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Political Discourse, Emotions, and Polarization: A Case Study of the President of the Madrid Region

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Abstract

In this article, I take a constructionist approach to study the strategic use of emotions as a polarizing tool by the current president of the region of Madrid, Isabel Díaz-Ayuso. Most of the existing discourse studies on emotions focus on their categorization (since Damasio, 1994; Nabi, 2002; Scheibenzuber et al., 2023). However, categories by themselves do not explain why emotions work so well in political and polarizing discourses, which are the main interest of the present study. That is why emotions are here understood as object-oriented mental states that are distinguished between two different types of objects: the deep object (the one perceived by the person constructing the emotion as both valuable and vulnerable) and the shallow object (the one perceived as affecting the deep object). The discourse conveys a relation between them that can be positive (an opportunity) or negative (a threat), triggering positive or negative emotions, respectively. This research shows how analysing emotions as evaluative/cognitive constructions helps us to understand their success in the current political landscape. It also shows that messages about different topics can convey the same emotional structure, being therefore part of the same communicative strategy. I use as a case study the speeches by Díaz-Ayuso at the Assembly of Madrid because she is a very polarizing political figure. I approach it under the hypothesis that her discourses employ a strategy of using emotions for political intentions.

Keywords

discourse analysis; emotions; Madrid; polarization; political discourse

1. Introduction

Emotions are increasingly recognized as central elements in discourse analysis, particularly within contemporary political communication (e.g., Mackenzie & Alba-Juez, 2019). In this article, I take a

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constructionist approach (Alcántara-Plá, 2024) to study the strategic use of emotions by Isabel Díaz-Ayuso, the current president of the region of Madrid.

Defining emotion is a complex task, as the concept is dependent on interconnected systems and varies across different fields and theories. The term frequently intersects with concepts such as affect, feeling, and mood, terms often employed interchangeably (Batson et al., 1992), though careful distinctions should be maintained. Affect, for instance, is generally characterized as a broad sensation of pleasure or displeasure, whereas emotions represent more complex, discrete states associated with specific subjective feelings, intentional objects, and orientations toward action (Lindquist, 2017).

Despite definitional challenges, there is growing agreement on key features of emotion. A central tenet of the framework presented in this article is that emotions are fundamentally cognitive processes that take the form of evaluations or judgments. This perspective has historical roots in philosophy (at least since Aristotle) and is reflected in modern linguistic and psychological appraisal theories (e.g., Barrett, 2005; Frijda, 1986; Martin & White, 2005). Viewing emotions as evaluations challenges the notion that phenomena like hate speech are simply irrational, suggesting instead that they are based on a form of cognitive processing. This cognitive approach to emotions within discourse analysis aligns with a socio-cognitive framework, where emotions are understood as subjective constructs of the participants.

Crucially, from this viewpoint, emotions are constructed cognitively by the addressee. Although discourses are generated strategically with specific intentions, the emotional outcomes depend primarily on the recipient's interpretation. The addressee's understanding is thus paramount, as emotions emerge within their cognitive context, influenced not only by discourse content but also by internal and external factors accessible at that moment. This conceptualization aligns closely with the socio-cognitive approach, in which emotions and contexts are perceived as subjective constructs of participants (van Dijk, 2008), and it departs from studies solely categorizing emotions or focusing on a fixed stimulus-emotion-reaction link (Damasio, 1994).

In the present article, I take as a case study the speeches by Isabel Díaz-Ayuso, president of the Madrid Region, in order to understand whether she uses emotions in a strategic way. The hypothesis is that she does, since her discourse has been previously noted for its strong polarising effect (Fuentes Rodríguez & Brenes Peña, 2024). To prove it, I analyse her discourse looking at how she presents her opponents, how she presents herself (and her government), and how she talks about issues that she finds problematic for Madrid. The idea is to find common emotional structures that could point to general strategic goals.

2. Corpus

The corpus analysed in this study comprises all plenary session speeches delivered by Isabel Díaz-Ayuso in the Assembly of Madrid during the year 2024. The Assembly is one of the three governing institutions of the region of Madrid, along with the president of the community and the government. It constitutes the legislative branch of the region (in Spain, every region has its regional legislative assembly). Its members are elected by the citizens of Madrid through a universal, free, equal, direct, and secret suffrage, based on criteria of proportional representation. The number of deputies varies, having one deputy for every 50,000 inhabitants. There are currently 135 deputies: 70 from the Partido Popular (traditional right-wing party), 27 from Más

Madrid (new left-wing party), 27 from the Socialist Party (traditional left-wing party), and 11 from VOX (new extreme-right party). Isabel Díaz-Ayuso, from the Partido Popular, has been a deputy since 2011 and she has been the president of the region since 2019.

The speeches were extracted from the official transcripts published on the Assembly's website, which document verbatim records of all interventions made during parliamentary sessions. The compilation focuses exclusively on plenary debates, thus capturing a representative sample of Ayuso's public political discourse within a formal institutional setting.

The resulting dataset consists of 104,917 tokens, distributed across 30 plenary sessions held throughout the year. Each session may include multiple interventions by the president, depending on the structure of the debate and the political agenda of the day. The token count includes all words uttered by Ayuso during these sessions, excluding interventions by other speakers.

By encompassing a full legislative year, this corpus ensures the analysis of a representative sample of Díaz-Ayuso's communicative style, accounting for variations and consistencies in her rhetorical strategies. This breadth provides robustness to the study, permitting generalizable conclusions about how emotions are strategically mobilized within her political discourse.

3. Analysis of Emotions

3.1. Emotions

The incorporation of emotions into discourse analysis not only acknowledges their central role in political communication but also aligns with the increasing emphasis placed on language within neuroscientific research on emotion (Barrett, 2017). Despite this convergence, there remains insufficient interdisciplinary dialogue between linguistics and neuroscience; linguistics still predominantly adheres to a classical conceptualization of emotion (Alcántara-Plá, 2024). Consequently, linguistic studies frequently limit themselves to identifying and categorizing emotions present within discourses, as well as assessing their predominant valence as positive or negative, without further exploring their complex communicative functions.

As it has been explained in Section 1, the proposed framework (Alcántara-Plá, 2024) provides a distinctive approach to emotions, emphasizing their complexity and that surpasses simple categorization. Central to our perspective is the notion of emotions as cognitive evaluations or judgments, thus challenging perceptions of emotions as irrational. This latter point is not, in fact, a novel proposal, despite its apparent divergence from the commonly held view of emotions as inherently separate from rationality—a perspective frequently echoed within discourse analysis. Modern psychology has recognized emotions as rational evaluative processes at least since Arnold's seminal work (1960), following a philosophical tradition traceable back to Aristotle. Within linguistics, this evaluative approach has been particularly advanced by the appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005), which situates emotional analysis within the category of "affect" under the broader attitude framework.

A main difference between previous evaluative proposals, such as the appraisal theory, which focused on the categorization of emotions, and the one I will use here is that I will not assume a relationship between stimuli,

emotions, and reactions, as it is often assumed in previous studies (e.g., Scheibenzuber et al., 2023). This relationship has been crucial for the study of discourse since texts are analysed as stimuli that provoke certain emotions. However, this connection is not supported by empirical evidence found in neuroscience (Lindquist et al., 2012): the reality is that the same stimulus can provoke different emotions in the same way that the same emotion can be constructed from very different stimuli. As is always the case in discourse, everything depends on the context, which I understand as cognitively constructed by the recipient (Givón, 2005). Thus, the emergence of emotions primarily depends on the addressee's interpretation within their own cognitive and contextual frameworks, aligning closely with socio-cognitive models where emotions and contexts are regarded as subjective participant constructs (van Dijk, 2008).

Finally, emotions are conceptualized as object-oriented mental states, distinguished from feelings by their inherent cognitive representation of specific objects. Expanding on previous work, Alcántara-Plá (2024) introduces a crucial distinction between two types of objects involved in emotion construction: the deep object and the shallow object. The deep object is understood as something perceived by the addressee as both valuable and vulnerable, and its perceived importance and vulnerability are key factors influencing the intensity of the constructed emotion. The shallow object is the one affecting the deep object; it must be represented with the potential of damaging or ameliorating it.

The construction of an emotion is triggered by the perceived relationship between the shallow object and the deep object in a specific context. This relationship is interpreted by the addressee and can be seen as either an opportunity (where the shallow object helps maintain or gain the deep object, triggering a positive emotion) or a threat (where the shallow object negatively affects or endangers the deep object, triggering a negative emotion). The degree of perceived threat or opportunity also impacts the intensity of the emotion.

3.2. Analysis

I take a constructionist approach where emotions are analysed into their constituent elements, which in turn helps us understand them as rational phenomena. As I have described in the previous section, the distinction between the two types of objects involved in emotion construction—the deep object and the shallow object—and the perceived relation between them is key (Alcántara-Plá, 2024).

Emotion construction is strongly influenced by the addressee's views, beliefs, and desires. These elements shape the cognitive representation of the shallow and deep objects and their perceived relationship. Views and beliefs are dynamic, circulating in society through discourses, and they do not need to be objectively true to effectively trigger emotions. Desires are also important as they define the goals and projects linked to the deep object. The overall context, encompassing these beliefs, views, desires, and the social environment, provides the scaffolding within which affective phenomena unfold.

Figure 1 shows all the relevant elements we need to analyse in order to understand why an emotion is constructed. These elements may vary in prominence depending on the specific message or context, but all of them are consistently present in the construction of any emotion. The success of a message, especially in polarized political discourse, lies in targeting something relevant to the recipient and presenting a scenario where the addressee perceives something valuable is at stake.

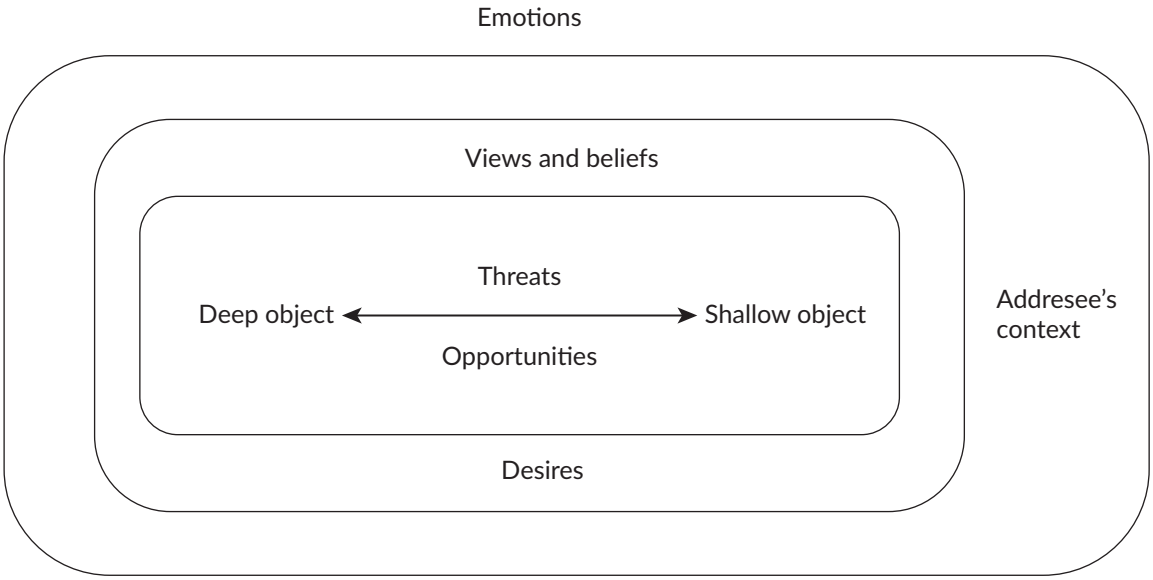


Figure 1. The structure of emotions with all the elements that must be analyzed. Source: Alcántara-Plá (2024).

3.3. Methodology

To analyse such a large corpus, I have used a hybrid methodology (Alcántara-Plá, 2020), starting from a quantitative analysis. The corpus has been processed using Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014) to have a list of the most frequent words and easy access to the concordances of those words. Since I am interested in the strategic use of emotions for polarisation, I searched the list for terms related to the three fields that are usually in play in polarised discourses. To group different elements under each of these fields, I have titled the sections inspired by Sergio Leone's well known movie *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*: the "ugly" is the out-group (in this case, the political opponents); the "good" is the in-group (Díaz-Ayuso, her government, and her political party); and the "bad" are those issues that Díaz Ayuso describes as the most harmful for Madrid (e.g., taxes, insecurity, immigration, etc.).

For the out-group, I have analysed all the messages where she was directly addressing members or parties of the opposition. Since the Assembly is a formal context, she always addresses them using the pronoun "*ustedes*," the polite form of "you" in Spanish. Besides "*ustedes*," the corpus shows that another frequent term clearly identified as an opponent is "Sánchez," referring to Pedro Sánchez, the president of Spain. As we will see, sometimes "Spain" is also conveyed as an opponent in a metonymic sense related to the government of Sanchez.

For the in-group, I have analysed those messages with pronouns in the first person: "*yo*" ("I"), "*nosotros*" ("we"), and "*nos*" ("us"). Although Díaz-Ayuso is the president, and I had expected a presence mostly as an agent of actions, "*nos*" is the most frequent form.

Finally, the problem with the highest frequency in the corpus is the high taxes. Other issues identified as "problems" by Díaz-Ayuso have also been analysed, e.g., the prices of housing and the lack of doctors.

4. Analysis of the Corpus

4.1. The Ugly

4.1.1. The Opposition

A large number of messages delivered by Ayuso are addressed to her opponents, the deputies representing the other parties in the Assembly. She usually addresses them using the polite form "*ustedes*" ("you"), which is the 25th most frequent form in the corpus with 358 occurrences. If we take out articles, prepositions, and other empty words (such as "more"), only the form "Madrid" is more frequent than "*ustedes*" with 593 occurrences. Since the Assembly is a place for debating, it makes sense that the opponents are acknowledged in the discourse.

However, it seems a debate of a particular kind because there is not even one positive message involving "*ustedes*." The 358 mentions are used to blame them for having done something wrong. We find accusations at different levels. In some cases, they are essentialist, describing how the opponents are:

> Los ciudadanos que viven y trabajan en la Comunidad de Madrid, por responsabilidad y también por humanidad, la que a ustedes tanto les falta ¡siempre! [The citizens who live and work in the community of Madrid, out of responsibility and also out of humanity, which you always lack so much!]. (Quote 1)

> Son ustedes cada vez mucho más dictatoriales [You are becoming more and more dictatorial]. (Quote 2)

Other mentions describe what the opponents have done:

> Ustedes están asfixiando a las empresas, a los autónomos, expulsando la inversión..., porque lo único que quieren es tener a todo el pueblo adormecido, subvencionado y en la cola para que tengan que tener una cartilla de racionamiento, que es como gestionan ustedes en todas esas dictaduras [You are suffocating businesses, the self-employed, expelling investment…because the only thing you want is to have the entire population asleep, subsidized, and in line so that they have to have a ration card, which is how you manage all those dictatorships]. (Quote 3)

> Yo entiendo que ustedes, como no pintan nada en todo ello, tienen que atacarnos y mentir en todos los plenos [I understand that you, since you have nothing to do with all this, must attack us and lie in every plenary session]. (Quote 4)

And other messages pretend to describe the opponents from the alleged point of view of normal citizens:

> Y por eso nos dan estos escaños: porque quieren prosperidad y libertad, y a ustedes les quieren fuera de las instituciones [And that's why they give us these seats [at the Assembly]: because they want prosperity and freedom, and they want you out of the institutions]. (Quote 5)

> ¿Y saben ustedes por qué Madrid no les quiere? Porque ustedes no quieren a Madrid [And do you know why Madrid doesn't love you? Because you don't love Madrid]. (Quote 6)

From the point of view of the emotions, we found constant repetitions of the idea that these parties put in danger elements that are very relevant to the people of Madrid. They are not only "suffocating businesses" and lying in the Assembly, they are also "sinking investment in Spain by more than 50 percent"; they "keep impoverishing people with their speeches"; they "want to destroy and to dismantle [the health system] for political reasons"; they are "growing legal uncertainty with their attacks on the tourist industry and the service sector"; "the only thing they are doing is always attacking Spain, which is left without doctors"; and "they give privileges to the nationalists to buy them." In short, "all they want is to ruin us."

These examples show that one key strategy in her discourses is to connect them ("*ustedes*") as shallow objects with several deep objects, always in a relation of threat. Being the focus on them, the negative emotion is usually constructed as hatred (of those who intend to harm the deep object). In some cases, the focus is on the deep object with hyperbolic comparisons with other countries, particularly Maduro's Venezuela and Milei's Argentina. When this is the case, fear (of losing the deep object) might prevail as a negative emotion.

4.1.2. Sánchez and Spain

Although traditionally the Partido Popular is a nationalist party whose members strongly identify with the country and its symbols (such as the flag or the king), Ayuso has an ambivalent discourse about Spain (286 occurrences). We find two explanations for this in the corpus. On one hand, she uses Spain as a metonymic term for its government (see Quote 7), which she identifies as her main opponent. On the other hand, she makes comparisons to highlight the achievements of her region, and the rest of the country is the most obvious place to look for such comparisons (see Quote8).

> España tiene unos gravísimos problemas de falta de credibilidad. La prensa extranjera no da crédito no solo a las maniobras que se han urdido desde La Moncloa sin dar explicaciones, sino a que simplemente el presidente del Gobierno saliera ayer a llorar porque se le critica [Spain has very serious credibility problems. The foreign press can't believe not only the maneuvers that have been hatched from La Moncloa without explanation, but also the fact that the prime minister simply came out crying yesterday because he was criticized]. (Quote 7)

> Aquí tenemos mayores salarios que en el resto de España y los mejores planes sanitarios, las menores listas de espera [Here we have higher salaries than in the rest of Spain and the best healthcare plans, and the shortest waiting lists] (Quote 8)

Since Madrid is depicted as better than other regions, it is also shown as the driving force of the country's economy.

> La Comunidad de Madrid es el motor económico de España y la religión más libre y, por tanto, somos la región que sitúa a la persona en el centro de todas sus políticas; la libertad, la vida y la familia son nuestro motor [The community of Madrid is Spain's economic engine and the most religiously free. Therefore, we are the region that places the individual at the centre of all its policies; freedom, life, and family are our driving force]. (Quote 9)

> El papel de esta región capital se ha ido haciendo cada vez más importante para el conjunto de España [The role of this capital region has become increasingly important for Spain as a whole]. (Quote 10)

She also refers to Spain as a country in danger because of the current policies, constructing negative emotions with a relation of threat between the country (as a deep object) and the government (as a shallow object):

> El odio que este tipo de mandatarios profesan por las democracias liberales es evidente, como evidente es que están llevando a España, a la fuerza, a una situación límite [The hatred that this type of leader professes for liberal democracies is evident, as is the fact that they are taking Spain to a critical situation]. (Quote 11)

> Desde que la ultraizquierda tiene escaños en los parlamentos, la política en España se ha ido al traste [Since the far left has had seats in parliament, politics in Spain has gone down the drain]. (Quote 12)

Another common way of referencing the government is by focusing on the president, "Sánchez" (80 occurrences plus 19 as "president of the government"). She always does so in negative framings, accusing him of being detrimental to the country (and even more so to the region of Madrid). She accuses him of having "violated the transparency law 1,200 times," "defamed Feijóo's [former Partido Popular leader] wife, and my family as well, from the Congress, in interviews, and on at least three international trips," and "having raised taxes 69 times." At the same time, Sánchez is "cornered by corruption."

As was also the case with "*ustedes*," Díaz-Ayuso mentions issues related to Sánchez to reinforce a structure where the Spanish president is always the shallow object of negative emotions.

4.2. The Good

4.2.1. Us

It must be pointed out that Ayuso talks more frequently about "*nos*" ("us," 297 occurrences) than about "*yo*" ("I," 215) or "*nosotros*" ("we," 197). It shows a defensive attitude, presenting "us" as under attack by the opposition, as can be seen in the following examples:

> Tenemos delante a un Gobierno que nos insulta y que nos difama desde viajes en el extranjero [We are facing a government that insults us and defames us from abroad]. (Quote 13)

> Y que todavía nos eche las culpas a nosotros [And you still blames us]. (Quote 14)

> Nos están dejando sin inversiones por parte del Gobierno [They are leaving us without investments from the government]. (Quote 15)

> ¿De verdad que nos va a dar lecciones? [Are you really going to lecture us?] (Quote 16)

This last idea, of the opposition pictured as teachers giving lessons, is frequent in the corpus (e.g., "you tell us lessons in transparency and democracy" or "you give us lessons in immigration"). As we have seen in the

last section, from an emotional point of view, the strategy seems to be to focus on the shallow objects, which are always the same: the opposition and the Spanish government. The deep object acquires significance insofar as the pronoun "us" functions as a marker of identification between the ruling party (or Ayuso herself) and the citizens of Madrid. This identification is legitimized through electoral outcomes, a relationship that is explicitly articulated in several messages, including Quotes 17 and 18. It is important to note that this process of legitimation simultaneously entails the delegitimization of the addressees, who—as opposition—were not selected by the electorate to govern:

> La inmensa mayoría que nos vota, que son todos los madrileños [The vast majority who vote for us, which is all the people of Madrid]. (Quote 17)

> Yo estoy aquí porque lo han decidido los ciudadanos y es a ellos a quienes nos sometemos [I am here because the citizens have decided it and it is to them that we submit]. (Quote 18)

The identification works at different levels depending on the topic. In Quote 19, for example, "us" means the region of Madrid, as a metonymy of those who live in the region; in Quote 20, "us" are all the Spaniards, while in Quotes 21 and 22, "us" are the women:

> Mientras nos quitan infraestructuras y proyectos a Madrid y ustedes, los socialistas madrileños, se callan [While they take away infrastructure and projects from Madrid, you, the socialists in Madrid, remain silent]. (Quote 19)

> Ni siquiera nos cuentan a todos los españoles qué van a hacer con la amnistía durante estos días [They don't even tell all of us Spaniards what they're going to do with the amnesty in the coming days]. (Quote 20)

> Nos deja a las mujeres en muy mal lugar [It leaves us women in a very bad place]. (Quote 21)

> Es como nos quieren: victimizadas porque somos mujeres y dividirnos constantemente de los hombres [This is how they want us: victimized because we are women and constantly dividing us from men]. (Quote 22)

Ayuso, being a woman from Madrid (and therefore from Spain), can use "us" in all these senses, many times ambiguously, without specifying which "us" is the one in place. We could wonder, for example, who is the "us" of Quotes 15, 23, or 24:

> Cada vez más jóvenes se nos van a ir y mucho talento si no se remedia [More and more young people will leave us, along with a lot of talent, if this is not addressed]. (Quote 23)

> ¿Cuánto nos cuesta lo de los 16 ministros a los que les pagamos todo eso? [How much does it cost us for the 16 ministers we pay all of that to?]. (Quote 24)

This ambiguity is intensified by the register used by Ayuso, frequently more informal than the one that we would expect in an Assembly. This use of the language favours the identification of the citizens with the "us."

To take an example, in Quote 25, the terms "*matón*" ("bully") and "*achantar*" ("to back down") are very informal, and they present the confrontation with the Spanish president as a school fight:

> Ayer [el presidente] se comportó como un matón con nosotros cuando fue a Televisión Española a amenazar a los jueces y a amenazar a los medios de comunicación y, por supuesto, meterse por medio con la Comunidad de Madrid; pues no nos vamos a achantar en nada y vamos a decir las verdades [Yesterday, he [the president of Spain] acted like a bully when he went on Spanish Television to threaten the judges and the media, and, of course, to interfere with the community of Madrid. We're not going to back down on anything, and we're going to tell the truth]. (Quote 25)

As we are seeing in the examples, the relation conveyed is usually of a threat against "us." Besides, the objects threatened are usually perceived as deep objects by the citizens since they relate to an "us" that seems to include them. The deep objects are hyperbolically described, also intensifying the construction of negative emotions. "They" (the ugly opponents described in the previous section) "want to restrict *our* water and energy supplies so *we* can't build data centres and continue to grow"; "they deny *us our* fiscal autonomy, they want to deny *us* our powers, because as, I insist, they are deeply authoritarian, they do not respect that *the citizens of the community of Madrid* have decided on other policies" (emphasis added).

In those cases where the opponents are not involved in the message, the emotions conveyed are positive, while the ambiguity of the "us" prevails. As we see in the following examples, Ayuso claims positive features of the region of Madrid, and these features are linked to her policies:

> Y además nos hemos consolidado como la única región que presta atención gratuita en centros de discapacidad [And we have also established ourselves as the only region that provides free care in disability centers]. (Quote 26)

> Lo constatan las cuatro principales agencias de rating que nos otorgan la máxima calificación por la gestión de la deuda, credibilidad y confianza que generamos en los mercados financieros [This is confirmed by the four main rating agencies that give us the highest rating for debt management, credibility and trust that we generate in the financial markets]. (Quote 27)

> Nos ha convertido en la región con mayor número de nacimientos de España [It has made us the region with the highest number of births in Spain]. (Quote 28)

4.2.2. "I" and "we"

It is interesting to note that when Ayuso uses "I" as the subject of a sentence, it is usually to talk about what the opponents have done, not herself:

> Y yo creo que se ha puesto al servicio de todo el Partido Socialista [And I believe that you are at the service of the entire Socialist Party]. (Quote 29)

> Yo la animo a seguir con ese discurso apocalíptico de la Comunidad de Madrid [I encourage you to continue with that apocalyptic discourse about the community of Madrid]. (Quote 30)

> Yo entiendo que esto es un poco difícil de explicar cuando se tiene todo el aparato de un Gobierno contra un ciudadano particular [I understand that this is a little difficult to explain when you have the entire apparatus of a government against a private citizen] (Quote 31)

> Entonces yo la animo a que se informe de las cuestiones más básicas, que sea respetuosa y que sea ejemplar, y que, por tanto, esté a la altura de las circunstancias [So I encourage you to educate yourself on the most basic issues, to be respectful and exemplary, and therefore to rise to the occasion] (Quote 32)

Even when she seems to be talking about herself, it is usually a way of revealing bad behaviour in the opposition:

> Yo lo que no voy a hacer es blanquear ni lo que está sucediendo con la amnistía ni mucho menos con el concierto catalán, que retrae recursos de todos los españoles para que ustedes se mantengan en la Moncloa [What I am not going to do is whitewash what is happening with the amnesty, much less with the Catalan agreement, which withdraws resources from all Spaniards so that you can remain in Moncloa [in the government]]. (Quote 33)

> Y usted decía que yo había ido provocar a la Complutense, cuando me ha realizado la ultraizquierda, con todos ustedes detrás, un escrache por ir a recoger un título [And you said that I had gone to the Complutense University to provoke, when the far left, with all of you behind, staged a public shaming against me for going to collect my certificate]. (Quote 34)

> Yo me someto al control de este Gobierno cada semana, como no hace Pedro Sánchez cada vez que le conviene y no digamos en el Senado, donde lleva siete meses desaparecido [I submit to the control of this government every week, unlike Pedro Sánchez, who does so when it suits him, and let's not even mention the senate, where he has been missing for seven months]. (Quote 35)

The same happens when "we" is the subject. The actions described as carried out by "we" are compared with the actions of the opponents:

> Nosotros damos ruedas de prensa con periodistas y con preguntas, no como ocurrió ayer [We hold press conferences with journalists and questions, not like what happened yesterday]. (Quote 36)

> Nosotros triplicamos nuestros efectivos mientras esperamos a que el ministerio actúe [We tripled our staff while we waited for the ministry to act]. (Quote 37)

> Somos el país más endeudado de la Unión Europea y la competitividad de las empresas se está hundiendo, mientras nosotros lideramos la creación de empresas y de puestos de trabajo en España [We are the most indebted country in the EU, and business competitiveness is plummeting, while we lead the creation of businesses and jobs in Spain]. (Quote 38)

> España tiene la mayor tasa de paro juvenil y nosotros tenemos en la comunidad de la tasa más baja [Spain has the highest youth unemployment rate and we have the lowest rate in the community]. (Quote 39)

From an emotional point of view, these examples show that, even when describing positive aspects of her government, there is always a negative note about the opponents. There is a constant comparison with Spain and its government, as a counterexample to her success. This way, two emotions are conveyed at the same time. On one hand, there is a positive relation between her (or her government) and relevant deep objects such as the economy or the employment. On the other hand, the same discourse casts a shadow on these positive situations, constructing a negative emotion between the same deep objects and her opponents. We find the same strategy when the "we" is used to announce new policies:

> Nosotros vamos a proponer, porque ya está bien de tanto daño y tanto dolor en esta zona, un parque para todos los vecinos y es lo que les fastidia, porque en el futuro lo que va a haber es un gran parque urbano [We are going to propose, because there has been enough damage and pain in this area, a park for all the residents, and that is what bothers you [referring to the opposition], because what there will be in the future is a large urban park]. (Quote 40)

> Nosotros vamos a recuperar la Dirección General de Mujer porque esto de la igualdad, falsa igualdad, tiene que terminar de una vez [We are going to recover the General Directorate of Women because this equality, false equality, has to end once and for all]. (Quote 41)

If we focus on the positive side, the most common emotion is pride, intensified by the fact that, as the comparisons make clear, not only does Madrid have positive aspects, but it has aspects more positive than the others have:

> Nosotros tenemos las mejores cifras, a pesar de las dificultades y del volumen que trabajamos en la Comunidad de Madrid [We have the best figures [in health care], despite the difficulties and the volume of work we do in the community of Madrid]. (Quote 42)

> Dentro de las regiones de régimen común, nosotros somos los que tenemos las tasas más bajas [In comparison with the other regions, we are the ones with the lowest taxes]. (Quote 43)

> Nosotros tenemos en la Comunidad de Madrid el mercado más paritario [In Madrid, we have the market with the best parity of representation]. (Quote 44)

Quote 45 summarises this emotion of intensified pride:

> Y sí, Madrid lidera muchas cosas, yo sé que a ustedes les fastidia: somos la primera economía en España—insisto, por méritos propios, con los impuestos más bajos, líderes en la creación de empleo, vamos a tener la Ciudad de la Justicia más grande del mundo, somos la primera región en accesibilidad en Europa. Aquí las personas con dificultades en movilidad, las personas que tienen alguna discapacidad, tienen muchísima más libertad en todos los sentidos y más autonomía que en otros lugares, con la mayor esperanza de vida de Europa, con uno de los mejores índices de competitividad dentro de la Unión Europea, tenemos menores tasas de suicidios, tenemos más nacimientos, acogemos grandes eventos [And yes, Madrid leads in many things, I know it bothers you: we are the first economy in Spain—I insist, on our own merits, with the lowest taxes, leaders in job creation, we are going to have the largest city of justice in the world. We are the first region in

> accessibility in Europe—here people with mobility difficulties, people who have some disability, have much more freedom in every sense and more autonomy than in other places—with the longest life expectancy in Europe, with one of the best competitiveness rates within the EU, we have lower rates of suicides, we have more births, we host major events]. (Quote 45)

As was the case with "*nos*," we find also ambiguity in "*nosotros*," that sometimes seems to be the ruling party in Madrid, but sometimes seems to be all the citizens, as it is made explicit in Quote 46:

> Nosotros, por méritos propios, trabajadores, cotizadores, contribuyentes, todos, trabajamos a una para sacar adelante esta región y, por eso, cuando bajamos los impuestos, deflactamos, ayudamos a las clases medias y especialmente a los más vulnerables [We, on our own merits, workers, contributors, taxpayers, all of us, work together to move this region forward and, therefore, when we lower taxes, we deflate, we help the middle classes and especially the most vulnerable]. (Quote 46)

4.3. The Bad

The most frequent terms in Ayuso's discourse reveal several topics characterized by negative emotional framing. The word "*impuestos*" ("taxes") emerges as the most frequent, occurring 65 times. Taxes are consistently depicted negatively: they "suffocate" citizens, are employed by the government "to chase the self-employed," and frequently appear alongside terms such as "bureaucracy" and "insecurity." Actions described as "being chased" and "suffocated" evoke frames associated with insecurity and criminality, reinforced by Díaz-Ayuso's metaphor of taxes as putting one's hands in another person's pockets: "We do not put our hands in the pockets of the middle classes with confiscatory and non-progressive taxes."

Consequently, emotions elicited through these frames are inherently negative, as taxes (the shallow object) are portrayed as threats to personal security. Additionally, taxes are depicted as unjust and arbitrary ("taxes on demand—'a la carta'—directed exclusively against Madrid"), compounding anger with the fear already generated by perceived insecurity and aggression.

Positive emotional framing around taxes, conversely, emerges from the Madrid government's actions against taxation. The government "lowers taxes" (16 occurrences) and even "removes" them entirely (3 occurrences). Consistent with Díaz-Ayuso's typical rhetorical approach, she contrasts her administration directly with the opposition: "Sánchez has raised taxes 69 times since he became president; I have lowered them 32 times," further arguing that the Spanish government "intends to ruin Madrid with taxes to sustain itself."

An additional approach to identifying negative issues, according to Ayuso, is through her use of the term "*problema*" ("problem") employed 64 times to address societal issues. She identifies problems such as border protection, immigration, declining birth rates (described as "the demographic winter"), housing affordability, shortages of medical personnel, and declining competitiveness. A noteworthy observation from the analysis of these instances is that Ayuso situates these issues within the broader Spanish context rather than linking them directly to policies implemented within the Madrid region. This strategy is clear in Quotes 47, 48, and 49:

> Los jóvenes españoles están perdiendo oportunidades y están perdiendo poder adquisitivo, y también tienen un problema de vivienda, ¡en España entera!, ¡y desde que está Pedro Sánchez muchísimo más!

> [Young Spaniards are losing both opportunities and purchasing power, and they also have a housing problem, all over Spain! And even more so since Pedro Sánchez took over!]. (Quote 47)

> En España hay un problema de falta de médicos que es más que evidente y ahora mismo hay más de 5,000 médicos extracomunitarios que están deseando trabajar en España y ustedes no les dan la oportunidad [In Spain there is a problem of a lack of doctors and right now, there are more that 5,000 non-EU doctors who are eager to work in Spain and you do not give them the opportunity]. (Quote 48)

> Y lo hacen con absolutamente todo: con la utilización de la educación con las mujeres….Miren, ¡que no tienen discurso!, ¡hagan el favor de gestionar y ponerse a la altura porque este problema está en España entera! [And they do it with absolutely everything: with the use of education with women….Look, they have no discourse! Please take action and rise to the occasion because this problem is all over Spain!]. (Quote 49)

With respect to immigration—one of the most contentious issues in contemporary Europe—Díaz-Ayuso articulates two distinct and at times contradictory discourses. On one hand, she employs the term "illegal immigration" in 9 out of 45 references to immigration, sometimes embedding it in negative enumerations such as the one in Quote 50:

> Cuando permitimos que la okupación, que los pederastas, que la inmigración ilegal sin control, los pirómanos o a las personas que han cometido graves delitos, encima, vuelen y reincidan [When we allow squatters, pedophiles, uncontrolled illegal immigration, arsonists, or people who have committed serious crimes to fly and reoffend]. (Quote 50)

On the other hand, certain statements suggest a more defensive stance toward immigrants, exemplified by assertions such as "not everything surrounding immigration is insecurity." This apparent contradiction can be understood by examining the intended addressee of her discourse. When addressing the Spanish government, Ayuso tends to emphasize the concept of illegal immigration. Conversely, when responding to criticisms from VOX—the far-right party in the Assembly—regarding conditions in Madrid, she adopts a more moderate tone, implying that VOX is exaggerating the issue. Consistent with her broader rhetorical strategy, Ayuso frames immigration as a problem that lies beyond her jurisdiction: "If you have any complaints about illegal immigration or healthcare, go to the ministry."

In summary, challenges faced by the region are communicated in a manner that consistently reinforces an emotional structure in which specific actors (the opposition or the government of Spain) are clearly identified as responsible (as shallow objects) for endangering various elements considered highly valuable to society.

5. Discussion

The analysis presented in the previous section reveals several noteworthy aspects of Díaz-Ayuso's discourse. Firstly, the President's discourse exhibits a high level of polarization. Throughout all her interventions, she maintains a strict division between the in-group and the out-group, which are represented through antagonistic characteristics. The opposition is portrayed unequivocally as "the Ugly": harming the region of

Madrid and lacking legitimacy due to not having received sufficient votes to govern. As shown in Quotes 29–32, even when she appears to speak about herself (using the pronoun "I"), she is often, in fact, describing her opponents in negative terms. This sharply contrasts with the image she constructs of the "we," associated with positive actions, frequently framed as repairing the damage caused by the opposition (Quotes 40 and 41).

Secondly, Díaz-Ayuso draws comparisons with Spain and other regions of the country to underscore Madrid's successes (Quotes 7–12). This strategy involves a negative portrayal of Spain, which is depicted as being in decline. Such a depiction can be understood through a metonymic interpretation of "Spain" as referring to the government of Pedro Sánchez, who is the object of frequent criticism by her.

Thirdly, despite holding office and being in power, Díaz-Ayuso adopts a defensive and reactive stance (Quotes 13–16), using the pronoun "*nos*" (direct object form of the first person plural) more often than "*nosotros*" (subject form of the same pronoun). As noted previously, even when she uses the first-person singular, it is often to refer to actions taken by the opposition.

The construction of "we" is marked by a degree of ambiguity, as it shifts between different levels of reference and reveals a strong identification between Díaz-Ayuso, the region of Madrid, and its citizens (Quotes 19–22 and 46). This identification with the public may account for the occasional use of a highly informal register (e.g., Quote 25). In any case, the portrayal of both "we" and the region is strongly positive, frequently presented as outperforming others across various metrics (Quotes 42–45).

The corpus spans an entire legislative year during which a wide range of issues were addressed. Some topics stand out due to their particularly negative framing in the discourse, especially the issue of high taxation. However, the emotional analysis reveals a common structure underlying most messages, regardless of whether they concern taxes, housing prices, or the situation in Spain. The analysis of shallow and deep objects consistently reveals a recurrent pattern in which the opposition occupies the role of the shallow object in threat relations directed at various deep objects. In other words, most topics are used by Díaz-Ayuso to construct an emotional structure in which the opposition is portrayed as threatening some aspect of Madrid's well-being. This strategy reinforces the construction of negative emotions toward other political parties, and especially toward the national government.

As discussed in Section 3, the structure of an emotion consists of several elements, though not all of them need to be explicitly stated in the discourse; it is sufficient for them to be present in the mental space of the individual constructing the emotion. Despite this, Díaz-Ayuso consistently chooses to make the shallow object explicit in her messages, clearly identifying her opponents as being at fault. At the same time, she employs strategies to prevent her government from being positioned as the shallow object in any negative relation. When a deep object appears that could potentially be associated with her administration, she makes it clear that the responsibility lies with the opposition (Quotes 47–49).

6. Conclusion

The points outlined in the discussion highlight the significant value of conducting an analysis of political discourse that goes beyond the categorization of emotions. A basic labelling of the emotions present in

Díaz-Ayuso's speeches might suggest a high prevalence of negative emotions such as fear or hate. However, a deeper analysis of the elements constituting the emotional structure reveals a broader strategy of polarization through discourse. The repeated emphasis on blaming the opposition for all the problems faced by the citizens of Madrid not only discredits and delegitimizes them but also establishes a strongly negative emotional frame toward them.

As discussed in Section 3, emotions are constructed in the mind of the addressee based on their prior conceptualizations (ideas, beliefs, and desires). These conceptualizations are dynamic and subject to change through experience, which may be either directly lived or transmitted linguistically. Díaz-Ayuso's persistent framing of the opposition as shallow objects of negative emotions leads addressees to conceptualize them accordingly. By consistently making these shallow objects explicit, she places the emotional focus on the opposition rather than on the issues that her government faces. The presence of deep objects in negative relations encourages the construction of emotions associated with fear (we do not want to lose a deep object we perceive as valuable and vulnerable). However, the constant presence of shallow objects promotes the construction of emotions linked to hatred (we focus on those who attack us).

Since the emotional reaction elicited is one of aversion toward the political opponent, the overall effect of her discourse is highly polarizing. Moreover, the focus is not primarily on the underlying causes of the issues addressed or on seeking solutions, but rather on identifying the guilty party, questioning their motivations, and considering how they can be overcome.

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