate internal unity and stifle dissent by defining themselves against perceived threats. These political strategies underscore how collective emotional resilience is discursively constructed as a form of governance. While resilience is often characterized positively in the literature (because it fosters hope, trust, and unity), our framework exposes its paradoxical nature by allowing us to demonstrate that it can also be used to exclude, delegitimize, and reinforce existing power hierarchies. These dynamics raise two significant ethical concerns: (1) Emotional labor is thought to induce alienation and burnout (Hochschild 1983), and (2) The imposition of emotional conformity restricts authentic expression. These insights emphasize the need for a critical evaluation of the balance between emotion management as a tool for social cohesion and its potential to perpetuate existing power hierarchies. The ethical dilemmas inherent in emotional framing highlight the risk of prioritizing collective emotional resilience without carefully considering its impact on inclusivity, authenticity, and equity within democratic societies.

Study Context

In what follows, we analyze the context that gave rise to discursive strategies that political leaders in the US and the UK used to frame emotional deviants and to foster collective emotional resilience.

Johnson's Case

Our first case study focuses on the US, where House Speaker Mike Johnson publicly responded to a wave of student protests that enveloped Columbia University in April 2024. The unrest began on April 17, 2024, while this Ivy League school's president, Nemat "Minouche" Shafik, was in Washington, DC, to testify before Congress about rising campus antisemitism. On that same day, a group of student demonstrators erected an unauthorized encampment on the university's Morningside Heights campus in Manhattan. Called the "Gaza Solidarity Encampment," the site rapidly expanded to over

100 tents (Goldstein and Zuloaga 2024; Sentner and Touré 2024). This protest emerged in direct response to the ongoing Israel-Hamas war that erupted on October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched a deadly surprise attack, killing approximately 1,200 Israelis and taking 250 hostages (Sentner and Mitovich 2024). Israel's military response, widely reported to have resulted in over 34,000 Palestinian deaths and the mass displacement of Gaza's population (McDonough 2024), became the central concern of the encampment. While the International Court of Justice in The Hague provisionally ruled that Israel's response was excessive, it did not classify it as genocide (Huddleston 2024).

Although the protest appeared grassroots in nature, it was in fact highly organized. Demonstrators relied on decentralized leadership but coordinated via social media and through strategic consultations with veteran activists from groups such as the Black Panthers and National Students for Justice in Palestine (Hobbs, Bauerlein, and Frosch 2024). Journalistic accounts attach special significance to the events at Columbia because they are perceived as the catalyst for a wave of similar protests that impacted more than 100 university campuses across North America, Europe, and the Middle East (Craig, Natanson, and Morgan 2024; El Chamaa and Suliman 2024).

On April 18, President Shafik authorized the New York Police Department (NYPD) to clear the encampment, citing a "clear and present danger to the substantial functioning of the University" (McDonough 2024). The police arrested 108 individuals, primarily for trespassing. Notably, Police Chief John Chell reported that those arrested "were peaceful, offered no resistance whatsoever, and were saying what they wanted to say in a peaceful manner" (Stahl, Huddleston, and Vance 2024). Nevertheless, the university's response was swiftly criticized, prompting Columbia to reverse course the next day, stating that reintroducing the NYPD "would further inflame what is happening on campus" (Blinder 2024).

Despite the temporary withdrawal of law enforcement, tensions escalated. Demonstrations outside the campus gates became more intense and involved individuals unaffiliated with the university, which by then had been closed to the public (Polgreen and Peterson 2024). Negotiations between university administrators and student organizers soon broke down, and students resumed occupying adjacent campus lawns. On April 30, a group of masked and helmeted protesters seized control of Hamilton Hall, disabling security cameras, breaking windows, and barricading entrances (Davis et al. 2024). Columbia employee Mariano Torres, trapped inside the building during the occupation, reported being "terrified" and filed an accident report after a physical altercation with one of the protestors (Otterman 2024a). NYPD riot police regained control of the building within 24 hours, arresting 44 individuals—31 of whom were students or employees at either Columbia or one of its affiliated colleges (Wu 2024). The university issued a "shelter-in-place" order (Ailworth, Bhattacharya, and Kamp 2024), transitioned to remote learning (Blinder 2024), and canceled its primary graduation in favor of 19 smaller, off-campus ceremonies (Otterman 2024b).

The encampment and subsequent escalation generated polarized responses. Protesters framed their actions as morally necessary civil disobedience designed to pressure Columbia to divest from companies with ties to Israel. Many invoked historical struggles, comparing their protest to past movements at Columbia against the Vietnam War and apartheid in

South Africa. For instance, one student told journalists that "Conscientious people everywhere should stand up against the murder of innocents by Israel" (Ailworth, Choiniere, and Pisani 2024), while others chanted "'68 and '85! History is on our side!" (Wu, Morgan, and Meckler 2024). The protesters and their supporters described the crackdown on the encampment as disproportionate and repressive. In May 2024, Columbia's Arts and Sciences faculty passed a vote of "no confidence" in Shafik, accusing her of violating students' rights to free speech and assembly (Blinder and Otterman 2024).

In contrast, many Jewish students expressed deep concern, stating they felt unsafe and targeted by antisemitic rhetoric. Alleged chants and statements such as "We don't want no Zionists here" (Blinder 2024), "The 7th of October is going to be every day for you" (Garrity 2024), and "There is only one solution: intifada revolution" (Polgreen and Peterson 2024) were viewed by some as threats of violence. Phrases like "from the river to the sea" and "intifada" were interpreted by many Jewish students as calls for the destruction of Israel, drawing comparisons to the language of the Holocaust (Meckler and Boorstein 2024; Polgreen and Peterson 2024). A particularly disturbing incident involved protest leader Khymani James, who was recorded saying "Zionists don't deserve to live" (Ailworth, Choiniere, and Pisani 2024; Edmonds, Betts, and Hartocollis 2024). In response to these developments, Orthodox Rabbi Elie Buechler advised Jewish students to return home, stating that neither Columbia nor the NYPD could ensure their safety (Blinder 2024). The Anti-Defamation League concluded that Jewish students had been "explicitly threatened, increasingly menaced and physically attacked" (Craig et al. 2024), echoing concerns about a broader national increase in antisemitic incidents (Mangan and Hicks 2024).

Protesters rejected accusations of antisemitism, distinguishing their anti-Zionist stance from anti-Jewish hatred. Jewish activists were visibly present within the encampment, organizing Seder dinners and Shabbat gatherings (Ailworth, Choiniere, and Pisani 2024). Many of these participants expressed that their activism was rooted in Jewish ethical traditions and a belief in justice for Palestinians (Ferré-Sadurní, Edmonds, and Cruz 2024). However, critics argued that the line between anti-Zionism and antisemitism had been blurred, and that Zionism was being used as a stand-in for Jewish identity itself (Rosman 2024). In some cases, Jewish students reported being physically ousted from the encampment by protestors forming human chains (Rosman 2024).

President Shafik resigned on August 14, citing the toll on her family and institutional strain. In her farewell message, she wrote: "It has been difficult to overcome divergent views across our community" (Natanson, Svrluga, and Seth 2024). Ironically, her resignation was welcomed by both sides of the political divide. Republican leaders, including Mike Johnson, and some Jewish Democrats saw her departure as justified, criticizing her restrained response. Conversely, defenders of academic freedom viewed her resignation as vindication for student rights, citing administrative overreach (Blinder and Otterman 2024; Sentner and Mitovich 2024). For many student activists, her resignation was proof that sustained protest could achieve real outcomes (Natanson et al. 2024).

Starmer's Case

Our second case examines UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's response to violent protests that followed a tragic mass stabbing that occurred on July 29, 2024, at the Hart Space dance studio in Southport,

Merseyside, England. At the time of the incident, children ages 6 to 11 were attending a Taylor Swift-themed yoga and dance workshop when the perpetrator, 17-year-old Axel Rudakubana, attacked them with a kitchen knife. Three young girls—Bebe King (6), Elsie Dot Stancombe (7), and Alice da Silva Aguiar (9)—were killed. Ten others, including eight children and two adults, were injured, some critically (Waddington, Lazaro, and Humphries 2025).

On July 30, a large vigil was held in Southport, while misinformation quickly spread online that falsely claimed the attacker was a Muslim migrant. This disinformation fueled violent protests near the Southport Mosque, where rioters clashed with police (Paul 2024). On July 31, local residents began repairing the damage caused by the unrest, and efforts were launched to counter the spread of hate and misinformation. By August 1, authorities had charged Rudakubana with multiple counts of murder and attempted murder and revealed his identity to the public. By August 2, the unrest had escalated and spread to London, Hartlepool, and Manchester. Despite the chaos, the Southport community responded with resilience in the days that followed by organizing memorials and prioritizing healing and unity (Paul 2024).

The attack deeply shocked the nation and triggered a wave of public grief and outrage. It also exposed significant shortcomings in early intervention efforts, as Rudakubana had reportedly exhibited troubling behavior and yet had been repeatedly denied admission to the Prevent program. The widespread misinformation that followed not only exacerbated tensions but also exposed how social media can amplify fear and inflame public sentiment. In the end, the social unrest at the heart of this episode reflected broader public frustrations over the government's perceived failure to manage threats and safeguard communities (Lawless 2024).

In the wake of the tragedy, Prime Minister Keir Starmer faced immense pressure to address the nation and decisively respond to the escalating crisis. His initial public statement, delivered from 10 Downing Street, expressed deep sorrow for the victims and their families, while urging calm and unity in the face of tragedy (Prime Minister's Office 2024). However, Starmer's leadership was tested as violence intensified and unsettling reports emerged that violent reprisals had been directed against Muslims. In the days that followed, his approach to crisis management evolved as he attempted to balance the need for swift action with the need for thoughtful, proportionate responses.

Starmer ultimately convened an emergency meeting of the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBRA) committee to coordinate the government's immediate response to the crisis (Burge 2024). While this move was widely viewed as necessary, critics argued that it came too late to prevent the initial outbreak of violence. As the unrest spread, Starmer authorized the deployment of additional police and riot control units to affected areas. This decision was met with mixed reactions. Some applauded the government's efforts to restore order, while others warned that a heavier police presence would only heighten tensions. Starmer defended his decision, asserting that protecting lives and property was paramount, while also emphasizing the necessity of balanced and restrained policing.

Beyond short-term law enforcement measures, Starmer pledged to overhaul counterterrorism laws to better address non-ideological acts of violence. He emphasized the need to respond to "acts of ex-

treme violence perpetrated by loners, misfits, young men in their bedroom, accessing all manner of material online, desperate for notoriety, sometimes inspired by traditional terrorist groups, but fixated on that extreme violence, seemingly for its own sake" (Booth et al. 2025). His proposal was, therefore, designed to overhaul outdated laws that were not designed to counter contemporary forms of political violence and extremism. Furthermore, recognizing the social dimensions of the crisis, Starmer initiated a series of pre-announced reforms intended to promote equality and community integration. These included increased funding for youth services, a review of hate crime legislation, and the formation of a cross-party commission to investigate issues of integration and social cohesion (Progressive Britain 2024). Although these reforms were generally welcomed, critics claimed they were inadequate and failed to remedy the immediate crisis. As the situation deteriorated, both Starmer's political allies and opponents pressured him to take more decisive action. In response, he invoked emergency powers that allowed the government to temporarily impose curfews and restrict public gatherings. This decision was roundly criticized by civil libertarians and some members of his own party, who viewed it as an overreach of executive authority that risked further alienating marginalized communities (Elliott, Heffer, and Tapsfield 2024).

Starmer's communication strategy during the crisis was also subject to intense public scrutiny. His initial calls for unity and calm were perceived by some as "tone-deaf" and "out-of-step" with the gravity of the situation. As conditions worsened, he assumed a more aggressive posture, unequivocally condemning the violence and pledging a more immediate response. Yet again, many perceived his actions to be inadequate and untimely (Maclellan and Demony 2024). Moreover, critics castigated him for the way he managed the media. Although Starmer made frequent appearances on national television, some accused him of evading difficult questions and failing to meaningfully engage with the communities most affected by the violence. While his decision to meet privately with local religious leaders and community organizers was seen by some as constructive, others argued that such meetings should have been more transparent and inclusive.

Competing frames emerged across the political spectrum and civil society. Right-wing commentators, who framed the unrest as evidence of governmental weakness and the erosion of law and order, called for harsher policing and stricter immigration controls (Letters to the Editor 2024). In contrast, those on the Left emphasized the dangers of scapegoating minority communities, choosing instead to frame the crisis in terms of either failed social cohesion or the inept management of online disinformation on the part of the state ("A Rediscovery of Who We Are" 2024). Moreover, civil libertarians cast the imposition of curfews as a dangerous precedent that risked normalizing authoritarian practices (Halliday and Vinter 2024). Leaders in the Muslim community framed the violence as a form of collective punishment rooted in prejudice, emphasizing their communities' vulnerability and demanding stronger protections against hate crimes (Mason et al. 2024). Meanwhile, grassroots activists and local residents framed their own initiatives—vigils, community cleanups, interfaith gatherings—as alternative narratives of resilience that countered both state-centric and extremist frames of the crisis (Dearden 2024). Lastly, academics challenged the dominant narrative that the riots were primarily the work of right-wing extremists. Whiteley (2024) argues that such accounts oversimplified the crisis

and obscured its deeper social roots. Although extremist actors did in fact participate, his analysis of census and voting data showed that deprivation and poverty in "left-behind" communities were more strongly correlated with the incidence of violence. This interpretation parallels those offered in the wake of the 2011 London riots and the 1986 Bristol riots, where heavy-handed policing and socioeconomic marginalization were thought to perpetuate the violence. According to this view, the Southport unrest was not only attributable to the inability to counter online disinformation, but also resentment fueled by long-standing structural inequalities and relative deprivation (Whiteley 2024).

In the aftermath of the crisis, public assessments of Starmer's leadership were mixed. Some praised his ability to eventually grasp the complexity of the situation and to productively respond with a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy. Others, however, criticized his initial hesitation and insinuated that it was this indecisiveness that exacerbated the unrest (Maclellan and Demony 2024). The long-term consequences of his leadership during this period have continued to shape public opinion and influence debates over national security, social cohesion, and crisis management in the UK.

Situational Embedding of the Speeches

Although both leaders deploy emotional framing, they do so from markedly different rhetorical situations. As the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Johnson speaks as a partisan legislative leader who lacks direct operational authority over campus security, which fell squarely within the jurisdiction of a private university and the local police. His speech is, therefore, designed to assert moral leadership and redefine a campus conflict as a national moral drama within the constraints of federalism and First Amendment norms. The intended function of his speech was to condemn his political opponents and draw boundaries by using emotion-laden rhetoric to escalate the tensions and emphasize the gravity of the threat.

Starmer, by contrast, speaks as Prime Minister—the chief executive expected to directly manage a fast-moving public crisis with real-time implications for public safety. He too faces institutional constraints, several of which parallel those faced by Johnson, such as the operational independence of local police and civil liberties concerns. However, unlike Johnson, he appears to face more intense pressures from within his own party. The intended function of his speech is de-escalation with assurance of capacity: restore order, signal protection of vulnerable groups, and justify proportionate state action. Accordingly, Starmer's message is more procedural and policy-laden (promises of coordination and legal tools), whereas Johnson's is more moralizing and adversarial, leaning on sharp binaries and symbolic censure. In short, who speaks, to whom, and under which constraints condition not only the targets of deviance framing but also the expected uptake (symbolic sanction versus operational reassurance).

Press coverage across both cases points to divided reactions. In the US, some commentators suggested that Johnson's remarks inflamed tensions, while others praised his defense of Jewish students. In the UK, some segments of the public found Starmer's appeals to be reassuring, while others criticized them for being inadequate or even provocative (Allen and Ross 2024; "How Effectively Has Keir Starmer Handled the Riots? Join The Independent Debate" 2024; "Keir Starmer Condemns 'Far Right Thuggery' as Unrest Flares across Britain" 2024).

Data and Methods of Analysis

In this research, we analyze how Mike Johnson (the 56th Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Republican Party) and Keir Starmer (Prime Minister of the UK, Labor Party) strategically use rhetoric to frame emotional deviants to strengthen collective emotional resilience. To do so, we apply Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework within a constructivist ontology. Like Bierre and Howden-Chapman (2022:6), we assume that language and socially constructed knowledge shape our understanding of the material world and that human behavior can be understood through discourse and rhetoric. Fairclough's CDA recognizes the discursive (semiotic or linguistic) nature of policy and policy-making and aligns with anti-positivist and interpretative approaches to policy studies (Fairclough 2013:177). CDA functions as both a theory and methodology for analyzing discourse, which is seen as an integral part or "moment" of the political, economic, and social contexts and dialectically related to other elements (Fairclough 2013:178). Therefore, CDA is appropriate for exploring how the aforementioned leaders discursively managed collective emotional resilience that was compromised by divisive socio-political crises triggered by opposition groups. Specifically, we investigate: How was discursive emotional framing of emotional deviants employed as a political strategy for strengthening collective emotional resilience in the US and the UK during the political crises of 2024?

Our analysis is based on the transcripts of three speeches: (1) Mike Johnson's April 24, 2024 speech delivered at Columbia University amidst the pro-Palestinian protests (Johnson 2024), and (2) Keir Starmer's statements from Downing Street delivered on August 1 and 4, 2024 (Starmer 2024a; Starmer 2024b). We selected these speeches through purposive sampling. Our selection is justified by the extant literature and our study's theoretical framework, with the criteria for inclusion being that these were the public statements made by political leaders during significant political crises driven by social groups with opposing political views. These crises profoundly affected the collective emotional resilience of American and British societies, and both leaders addressed this in their speeches. Our data analysis and interpretation follow abductive reasoning.

Our examination proceeds according to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework: (1) textual analysis, (2) discursive practice, and (3) sociocultural practice (Fairclough 2003). First, the textual dimension involves a linguistic analysis of selected speeches and public statements by Mike Johnson and Keir Starmer that concentrates on lexical choices, modality, and rhetorical devices. This allowed us to identify how these leaders constructed and deployed emotional categories. Second, the discursive practice dimension focuses on the production, distribution, and consumption of these texts. Here, we paid particular attention to how Johnson and Starmer framed emotional dissent and used surface and deep emotional labor to regulate public affect, drawing on Hochschild's (1983) concepts as part of our analytical lens. Third, the sociocultural practice dimension situates the discourses within broader ideological and institutional structures. We, therefore, explored how these rhetorical strategies reflected and reinforced dominant social norms, national narratives, and hegemonic ideologies. In this dimension, we drew on Laclau's (2005) theory of antagonistic identity formation and Demertzis' (2020) understanding of emotion as a tool of governance, highlighting how the emotional framing of dissenters serves as a mechanism of political control.

We analyzed the texts in three iterative rounds, employing "a flexible deductive approach" (Fletcher 2016:186). We derived categories and subcategories from our theoretical framework and introduced additional codes throughout the process to ensure comprehensive and accurate coding of all text segments. Initially, we analyzed the transcripts to identify and explain the theory-based strategies for strengthening collective emotional resilience through the emotional framing of emotional deviants (i.e., casting political opponents as emotional deviants; establishing an emotional framework; and creating "others" to foster solidarity), framed as discursive (rhetorical) practices. Next, we focused on the selected elements and techniques used in discourse to understand how meaning, power, and persuasion are constructed (Table 1).

Table 1. Selected elements and techniques used in discourse to understand how meaning, power, and persuasion are constructed

Code	Description
Active and passive styles	Sentences that are passive usually entail the author placing the object in the subject position. In academic and policy contexts, authors frequently deploy passive writing styles to convey a sense of objectivity.
Ambiguity	Vague or imprecise terms are often used deliberately to convey multiple meanings. In policy writing, for example, it is quite common for the word "community" to be used. The term has no precise meaning, so it is difficult to take exception to its deployment.
Audience	The audience of any text can differ quite markedly. In academic texts, for example, there is an internal audience of other academics and an external audience made up of students and general readers. Very often, the producer of texts will target particular audiences.
Metaphor	The figurative use of terms. Often used by authors to make a point by offering an example, which, while not strictly relevant, nevertheless helps make a point. An example of the use of metaphor is the sentence: "The government minister has been forced to make a U-turn."
Modality	A term signifying the author's or speaker's level of commitment to the claim being made within a sentence. Usually, claims are made in terms of obligation or truth. An obligation modality is a statement about what ought to be. An example of obligation modality is offered in the following sentence: "It is important in politics to have a clear agenda and not get sidetracked by events." A truth modality is a statement about what is (which is ideologically informed rather than objective). An example of a truth modality claim is as follows: "Australia's education system is in crisis."
Emotion management	In the coding process, particular attention should be paid to the following analytical dimensions: the general idea, the application of feeling and display rules, the application of surface and deep acting, the use of emotional narratives to enforce power dynamics, and the social construction of emotional expectations.

Source: Jacobs 2019 and own work (emotion management).

We also incorporated elements of Aristotle's rhetoric theory (Table 2) to help identify key discursive strategies employed by the political leaders.

Table 2. Aristotle's modes and proofs

Code	Description
Ethos (Credibility)	Ethos refers to the credibility, character, and authority of the speaker or writer. It involves convincing the audience that the communicator is trustworthy and knowledgeable by ethical appeal, character, reputation, expertise, and moral integrity. Speakers and writers establish ethos by demonstrating their knowledge of the subject, building a rapport with the audience, and showcasing their ethical principles. Examples include citing qualifications, highlighting experience, and presenting oneself as fair and respectful.
Logos (Logical Appeal)	Logos refers to the use of logic, reason, and evidence to persuade the audience. It involves constructing a coherent and logical argument that supports the communicator's claims with facts, statistics, logical reasoning, evidence, and rational arguments. Speakers and writers use logos by presenting clear, logical arguments supported by data, facts, and well-reasoned analysis. This includes organizing points logically, using syllogisms, and referencing credible sources.
Pathos (Emotional Appeal)	Pathos involves appealing to the audience's emotions to elicit feelings that support the speaker's or writer's argument through emotional engagement, empathy, and connection. Communicators use pathos by telling stories, using vivid language, and addressing the audience's hopes, fears, values, and desires. Techniques include using metaphors, anecdotes, and passionate delivery to elicit an emotional response.

Source: Own work based on Richardson 2007:156-177.

Our comparative strategy relied on the logic of controlled comparison. Rather than attempting to explain outcomes through strict causal inference, our goal was to identify recurring mechanisms of emotional framing across two different rhetorical situations. The cases were selected because they provide variation in key contextual dimensions—political role (legislative leader versus chief executive), type of crisis (campus protest versus public-order emergency), and immediate institutional constraints—while displaying a shared phenomenon: the use of emotion management to frame dissenters as emotional deviants. The comparative logic was, therefore, heuristic rather than strictly causal. By holding the dependent phenomenon constant across contrasting contexts, we sought to illuminate the specific mechanisms through which emotional framing operates in political discourse. The analysis and interpretation were conducted through the lens of our theoretical framework, which allowed us to interpret similarities as evidence of transferable discursive practices and differences as products of situational embedding. Although we divided responsibility for drafting different sections of the paper, all parts were collectively reviewed and refined until consensus was reached.

While CDA has its limitations, such as susceptibility to partiality and selection bias due to its focus on small text samples, it is particularly well-suited for our study, and our use of it is entirely defensible. The selected speeches by Johnson and Starmer were crucial cases because they involved high-profile political interventions in response to violent protests and because they were delivered by leaders speaking in their institutional capacities. Another critique of CDA is that it tends to overemphasize language at the expense of material realities. However, our approach acknowledges that while the material and discursive realms are distinct, access to material reality is mediated through discourse. Lastly, CDA is sometimes criticized because it emphasizes individual agency at the expense of structural factors. To mitigate this limitation, we situated individual ac-

tions within a broader social and political context. On balance, the advantages of the CDA outweighed its limitations in the context of our work, and, therefore, it was a viable method for examining how political leaders employ discursive strategies to shape collective emotional resilience and marginalize and delegitimize dissenting voices.

Finally, we used generative AI (ChatGPT-5) in two ways. First, we used it for language support and mechanical tasks such as paraphrasing, reformulating sentences, improving clarity and readability, harmonizing terminology, and minor reference reformatting. Second, we used it as a scholarly assistant in an advisory capacity, consulting with it on the coherence of successive stages of the project. In all cases, AI outputs were reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors. The overall logic and intellectual contribution of the article—including the identification of the research problem, selection of theoretical frameworks and methods, choice of sources, and the design of the analytic and interpretive strategy, as well as revisions made in response to peer review—are entirely the result of the authors' multi-stage work. AI was used with responsible-use guidelines (accuracy checks, source verification, privacy, and IP safeguards), and the authors retain full responsibility for the content.

How Was Discursive Emotional Framing of Emotional Deviants Employed as a Political Strategy for Strengthening Collective Emotional Resilience in the US and the UK During the Political Crises of 2024?

Our analysis shows that leaders in both the US and UK carefully considered and deliberately deployed discourse and rhetoric to frame emotional deviants as a means of accomplishing their political objectives. Both Johnson and Starmer framed their opponents as emotional deviants, created clear emotional frameworks, and created "others" to isolate dissenters. In what follows, we discuss these discursive practices in greater detail.

Framing Political Opponents as Emotional Deviants

Johnson addresses multiple audiences (students, Congress, and the broader American public) and seeks to ensure that his message resonates with these different groups. He immediately asserts his authority: "As Speaker of the House, I am committing today that the Congress will not be silent as Jewish students are expected to run for their lives and stay home from their classes hiding in fear" (Johnson 2024). This statement engenders trust in his leadership and enhances his moral integrity. It also creates a power dynamic that legitimizes his position and delegitimizes dissenting voices by insinuating that the pro-Palestinian demonstrators are radical, extreme, and associated with terrorism. To this end, he claims that protesters have "chanted in support of terrorists" and describes their actions as "detestable" and "lawless" (Johnson 2024). Moreover, he accuses protesters of shouting racial epithets and mocking Jewish students, behaviors portrayed as un-American, socially unacceptable, and morally repugnant. By depicting protesters' expressions as emotional outbursts, Johnson delegitimizes their motives and discounts the validity of their grievances. This strategy can be read as a form of emotion management in Hochschild's sense, as Johnson implicitly prescribes "feeling rules" for how Jewish students (courageous, resilient) and protesters (angry, irrational) ought to feel and display their emotions in public. This strategy reflects his rhetorical position. Because

he lacked operational authority over campus security, he instead relied upon symbolic escalation to transform a local protest into a national moral drama. Press commentary mirrored this duality. Some outlets praised his moral clarity in defending Jewish students, while others accused him of exacerbating polarization and exploiting the unrest for partisan gain (Allen and Ross 2024).

This interpretation is consistent with Demertzis' (2020) view that emotions function as tools of governance, helping explain how leaders leverage societal norms to marginalize dissenters by stoking collective outrage and building trust among their constituents. Johnson's invocation of shared moral outrage against antisemitism can be understood through Illouz and colleagues' (2014) argument that emotions are culturally constructed and strategically deployed. By associating protesters with Hamas, a terrorist organization, Johnson (2024) amplifies their perceived deviance: "If you are a protester on this campus and you are proud that you've been endorsed by Hamas, you are part of the problem." Such rhetoric is intended to reduce protesters' impact on public discourse by depicting them as fanatics. Johnson's (2024) description of protesters' ideologies as "radical and extreme" is deliberately vague and strategically advantageous because it invites audiences to associate them with a wide range of deplorable beliefs. Additionally, Johnson uses active voice to assign blame and emphasize accountability. For instance, he states: "Columbia's administrators have chosen to let the threats...overtake American principles" (Johnson 2024). Finally, he demonstrates surface acting by expressing measured condemnation and deep acting by engendering sympathy for Jewish students. Johnson's use of surface acting is visible in the restrained and clinical way he condemns the protesters, while his deep acting empathetically aligns with Jewish students' fear and vulnerability. Together, these strategies illustrate Hochschild's distinction between performative displays of indignation and inward attempts to inhabit emotions of solidarity. His vivid emotional narratives reinforce the protesters' moral deviance while setting normative expectations that reject antisemitism and demand inclusivity.

Similarly, Keir Starmer's speeches target multiple audiences, including law enforcement, marginalized communities, and the general public. Like Johnson, he too emphasizes inclusivity and collective resilience while discrediting violent actors. His speeches following the discord of 2024 exemplify the use of discursive emotional framing to shape public sentiment, marginalize opponents, and promote unity. By framing participants in the violence as emotional deviants, Starmer delegitimizes their actions and appeals to broader societal values of justice and cohesion. He consistently portrays far-right actors as emotional deviants, labeling them a "gang of thugs" (Starmer 2024a) engaged in "organized, violent thuggery" and "marauding gangs intent on law breaking. Or worse" (Starmer 2024b). This rhetoric delegitimizes dissent by characterizing these actors as irrational, criminal, and morally reprehensible. More specifically, he states: "It's not protest. It's not legitimate. It's crime... Violent disorder" (Starmer 2024a), stripping these actions of any political or social legitimacy. Like Johnson, Starmer also defines the boundaries of what emotions are acceptable during a public demonstration. Legitimate protest may involve anger or passion, but "crime" must only elicit condemnation and fear. This is a clear attempt to police the emotional boundaries of the public sphere, consistent with Hochschild's concept of emotion management. Starmer, speaking as Prime Minister, was directly responsible for crisis

management in the wake of violent riots, with expectations of reassurance, de-escalation, and coordination with police. Media reactions reflected this complexity. While many reports credited him with steady leadership and praised his unifying message, others found his remarks to be inadequate or overly procedural, arguing that they risked alienating certain communities ("How Effectively Has Keir Starmer Handled the Riots?..." 2024; "Keir Starmer Condemns…" 2024).

Starmer's rhetoric can be interpreted in light of Wahl-Jorgensen's (2019) analysis of the emotionality of political rhetoric, which emphasizes justice and cohesion while delegitimizing dissent as criminal behavior. Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) argues that emotions are mobilized in mediated public life to reinforce dominant narratives and marginalize opposing voices. Accordingly, Starmer isolates far-right groups from broader public discourse by using active language to assign agency to perpetrators (e.g., "These people are showing our country exactly who they are" [Starmer 2024a]) and to affirm governmental action (e.g., "We will establish a national capability...To tackle violent disorder" [Starmer 2024a]). Furthermore, he demonstrates surface acting through his controlled outrage and deep acting when he appeals to the broader moral imperatives of justice and inclusivity.

Establishing an Emotional Framework

The deliberate construction of emotional dichotomies is central to both leaders' rhetorical strategies. These dichotomies contrast positive emotions like hope, unity, and resilience with negative emotions such as fear, anger, and hatred. By attempting to regulate public emotions, both leaders seek to strengthen collective resilience while delegitimizing disruptive affective expressions. As our framework suggests, emotional frames interact with broader cultural repertoires, media logics, and counterpublics, which, as Papacharissi (2015) and Gould (2009) argue, may reinforce, resist, or reinterpret leaders' intended messages.

Johnson juxtaposes fear and anger (associated with the demonstrators) against resilience, hope, and unity (associated with the Jewish students). In reference to Jewish students, he states, "Their bravery is inspiring" (Johnson 2024), which elevates their moral standing and attaches value to their resilience. In sharp contrast, he insinuates that the demonstrators created a climate of "fear" and "intimidation," underscoring the emotional toll that opposition imposed upon the Jewish community. He also evokes strong emotions by describing the brutal acts of Hamas: "Israeli women and children were savagely raped and murdered, and infants were cooked in ovens" (Johnson 2024). This vivid imagery evokes a sense of urgency and encourages moral outrage, appealing to the audience's empathy and shared values. Johnson's (2024) call for order and the protection of Jewish students underscores a narrative of collective security and resilience: "We will punish those who have allowed this violence and bigotry to go unchecked." In Johnson's case, emotion management works by invoking dramatic images of Hamas atrocities, which impose a hierarchy of appropriate emotions: outrage and sympathy are mandated for Jewish victims, while fear and intimidation are deemed unacceptable reactions to campus protests. In the press, this framing was read both as a necessary defense of vulnerable students and as a dangerous escalation that could exacerbate the volatile situation on campus (Allen and Ross 2024). Johnson's statements are intended to restore trust and hope within the targeted com-

munity. Therefore, he strategically deploys emotions to shape public sentiment and regulate collective affect in keeping with Hochschild's concept of emotion management. However, as the literature we referenced earlier suggests, his ability to impose this framework is likely diminished by competing media framings and counter-narratives circulating at the time of his remarks.

Starmer's rhetoric can also be interpreted through Hochschild's concept of emotion management, as it reveals mechanisms designed to foster unity and trust by regulating collective affect. He establishes credibility by positioning himself as a defender of justice and inclusivity, thanking law enforcement, and vowing to hold perpetrators accountable. His direct rebuke of the far-right bolsters his moral authority. He contrasts disruptive emotions associated with far-right groups (fear, hate, division) with constructive ones such as trust, resilience, and unity. For example, he stresses: [We] "will not allow understandable fear… To curdle into division and hate in our communities" (Starmer 2024a). Starmer's framing likewise prescribes "appropriate" emotions. By stating that fear must not "curdle into division and hate," he distinguishes legitimate feelings (fear, anxiety) from illegitimate affective outcomes (hate, division). This is an explicit invocation of feeling rules that direct audiences to transform negative affect into resilience and solidarity. This clear dichotomy encourages resilience by uniting the public under the shared values of safety, justice, and cohesion. He reinforces these values by thanking police officers for "[standing] up to intimidation and violence" (Starmer 2024a) and reaffirming the government's commitment to public safety through actions like enhancing police capabilities. Formally thanking police officers is a form of surface acting (an outward expression of gratitude and respect), while his empathetic tone toward Muslim communities targeted during the riots exemplifies deep acting accomplished by morally aligning himself with the victims of the attacks. His appeals bolster Berezin's (2002) argument that political emotions help forge shared identities and sustain cohesion during crises. In Starmer's case, his rhetorical position as Prime Minister demanded not only moral framing but also procedural assurances. Press coverage highlighted this dual role: his mix of empathy for affected communities and promises of concrete tools (e.g., policing powers, facial recognition) reassured some audiences but was derided by others as either too cumbersome or inadequate given the magnitude of the crisis ("How Effectively Has Keir Starmer Handled the Riots?..." 2024). Logical appeals are also evident in his proposals to use facial recognition technology and criminal behavior orders, which project a pragmatic approach to maintaining order. At the same time, Starmer evokes empathy for victims and communities while channeling anger and disdain toward perpetrators. He uses vivid imagery (e.g., references to "attacks on Mosques" and "residents and staff in absolute fear" [Starmer 2024b]) to elicit emotional responses, while also relying upon inclusive terms like "right-minded people" (Starmer 2024b) to position dissenters outside the moral community.

Creating "Others" to Foster Solidarity

Both Johnson and Starmer construct clear "others" to serve as foils against which their respective communities define themselves, a practice consistent with Laclau's (2005) theoretical lens on the creation of antagonistic identities in political discourse. Yet, as our theoretical framework suggests, such constructions must be understood as attempts to hegemonize emotional and moral boundaries rather than as unilateral acts of definition. The "other" is discur-

sively produced in interaction with broader cultural repertoires, media narratives, and counter-discourses that may reinforce, resist, or destabilize leaders' intended framings (Gould 2009; Papacharissi 2015).

In Johnson's case, he engages in othering by juxtaposing the protesters against the shared American values of liberty, democracy, and religious tolerance. He also draws on historical and cultural symbols (including Winston Churchill and the American Revolution) to associate Jewish students with the ideals of democracy and resilience. In contrast, he accuses the protesters of debasing freedom of speech and the rule of law (e.g., "They have co-opted First Amendment arguments to protect genocide and to elevate the voices of antisemitism" [Johnson 2024]). Johnson enhances the urgency of his message by situating his speech within the broader context of antisemitism and national security concerns. By framing the protests as threats to American values and Jewish safety, he positions his intervention as a defense of democracy and moral integrity. The division that Johnson rhetorically constructs promotes solidarity among those who align with American democratic ideals while isolating and discrediting the protesters. Phrases like "the madness has to stop" and "we are better than this" create a unified call to action that links specific events to broader national values. Statements such as "this is dangerous" and "we cannot allow this to happen" employ strong truth modality, emphasizing urgency and necessity. Johnson (2024) also grounds his rhetoric in factual references, such as: "By some counts, as many as 200 universities have a similar form of protest right now." Likewise, Johnson strengthens his argument by linking these facts to broader implications for safety and American values. His portrayal of protesters as threats to American principles also mirrors broader mechanisms of emotional framing by insinuating that the protesters are morally and emotionally deviant. Johnson demonstrates emotion management through othering by repeatedly contrasting "American principles" and the protesters' alleged hatred. By doing so, he is essentially instructing the public to feel pride in democratic traditions and shame or indignation toward those who violate these traditions. Through surface and deep acting, he projects emotional sincerity, contrasting moral actors with radicals to reinforce cohesion. His narratives depict the dissenters as dangerous deviants who fail to uphold shared national values, constructing expectations of pride in these values and rejection of hate-driven behaviors. Press responses reflected this framing. Sympathetic commentators praised him for defending democratic values, while his critics insisted that his rhetoric deepened divides and stigmatized legitimate dissent (Allen and Ross 2024). Finally, Johnson's speech uses a moral framework to advance his conservative ideology and agenda by invoking traditional values, appealing to national identity, calling for law and order, and vigorously opposing progressive movements.

Starmer likewise constructs a distinct "other" against which *his* political community can define itself. In turn, he uses vivid depictions of far-right violence to channel disgust and moral outrage toward the perpetrators, while simultaneously reassuring Muslim and minority communities that fear is legitimate but should be met with collective solidarity rather than withdrawal. By doing so, Starmer is attempting to balance the management of both disruptive and restorative emotions within a single rhetorical frame. He also uses vivid imagery to describe the far-right: "Flares thrown at the statue of Winston Churchill," "a Nazi salute at the Cenotaph," (Starmer 2024a) and "attacks on Mosques" (Starmer 2024b). These descriptions evoke outrage and en-

courage solidarity among those who reject such actions, rallying the political majority around values of tolerance, diversity, and the rule of law. Again, Starmer (2024b) reassures targeted communities by stating: "I know how frightening this must be...this violent mob do[es] not represent our country." Not only is he trying to isolate and discredit the far-right with this statement, but he is also urging the inclusion of marginalized groups and the promotion of their safety. His phrases—"crime is crime" and "we make no distinction"—create a unified message affirming fairness and justice across all communities. By framing government actions as responses to "far-right hatred" and "violent disorder," Starmer (2024a) advances a narrative of moral responsibility and decisive leadership. He also applies feeling and display rules to shape appropriate emotional responses. He does so by condemning violence and promoting solidarity with affected communities. Through these emotional narratives, he underscores the harmful actions of the "other" while simultaneously promoting unity and harmony within the moral majority. His speeches reflect a democratic and egalitarian ideology that emphasizes equality before the law, which is antithetical to divisive extremism. But because Starmer was addressing riots as head of government, he was expected to initiate a meaningful response that went beyond symbolic overtures. This was reflected in the journalistic accounts that followed his public statements. While some accounts suggested that his rhetoric was reassuring, others worried that his emphasis on law and order would exacerbate tensions with marginalized groups ("Keir Starmer condemns…" 2024).

We interpret Johnson and Starmer's strategies not merely as rhetorical but as part of a broader system of governance in which leaders seek to harness collective outrage and empathy to align public sentiment with their political objectives. Their framing of "others" stabilizes collective emotional dynamics while discrediting and delegitimizing opposition groups. However, consistent with our theoretical framework, such strategies should not be seen as all-powerful. The creation of "others" is always contested. Dissenters and other interested parties may resist, reinterpret, and/or subvert the frames being advanced by circulating their own counter-narratives through the media, activism, and cultural repertoires. This underscores that the emotional politics of "othering" function both as a unifying force and as a mechanism of social control—partial, negotiated, and subject to challenge.

Cross-Case Convergence in Mechanisms of Emotional Framing of Emotional Deviants as a Political Strategy for Strengthening Collective Emotional Resilience

Despite the many contextual differences, both leaders relied on a shared toolkit of discursive techniques that traveled across settings. As previously discussed, Johnson and Starmer used moral dichotomization coupled with othering to stabilize in-group cohesion. They also assigned agency and blame through the consistent use of active voice and agentive predicates, while strategically using ambiguous terms like "radical," "extreme," or "thugs" to broaden the scope of stigmatization. Moreover, they invoked culturally available feeling rules that allowed them to police the emotional boundaries of the public sphere. Their rhetoric included claims of protection for vulnerable groups with promises to decisively institute certain policies or law enforcement measures. At the same time, they engaged in surface and deep acting by projecting controlled

indignation alongside authentic concern. In sum, we observed the use of similar specific practices of emotion management: the imposition of feeling rules (who may feel fear, who must express resilience), the performance of surface and deep acting (controlled outrage, authentic empathy), and the policing of emotional boundaries that separate legitimate protest from illegitimate disorder. Finally, both leaders relied on vivid imagery to dramatize events and heighten the moral urgency of their messaging. Although both leaders employed elaborate rhetorical strategies, press coverage showed that their messaging did not go uncontested. While Johnson's condemnations were seen by some as justified and protective, others found them to be incendiary. While Starmer's reassurances helped allay the concerns of some, they riled others who found his response to be either too reserved or overzealous (Allen and Ross 2024; "How Effectively Has Keir Starmer Handled the Riots?..." 2024).

Why did these similarities recur despite divergent rhetorical situations? Our interpretation is that high-profile leaders like Johnson and Starmer face structural incentives of mass-mediated crisis politics: (1) media logics reward moral-emotional clarity; (2) democratic accountability pressures leaders to project control and concern; and (3) moments of perceived threat invite securitizing frames that emphasize order and protection. Emotional framing functions as a governance shortcut—a way to quickly organize public meaning in uncertain, fluid, and volatile political contexts—regardless of ideological orientation or institutional role (cf. Papacharissi 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen 2019; Demertzis 2020). The specific targets and policy levers differ (symbolic sanction versus operational reassurance), but the mechanisms remain strikingly consistent.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our analysis advances political sociology by demonstrating that emotional framing (Peterson 2006; Lively 2024) functions not only as a rhetorical tool but as a governing mechanism through which political leaders consolidate power and manage collective emotional resilience during times of national crisis (Teo et al. 2017; Zubrzycka-Czarnecka 2024). Drawing on Hochschild's (1979; 1983) concept of emotion management, we show how emotional norms are actively shaped by political discourse—particularly through the strategic labeling of dissenters as emotional deviants.

Our empirical findings reveal that both Mike Johnson and Keir Starmer employed emotionally charged rhetoric to frame political opponents as irrational, dangerous, and emotionally unstable. In doing so, they constructed emotional dichotomies—juxtaposing fear, anger, and hatred with unity, resilience, and hope—to regulate public sentiment. They also defined moral "in-groups" and deviant "others," using narrative, historical references, and emotion-laden appeals to consolidate solidarity and exclude dissenting voices. These practices are central to what we call "discursive emotional framing," which attempts to align collective emotions with dominant political and ideological norms.

A key contribution of our comparative design is the identification of cross-case convergence in the mechanisms of emotional framing. Despite substantial contextual differences—an American legislative leader addressing campus protests versus a British Prime Minister managing violent riots—both Johnson and Starmer borrowed from a shared toolkit of discursive strategies. These included moral dichot-

omization and othering to stabilize in-group cohesion; the assignment of agency and blame through active, agentive predicates; the use of strategic ambiguity to broaden stigmatization; and the invocation of feeling rules to prescribe which emotions were legitimate and which were not. Both leaders combined claims of protecting vulnerable groups with promises of decisive action, performed surface and deep acting to project controlled indignation alongside authentic care, and dramatized events through vivid imagery. The recurrence of these mechanisms across divergent settings lends credence to our central claim: emotional framing has become a generalized repertoire of governance in liberal democracies.

Such convergence suggests that emotional framing is not idiosyncratic but structural—a technique of governance in mass-mediated democracies, particularly in times of crisis and polarization. These strategies offer short-term emotional stability and cohesion but raise deeper concerns about their long-term effects on democratic culture. Moreover, our findings highlight the tension between individual liberty and collective order in contemporary democracies. Emotional framing is often justified through appeals to security, public safety, or national unity. Although these concerns are not unfounded and must be taken very seriously (particularly in light of the genuine fears expressed by Jewish communities in the US and Muslim communities in the UK), we caution against allowing emotional regulation to become a pretext for curtailing expressive freedoms and suppressing legitimate dissent.

Our work informs recent sociological debates by extending the emerging literature on emotional governance and collective resilience. Recent treatments emphasize the shift from individual affect to institutional and systemic dynamics of emotion regulation (Zhang et al. 2024), as well as how states and political elites seek to regulate public affect through discourses of security, migration, and crisis (Cantat, Pécoud, and Thiollet 2023). Our comparative analysis furthers this agenda by demonstrating cross-case convergence in the mechanisms of emotional framing across divergent rhetorical situations: symbolic sanctioning in the US and operational reassurance in the UK. In doing so, we show that leaders leverage strikingly similar tools that include feeling rules, othering, and surface/deep acting. While these tools have a rhetorical dimension, they clearly function as governing techniques designed to strengthen collective emotional resilience. By foregrounding the paradoxical character of resilience as both integrative and exclusionary, we expose and explore an important gap in the existing literature where scholars have largely celebrated resilience as inherently positive (Meneghel et al. 2014; Garcia and Rimé 2019), while overlooking its use as a means of marginalization and control.

The observed ethical challenges of emotional framing are not limited to elite actors. Protest movements themselves can perpetuate exclusionary or extremist discourse, as seen in cases of Antisemitic and Islamophobic rhetoric within or adjacent to protest spaces. This sort of language is not only morally repugnant but also compromises the inclusivity of democratic expression, just like the rhetoric used to discredit emotional deviants. Thus, both state and non-state actors contribute to the narrowing of the emotional and discursive space available for authentic political participation.

In light of the tensions that we described above, we suggest that future research explore how emotional politics can also be democratizing rather than ex-

clusionary. Historical figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela illustrate how emotional rhetoric can serve inclusion, justice, and collective empowerment, rather than marginalization and control. Investigating bottom-up emotional framing in social movements may offer insights into how counter-hegemonic emotional narratives challenge dominant norms and expand the boundaries of democratic engagement. We also urge future researchers to nudge us forward by examining the long-term effects of emotional framing on political participation and institutional trust; the cultural specificity of emotional norms and deviance; and the mediating role of digital platforms that increasingly shape how emotions circulate and are publicly performed.

In conclusion, our study demonstrates that emotional framing is a political strategy that has serious implications for democratic integrity. When leaders use emotionally charged narratives to silence dissent and enforce conformity, they do more than secure order—they reshape the emotional boundaries of political life. Conversely, when protest movements traffic in exclusionary and caustic rhetoric, they inflict harm, erode the moral legitimacy of their cause, and stifle the meaningful exchange of ideas. A truly resilient democratic society must manage emotions not through repression, but through inclusive dialogue. Equally important, it must protect public safety without sacrificing expressive diversity and foster emotional cohesion without foreclosing the possibility of moral and political dissent.

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Citation

Zubrzycka-Czarnecka, Aleksandra, Gregory Neddenriep, and Krzysztof Śliwiński. 2026. "Emotional Framing of Emotional Deviants as a Political Strategy for Strengthening Collective Emotional Resilience." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 22(1):24-52. Retrieved Month, Year (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php). DOI: https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.22.1.02