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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMPUTER-ASSISTED THEMATIC QUALITATIVE TEXT ANALYSIS OF INAUGURAL SPEECHES: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN FIRST-WORLD DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how political leaders construct national identity and civic responsibility in inaugural speeches within first-world democratic systems, using computer-assisted thematic qualitative text analysis. Three inaugural speeches, identified using pseudonyms (Political Leaders A, B, and C), were analyzed through the seven-phase framework described by Kuckartz (2014), with QDA Miner Lite (Provalis Research, 2024) supporting and supplementing the manual coding process. Six thematic categories emerged inductively from the data: National Crisis, National Unity, National Identity, National Renewal and Restoration, Civic Responsibility, and Government Accountability. Ninety-four coded text segments were distributed across these categories. National Renewal and Restoration generated the highest number of coded passages (24), while Civic Responsibility generated the fewest (4). Analysis of the distribution revealed significant variation in how each leader framed the crisis, constructed national identity, and assigned civic and governmental responsibility. A cross-category analysis identified two structural patterns: a link between crisis framing and civic demands, and a relationship between restoration promises and personal accountability claims. An in-depth case analysis of Political Leader B illustrated how these themes interact within a single speech. The findings suggest that inaugural addresses are not ceremonial texts but strategic instruments through which the terms of democratic citizenship are publicly constructed.

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INTRODUCTION

Inaugural speeches are among the most significant political texts a democratic leader can produce. Delivered at the moment of assumption of power, they describe national conditions, outline leadership priorities, and establish the terms within which governance will unfold. Because they are directed simultaneously to citizens, to institutional actors, and to the international community, they are unusually transparent records of how a leader understands the nation, its problems, and its possibilities. Political speech is not a neutral medium of information transfer. Van Dijk (2011) argues that language is one of the primary instruments through which power relations are reproduced, legitimized, and contested in social life. Inaugural addresses, as highly public and institutionally sanctioned texts, are a particularly clear site for this dynamic. Fairclough (2015) extends this perspective, positioning language as social practice that is shaped by existing structures while also actively reshaping them. Zarefsky (2004) specifically identified the power to define social reality as one of the most significant resources available to executive leadership, describing how presidential rhetoric constructs the terms within which governance unfolds. These frameworks situate thematic text analysis not merely as a method for categorizing content but as a means of tracing how political language constructs the conditions of democratic life. Historical and comparative study has documented the regularities of the inaugural genre. Sigelman (1996) found that national unification and the veneration of foundational values are the most persistent and increasingly prominent functions of the American inaugural address across two centuries. Ericson (1997) similarly observed that inaugural addresses function to express the cultural features of a nation's political life, its understanding of itself and its aspirations. Both scholars identified the genre as a site of genuine political work, not merely ceremonial convention. This study addresses the following research question: How do political leaders construct national identity and responsibility in inaugural speeches in first-world democratic systems? Four sub-questions guided the analysis: how crisis is described; how national identity and unity are constructed; how renewal or restoration is framed; and how responsibility is distributed between citizens and government.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The study employed thematic qualitative text analysis following the seven-phase framework described by Kuckartz (2014). This framework provides a structured, iterative process for examining textual data systematically to identify recurring patterns and themes. Creswell and Poth (2018) position thematic analysis as particularly well suited to research concerned with meaning-making and the social construction of reality, which are the very processes inaugural addresses perform. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) argue that qualitative methods are indispensable when the researcher seeks to understand phenomena as they emerge in naturalistic contexts without imposing predetermined categories on the data.

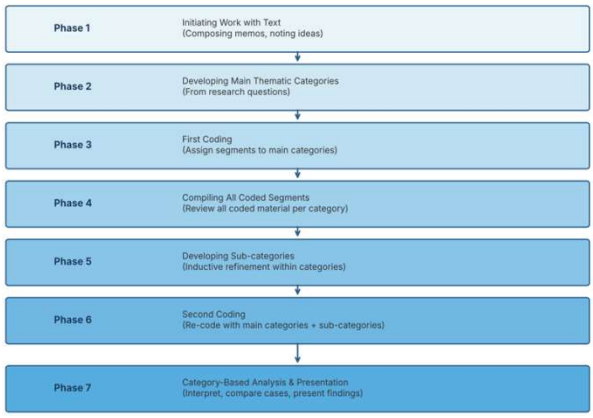

Figure 1. Kuckartz (2014) Seven-Phase Thematic Qualitative Text Analysis Framework

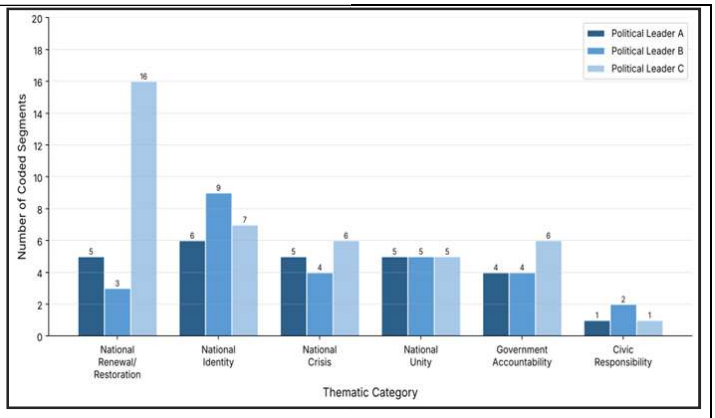

Figure 2. Coding Frequency Distribution by Theme and Political Leader (QDA Miner Lite, N = 94)

As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework proceeds from initial work with the text (Phase 1: composing memos and identifying relevant passages) through the development of thematic categories (Phase 2), two rounds of systematic coding (Phases 3 and 6), the compilation of coded segments (Phase 4), the development of sub-categories (Phase 5), and culminating in category-based analysis and presentation of findings (Phase 7). QDA Miner Lite (Provalis Research, 2024) was used to support and supplement the manual coding process. Three pseudonymized inaugural speech transcripts were imported into the software as separate case documents. Memos were attached to key passages during initial reading. Following the development of main thematic categories and sub-categories through manual analysis, the coding structure was replicated in QDA Miner Lite, allowing text segments to be systematically assigned to categories through the software's coding interface. Figure 4 illustrates the QDA Miner Lite coding environment with the coded text and frequency outputs visible. The software's coding frequency function was used to generate quantitative frequency tables and charts, providing an empirical layer of precision not available through manual coding alone. Saldaña (2021) recommends a structured, iterative approach to code development in which initial codes remain close to the data before being progressively abstracted into categories; a procedure directly supported by the two-pass coding strategy employed here. Miles et al. (2019) similarly emphasize the importance of using frequency displays to verify the weight and distribution of themes across cases. The data consist of three inaugural addresses: one delivered in 1993 (Political Leader A), one in 2009 (Political Leader B), and one in 2025 (Political Leader C). Pseudonymization was applied to maintain analytic neutrality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Coding Frequency: The QDA Miner Lite analysis produced a total of 94 coded text segments across the three speeches, distributed across six thematic categories. Table 1 presents the full frequency distribution by theme and political leader. Figure 2 displays the same data graphically, and Figure 3 shows the QDA Miner Lite coding frequency table as generated by the software.

Table 1. Coding Frequency Distribution by Thematic Category and Political Leader (N = 94 coded segments)

Thematic Category	Leader A	Leader B	Leader C	Total
National Renewal & Restoration	5	3	16	24
National Identity	6	9	7	22
National Crisis	5	4	6	15
National Unity	5	5	5	15
Government Accountability	4	4	6	14
Civic Responsibility	1	2	1	4
Total	**26**	**27**	**41**	**94**

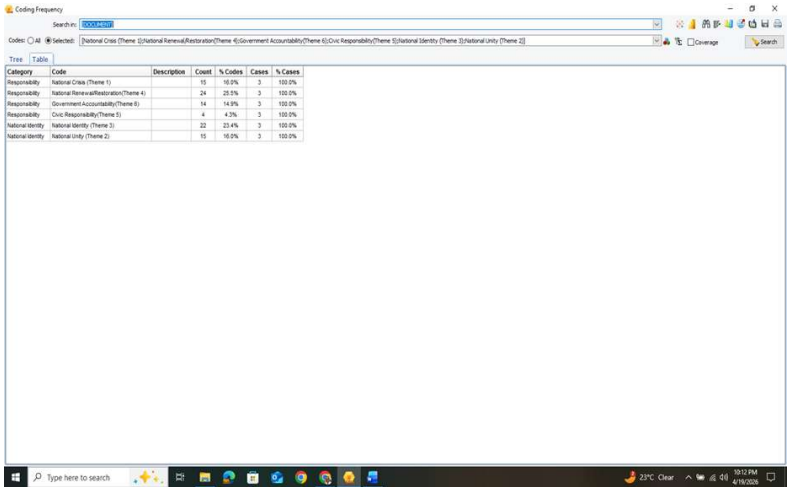

Figure 3. QDA Miner Lite Coding Frequency Table: Six Main Thematic Categories

National Renewal and Restoration was the most frequently coded theme (24 segments), followed by National Identity (22), National Crisis and National Unity (15 each), Government Accountability (14), and Civic Responsibility (4). All six themes appeared in all three speeches (100% case coverage), confirming that the categories are genre-level features of the inaugural address rather than unique choices of individual leaders. The variation lies not in whether these themes appear but in how they are constructed and with what intensity.

Category-Based Analysis: Sub-Category Findings: Table 2 presents the sub-category analysis across all six themes and three leaders. Sub-categories were developed inductively in Phase 5 and applied in the second coding pass.

Table 2. Sub-Category Analysis by Theme and Political Leader

Theme (Total)	Leader A	Leader B	Leader C
National Crisis (15)	Economic & Social Crisis: collective drift, unmet social conditions (5 segs)	Economic & Social Crisis: systemic failure, greed, collective irresponsibility (4 segs)	Institutional Crisis: corrupt establishment, erosion of public trust, failed governance (6 segs)
National Unity (15)	Unity of Purpose: civic imperative; end to deadlock and drift (5 segs)	Unity of Purpose: conscious democratic choice; hope over fear (5 segs)	National Belonging: affective family bond; unity through kinship and shared loyalty (5 segs)
National Identity (22)	Foundational Ideals: dynamic commitment to constitutional principles (6 segs)	Inclusive National Identity: pluralistic patchwork heritage; diversity (9 segs, highest)	Sovereign strength and restored global standing; reclamation of national greatness (7 segs)
National Renewal/ Restoration (24)	Renewal: organic, values-based recovery; spring metaphor (5 segs)	Renewal: conscious collective transformation; shared sacrifice (3 segs)	Restoration: immediate and decisive; "Golden Age begins right now" (16 segs, dominant)
Civic Responsibility (4)	Shared national duty; government must serve people (1 seg)	Citizens as agents of democratic change (2 segs)	Citizens as beneficiaries; protection-oriented framing (1 seg)
Government Accountability (14)	Generational accountability; democratic stewardship (4 segs)	Responsible withdrawal abroad; institutional reform (4 segs)	Personal executive promise; direct accountability to citizens (6 segs)

Table 3. Cross-Category Relational Patterns Across Three Inaugural Speeches

Relational Pattern	Description
Crisis Framing → Civic Responsibility & Accountability	Leaders who locate crisis in collective failure (Leaders A and B) implicate citizens in the solution, generating higher Civic Responsibility and Government Accountability coding alongside Crisis. Leader C, who locates crisis in institutional corruption, generates the most Accountability segments through personal executive promises rather than shared obligation.
National Renewal → Accountability as Personal Pledge	The highest Renewal/Restoration coding (Leader C, 16 segments) co-occurs with the highest single-leader Accountability coding (Leader C, 6 segments), suggesting that restoration promises are paired with personal commitments to deliver. This pattern is absent in Leaders A and B, where renewal is framed as collective rather than executive-led.
National Identity → Unity Strategy	Leaders with higher Identity coding (Leader B: 9 segments) construct unity through inclusion and shared heritage. Leaders with lower Identity coding (Leader A: 6 segments) emphasize civic obligation and national purpose. Leader C's identity framing (7 segments) centers on national greatness and sovereignty, which links unity to shared loyalty rather than shared values.

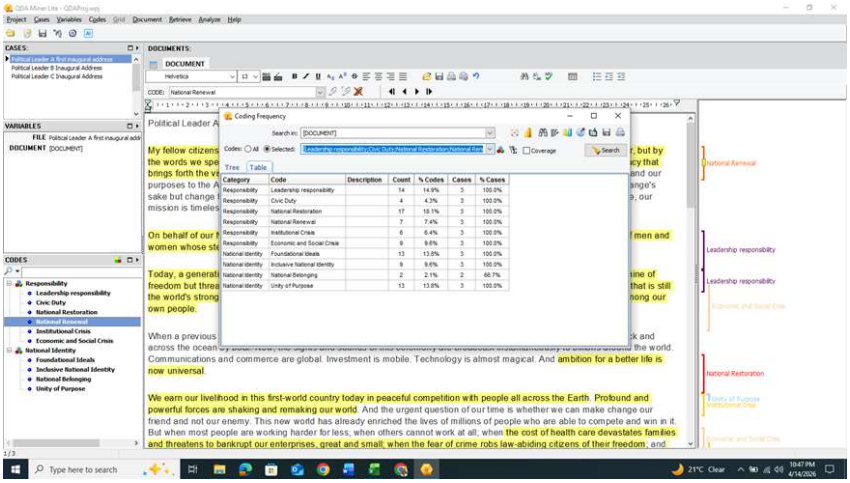

Figure 4. QDA Miner Lite Interface Showing Political Leader B Coded Text with Frequency Table

The sub-category analysis reveals that while the same six themes appear across all three speeches, each leader constructs them through fundamentally different strategies. National Crisis illustrates this most clearly: Political Leaders A and B frame crisis as economic and social failure, implicating collective behavior and institutional shortcomings, while Political Leader C locates crisis in institutional corruption and government betrayal. This distinction has downstream consequences for how civic responsibility is framed. When crisis is collective, citizens are implicated in its resolution; when crisis is institutional, citizens are cast as victims awaiting executive protection. National Identity shows the most pronounced inter-leader variation (range: 6 to 9 segments). Political Leader B produced nine coded segments under this theme; the highest single-leader contribution to any category, reflecting the density and diversity of pluralistic identity language. Political Leader A's identity framing centers on constitutional and democratic ideals. Political Leader C's framing emphasizes sovereign strength and national greatness, positioning identity as something to be reclaimed rather than expressed. National Unity, despite equal quantitative distribution (5 segments per leader), reflects three distinct strategies. Political Leader A constructs unity as civic obligation. Political Leader B frames it as conscious democratic choice grounded in shared suffering and aspiration. Political Leader C constructs it as national belonging; an affective bond built on kinship and shared loyalty to leadership rather than shared values or civic purpose. National Renewal and Restoration produced the dataset's most striking distributional pattern: 16 of the 24 total segments were coded from Political Leader C's speech. This dominance is consistent with a restoration framing that presents change as immediate, decisive, and already under way;"the Golden Age of America begins now",rather than as an organic process (Leader A) or a collective democratic project (Leader B). Stuckey (2020) notes that when presidents position themselves as the primary authors of national change rather than agents within a shared system, they assume accountability in personal rather than institutional terms, and the relational patterns identified here directly illustrate that dynamic.

Cross-Category Relational Analysis: Kuckartz (2014) identifies the analysis of relationships between main categories as a distinct analytical level that moves beyond describing what each category contains to examining how the categories interact across the dataset. Table 3 presents the three relational patterns identified in this study. The cross-category analysis reveals that the framing of crisis is structurally consequential for the architecture of civic responsibility. When crisis is in collective failure, citizens are implicated in both the diagnosis and its resolution, and civic demands follow logically from the framing. When crisis is in institutional corruption, civic responsibility gives way to the promise of executive protection and restoration. Osnabrügge et al. (2021) found that politicians deploy emotional language strategically in proportion to audience size. The relative thinness of Civic Responsibility coding across all three leaders (only 4 total segments) suggests that explicit demands on citizens are treated as a higher verbal risk than aspirational or identitarian appeals, even in the most public political address available to democratic leaders.

In-Depth Case Analysis: Political Leader B: Political Leader B was selected for in-depth case analysis because this speech produced the most complex and analytically rich thematic profile across the dataset. With 27 total coded segments and the highest single-theme contribution (9 segments under National Identity), the speech illustrates how plural identity construction, civic obligation, and institutional accountability can be integrated within a single communication strategy. Table 4 presents the in-depth case analysis by theme. The in-depth analysis confirms that Political Leader B's speech is structurally integrated. Crisis is in collective failure (including systemic irresponsibility and greed), which makes civic responsibility a logical consequence of the diagnosis. Identity is constructed pluralistically, providing a maximally inclusive foundation for the unity appeal. Renewal is framed as a collective democratic project requiring shared effort rather than an executive delivery. Accountability is distributed institutionally rather than concentrated in personal promises. This integration distinguishes Leader B's communication approach, distinct from both Leader A's more civic-obligation-centered framing and Leader C's restoration-and-protection model.

Table 4. In-Depth Case Analysis: Political Leader B: Thematic Evidence and Interpretation

Theme (Coded Segments)	Textual Evidence and Interpretation
National Identity (9 segments)	*"We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth." (Political Leader B)* Leader B produced the highest single-leader contribution to this theme, reflecting the density of pluralistic identity language in the speech.
Civic Responsibility (2 segments)	*"What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility: a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world." (Political Leader B)* While numerically modest, this coding is analytically significant: it is the most direct statement of citizen obligation in the dataset.
National Crisis (4 segments)	*"Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices." (Political Leader B)* Crisis is in collective failure, implicating citizens alongside institutions; a framing that makes civic responsibility a logical response.
National Renewal (3 segments)	*"Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America." (Political Leader B)* Renewal is framed as conscious democratic choice, shared sacrifice, and forward-looking transformation, distinct from both Leader A's organic metaphor and Leader C's restoration promise.
Government Accountability (4 segments)	*"We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan." (Political Leader B)* Accountability is framed institutionally and internationally rather than personally, consistent with the broader pattern of shared responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that inaugural addresses function as strategic instruments through which the terms of democratic citizenship are actively constructed, not as ceremonial formality. Computer-assisted thematic analysis using QDA Miner Lite, guided by Kuckartz's (2014) seven-phase framework, identified six recurring categories across three inaugural speeches and confirmed that the framing of crisis is structurally consequential: when a leader locates crisis in collective failure, civic responsibility follows logically from the diagnosis; when crisis is located in institutional corruption, citizens become beneficiaries of executive protection rather than agents of national renewal. These patterns, made measurable through frequency analysis, extend Zarefsky's (2004) argument about presidential definitional power into a comparative, cross-national context. The study is limited by its three-speech sample and by the pseudonymization protocol, which prevents findings from being situated within specific political and historical contexts. Future research could expand the dataset to include inaugural addresses across different democratic systems and historical periods and could examine whether the frameworks established in inaugural speeches predict subsequent governance priorities. Computer-assisted thematic text analysis, applied comparatively, provides a method that is proportionate to the complexity of these texts and to the claims they make on the democratic communities that receive them.

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