

Collective pronouns and the construction of political identity in British and German politics

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In a context of increasing political polarisation and transformation of public communication, the study of collective pronouns offers a valuable lens for understanding how political actors construct and negotiate belonging, national identity, and democratic legitimacy. This study presents a comparative analysis of the use of first-person plural pronouns in the digital discourse of politicians from the United Kingdom and Germany, aiming to explore how the idea of political community is discursively constructed in two distinct European democratic traditions. By examining the specific linguistic choices made by politicians in their online communication, this study seeks to illuminate the strategies through which political actors articulate inclusion and exclusion, and how these strategies shape perceptions of collective identity. Through a thorough analysis of digital political discourse, particularly on the platform X, this study addresses the rhetorical strategies through which politicians appeal to and define their constituencies, define the boundaries of political communities, and construct a sense of shared purpose or responsibility among their followers. The study is grounded in the assumption that collective pronouns are far from being mere grammatical elements; rather, they operate as significant ideological markers and discursive strategies that serve to include or exclude particular groups. By employing the pronoun *we*, politicians actively delineate who is considered part of the political in-group and who is positioned outside it. In this way, the use of collective pronouns allows political actors to legitimate certain positions, policies, or actions, while simultaneously constructing narratives of unity, shared responsibility, and at times, confrontation. Consequently, the political “we” emerges as a central rhetorical device, capable of both building consensus and mobilising partisan support, functioning as a tool that reinforces collective identity and political cohesion within a given audience. The main objective of this study is thus to analyse quantitatively and qualitatively the use of first-person plural pronouns in the digital discourse of British and German politicians. In doing so, this study identifies the discursive referents of “we” in both contexts (national, institutional or partisan), while contributing to the understanding of contemporary European political discourse from a comparative linguistic perspective, showing how pronominal choices reflect differing conceptions of democratic community. The analysis is framed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which allows for the examination of language as both a reflection and a mechanism of social and political power. The corpus consists of tweets published between 2020 in 2025 by prominent political figures from the main parties in both countries. Using a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative analysis of frequency and collocations with qualitative analysis of pragmatic and semantic context, the study identifies patterns of collective-pronoun use and the implicit referents of “we” in each political culture. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the field of comparative political discourse analysis by showing how an apparently simple linguistic category reflects profound differences in political culture, rhetorical tradition, and conceptions of democratic community. In examining the digital “we” of British and German politicians, it becomes clear not only how leaders address their citizens, but also how they imagine –and delineate– the symbolic space of the people they claim to represent.