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# Constructing Victimhood in Official Responses to the Israel–Gaza War: A Corpus-Assisted Comparison of Emmanuel Macron and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

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**Abstract**
Research on the Israel–Gaza war has focused largely on media and online discourse, while comparative analysis of official leaders' constructions of victimhood remains limited. This study uses a comparative corpus-assisted discourse design to examine how Emmanuel Macron and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan constructed victimhood in seven official texts and speech records published between 24 October and 4 December 2023. The controlled English corpus contains 6,836 tokens and is aligned with the French and Turkish originals. Keyness, concordance and collocation analyses were integrated with social actor coding, clause-level agency and responsibility analysis, framing analysis and leave-one-document-out checks. Both leaders used humanitarian, moral, legal and diplomatic resources, but distributed victim visibility and responsibility differently. Macron constructed a broader but uneven victim field encompassing Israeli victims, hostages, Palestinians and generalised civilian populations. He associated principal causal responsibility mainly with Hamas, while representing Israel more often through qualified legal and protective obligations. Erdoğan constructed a more concentrated Palestinian-centred victim field, foregrounding children, women, families and kinship. He attributed direct responsibility to Israel and extended enabling responsibility to Western governments and international institutions. The central contrast was not between humanitarian and emotional discourse, or between active and passive grammar, but between the actors associated with harm and the force with which responsibility was expressed. Van Dijk's ideological square was supported more clearly through its two emphasis operations than through its de-emphasis operations. The study contributes a translation-aware and document-sensitive corpus-assisted account of how official political discourse selectively connects suffering, innocence, blame and legitimate response.

**Keywords:** victimhood; corpus-assisted discourse analysis; political discourse; social actor representation; responsibility attribution; Israel–Gaza war; Emmanuel Macron; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Political Context and Study Focus

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel (2024) documented attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Israel on 7 October 2023 and the Israeli military operations in Gaza that followed. In this context, official speeches and statements do more than describe events: they identify affected groups, foreground or background agency, and frame particular responses as necessary or legitimate. Political discourse is therefore an important site for examining how social actors and moral responsibility are publicly structured (van Dijk, 2008).

Victimhood is central to this process because representations of harm also organise innocence, sympathy, blame, protection and political legitimacy. Gray and Kubin (2024) describe victimhood as a powerful basis of moral and political judgement. Research on online narratives of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict likewise shows how actors may be positioned as victims or victimisers and how such positioning can support competing argumentative conclusions (Altahmazi & Abid, 2025). Although based on online public discourse, that study illustrates the importance of analysing who is recognised as a victim and who is associated with harm.

The present study examines selected official speeches and statements by Emmanuel Macron and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as named political actors, not as representatives of European or Muslim discourse generally. It considers lexical choice, social actor representation, agency, responsibility and framing, including how suffering is connected with security, humanitarianism, law, diplomacy, morality and collective identity.

### 1.2. Research Problem

Recent studies have examined media representations of the war (Liu, 2024), online victimhood narratives (Altahmazi & Abid, 2025), and Erdoğan's post-October 2023 Palestine discourse (Gafarli, 2025). Yet the verified literature reviewed for this study gives less attention to controlled comparisons of named state leaders' official discourse that integrate recurrent lexical patterns with social actor representation, grammatical agency, responsibility attribution and framing.

This limitation matters because victimhood is not constructed simply by mentioning suffering. It depends on which victims are made visible, whether they are specified or generalised, which actors are linked to harm, and whether responsibility is stated directly, extended to enabling actors or mitigated. Analyses limited to keywords, emotional language or broad themes may therefore overlook how innocence, blame and legitimate political response are related.

Comparability presents an additional problem. Cross-language studies may use translated political texts without checking whether actor naming, grammatical voice, modality or evaluative intensity differs from the original wording. Differences may also be attributed to ideology without adequate attention to genre, source format, document length or concentration within one text. A controlled comparison is therefore needed that verifies translation-sensitive findings and tests whether reported patterns are distributed across documents.

### 1.3. Research Question

**1)** How do Emmanuel Macron and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan discursively construct victimhood in their selected official speeches and statements on the Israel–Gaza war?

## 2. Focused Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Scholarship relevant to this study lies at the intersection of victimhood studies, corpus-assisted discourse research, social actor representation and critical

approaches to ideology. This section reviews these areas, establishes the research gap and presents van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach as the interpretive framework.

### 2.1. Victimhood as a Discursive and Political Construct

Victimhood refers both to the experience of harm and to recognition as a wronged party deserving moral concern. Gray and Kubin (2024) argue that perceptions of victimhood are closely connected with sympathy, innocence, blame and political judgement. Recognising an actor as a victim is therefore not merely descriptive; it also shapes how other actors and possible responses are morally evaluated.

At the collective level, victimhood develops through shared accounts of harm experienced by members of a social or political group. Vollhardt (2020) emphasises that these accounts are shaped by historical narratives, intergroup relations and differences in power. They may reinforce identity and claims for recognition, but they may also generate competition over whose suffering is more serious or legitimate. Noor et al. (2012) describe this as competitive victimhood, in which adversarial groups seek comparative moral recognition for their own losses.

Political communication can also mobilise victimhood in struggles over identity, authority and legitimacy. Barton Hronešová and Kreiss (2024) show how leaders may portray constituencies as threatened or oppressed while positioning opponents as victimisers. Their analysis does not imply that the suffering invoked is necessarily fabricated; rather, it demonstrates that its political significance depends partly on how it is selected, narrated and connected with responsibility.

Collective victimhood is not a uniform orientation. Kljajić et al. (2025) distinguish between inclusive and non-inclusive forms and report that they are associated differently with reconciliation, exclusion and conflict-enhancing attitudes. These psychological categories cannot be attributed directly to speakers

from textual evidence alone. They nevertheless clarify why discourse analysis must consider whose suffering receives recognition, whether recognition crosses group boundaries and how victimhood is connected with blame and political obligation.

### 2.2. Corpus-Assisted Research on Conflict Representation

Corpus-assisted discourse research examines how meanings and representations are formed through recurrent patterns across bodies of texts. Baker and McEnery (2005) showed that refugees and asylum seekers were represented differently in United Nations and British newspaper discourse, demonstrating the importance of institutional context. Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) likewise identified recurring lexical and metaphorical constructions in the British press that associated refugees and asylum seekers with movement, threat and large numbers.

Baker et al. (2008) further demonstrated that corpus evidence can identify broad representational tendencies, while close analysis remains necessary to interpret their social and ideological significance. This relationship between recurrent patterning and contextual interpretation is central to corpus-assisted discourse studies (Partington et al., 2013). The literature therefore supports examining conflict discourse through patterns of naming, association and evaluation rather than isolated examples. It also shows that quantitative prominence does not explain meaning independently of the institutional setting and textual context in which a pattern occurs.

### 2.3. Social Actor Representation, Agency and Responsibility

Conflict discourse is shaped by how participants are included, categorised and positioned. Van Leeuwen (2008) explains that social actors may be excluded or included, individualised or collectivised, and identified through personal, relational, functional or institutional categories. In victimhood discourse, these choices affect whether sufferers appear as identifiable people, families,

demographic groups or generalised populations and therefore influence the form of moral visibility they receive.

Agency concerns how actions and participants are organised within clauses. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) describe clauses as representations of experience in which processes and participant roles establish relationships among actors, actions and affected parties. Fairclough (2003) similarly observes that social events may be represented through participant omission, nominalisation or abstraction, with consequences for the prominence of causal relationships.

Grammatical structure does not carry a fixed ideological meaning. A passive construction may omit an agent, retain it explicitly or leave responsibility recoverable from the wider co-text. Similarly, nominalisation may background an action without fully concealing its cause. Van Leeuwen's (2008) activation and passivation categories must also be distinguished from grammatical active and passive voice: the former concern represented social roles, whereas the latter concern clause structure. Social actor representation and clause-level agency are therefore complementary for examining how victims are humanised or generalised and how responsibility is foregrounded, qualified or left implicit.

### 2.4. Recent Israel–Gaza Discourse Research and the Research Gap

Recent linguistic research on the post-October 2023 Israel–Gaza conflict has concentrated mainly on media and online discourse. Liu (2024) compared reporting by Al Jazeera, China Daily and CNN and identified differences in lexical selection, collocational patterning and ideological representation. The study demonstrates how institutional and geopolitical positioning can shape conflict coverage, but its object is journalistic discourse rather than political leaders' official speeches and statements.

Victimhood has been examined more directly in online and news discourse. Altahmazi and Abid (2025) analysed approximately 130,000 YouTube comments

and showed how competing narratives positioned actors as victims or victimisers and supported different argumentative conclusions. In a preprint based on more than 14,000 news articles, AlShebli et al. (2025) reported differences in the individualisation, collectivisation and numerical representation of Israeli and Palestinian victims, as well as in the framing of source credibility. These studies make unequal victim visibility analytically important, but neither investigates how it interacts with grammatical agency, responsibility attribution and political framing in official state-leader discourse.

Erdoğan's Palestine discourse has also received focused academic attention. In a master's thesis, Gafarli (2025) examined Erdoğan's speeches and Turkish parliamentary discourse, identifying connections among solidarity, strategic political positioning and domestic contestation. This confirms that Erdoğan's post-October 2023 rhetoric is not an unexplored area. The study does not, however, compare him with Macron through a corpus-assisted design or centre victimhood within a translation-aware analysis.

Taken together, the literature covers media framing, online victimhood narratives, war-victim representation and Erdoğan-focused political discourse. Less attention has been given to a controlled comparison of selected official speeches and statements by Macron and Erdoğan that integrates recurrent lexical patterns, social actor representation, clause-level agency and responsibility, and framing while accounting for original-language meaning, source condition and document distribution. Within the literature reviewed for this article, no directly equivalent study was identified. This is a bounded literature-search finding rather than a claim of absolute originality.

### 2.5. Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach and the Ideological Square

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach treats discourse, cognition and society as interconnected dimensions of ideological communication. Social structures and

group relations do not shape discourse directly; their influence is mediated through socially shared knowledge, attitudes, ideologies and context models that guide how events and actors are represented (van Dijk, 1998, 2006, 2008). Ideology may consequently become visible through recurrent patterns of description, evaluation, emphasis and omission rather than only through explicit political declarations.

The ideological square summarises four broad tendencies of polarised representation: emphasising positive information about the in-group, emphasising negative information about the out-group, de-emphasising negative information about the in-group, and de-emphasising positive information about the out-group (van Dijk, 1998, 2006). These operations are relevant to victimhood discourse because they can affect how suffering, innocence, responsibility, protection and political legitimacy are distributed among social actors.

The framework is not treated as a template that every text must satisfy. The relevant in-group and out-group are identified from each speaker's discourse rather than predetermined as European and Muslim blocs, and some operations may be more strongly supported than others. Ideological interpretation therefore follows the linguistic analysis and is retained only where recurrent evidence supports it. The framework is used to interpret textual positioning while preserving shared patterns, counterexamples and document-sensitive findings; it is not used to infer either speaker's private beliefs or audience effects.

## 3. Methodology

This section outlines the study design, corpus construction, analytical procedures, and safeguards concerning translation, source format, document effects, and coding consistency.

### 3.1. Research Design

The study adopts a comparative corpus-assisted discourse design to examine how victimhood is constructed in selected official speeches and statements by

Emmanuel Macron and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on the Israel–Gaza war. This approach combines recurrent corpus patterns with close reading of their textual and political contexts (Baker et al., 2008). The analysis moves from description to interpretation: lexical and grammatical evidence is established first, followed by social actor, responsibility, framing, and ideological analysis. The controlled English corpus supports direct comparison, while the French and Turkish originals govern claims that depend on grammatical form, actor naming, modality, evaluative force, or contested terminology. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is used only after the linguistic patterns have been established (van Dijk, 2008).

### 3.2. Corpus Selection and Composition

The corpus was assembled through purposive, criterion-based selection of official and traceable records. A text was included when the speaker's wording could be identified reliably, the communicative setting was clear, and the discussion was sufficiently sustained to support analysis of victimhood and responsibility. Short extracts, media summaries, duplicated passages, unattributed translations, and records with uncertain speaker ownership were excluded.

The final corpus contains seven texts published between 24 October and 4 December 2023. The Macron sub-corpus comprises three complete French texts issued by the Élysée: bilateral declarations delivered in Ramallah and Cairo and an opening address delivered in Paris. The Erdoğan sub-corpus comprises four Turkish speech records from meetings in Astana, Tashkent, Riyadh, and Istanbul. Three were published by Türkiye's Directorate of Communications and one by the official AK Party archive. The controlled English layer contains 6,836 tokens, with 4,077 in the Macron sub-corpus and 2,759 in the Erdoğan sub-corpus. This difference was retained rather than adding weaker texts solely to equalise the datasets.

**Table 1**: Corpus Composition and Source Conditions

| Text ID | Date | Genre and setting | Source condition | Tokens |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MAC01 | 24 Oct 2023 | Bilateral declaration, Ramallah | Complete official delivered text | 1,582 |
| MAC02 | 25 Oct 2023 | Bilateral declaration, Cairo | Complete official delivered text | 1,468 |
| MAC03 | 9 Nov 2023 | Humanitarian conference opening, Paris | Complete official delivered text | 1,027 |
| Macron total | | Three documents | French originals | 4,077 |
| ERD01 | 3 Nov 2023 | Organization of Turkic States Summit, Astana | Official record with directly attributed speech | 211 |
| ERD02 | 9 Nov 2023 | Economic Cooperation Organization Summit, Tashkent | Official record with directly attributed speech | 283 |
| ERD03 | 11 Nov 2023 | OIC–Arab League Joint Summit, Riyadh | Official record with directly attributed speech | 1,154 |
| ERD04 | 4 Dec 2023 | COMCEC Ministerial Session, Istanbul | Official record with directly attributed speech | 1,111 |
| Erdoğan total | | Four documents | Turkish originals | 2,759 |
| Corpus total | | Seven documents | Official and traceable records | 6,836 |

*Note.* Token counts refer to the controlled English comparative layer.

### 3.3. Source Conditions and Extraction

The sub-corpora differed in source format. Macron's texts were complete delivered versions, whereas the Erdoğan materials were official institutional records containing directly attributed speech, sometimes separated by reporting clauses or paraphrase. The latter were therefore not treated as complete verbatim transcripts. Complete source files and original-language records were preserved before extraction. Webpage material, institutional narration, and unrelated

sections were removed, while meaningful repetition, pronouns, modality, and evaluative wording were retained. In multi-topic records, the full continuous Gaza-related section was included. Boundaries between separately published quotation blocks were marked, and extraction decisions were logged.

### 3.4. Translation and Paragraph Alignment

A controlled English version of each text was aligned with its French or Turkish source at paragraph level. The final alignment contains 95 paragraph pairs, 49 from Macron's texts and 46 from Erdoğan's. Document and paragraph identifiers allowed findings to be traced to the original wording. The English layer was used for frequencies, keyness, collocation, concordance, and document distribution. The original texts remained authoritative for actor naming, grammatical voice, agent omission, nominalisation, modality, evaluative intensity, responsibility, repetition, and contested terminology. Material translation differences were recorded, and unresolved cases were not used as the sole support for a central quotation or fine-grained grammatical claim.

### 3.5. Lexical Analysis

The controlled English texts were converted to lower case and tokenised as Unicode surface words, retaining internal apostrophes and hyphens. Direct keyness comparisons were conducted in both directions. Log-likelihood ($G^2$) identified relative prominence, while log ratio was used as an effect-size measure. For the family-level comparisons reported in Table 2, 0.5 was added to both sub-corpus counts before log-ratio calculation; $G^2$ was calculated from the observed counts. Raw counts were reported with normalised frequencies per 1,000 tokens (Brezina, 2018; Rayson & Garside, 2000).

Items retained for detailed discussion had a combined frequency of at least three, occurred in at least two documents of the relevant focus sub-corpus, and contributed directly to victimhood or its framing. Greetings, venue references and

procedural vocabulary were excluded. Surface forms were counted separately during the initial keyness scan; related forms were subsequently grouped into transparent lexical families, and family-level counts were recalculated for interpretation and reporting. Collocations were calculated within a symmetrical five-token span on either side of the node and ranked with logDice, using a minimum co-occurrence of two (Rychlý, 2008). Low-frequency patterns were treated as exploratory and interpreted alongside expanded concordance lines and document distribution.

### 3.6. Social Actor and Agency Coding

Social actor coding examined each reference to an affected or responsible actor. Victim categories included Palestinians and Gazans, Israelis, civilians, hostages, children, women, families, displaced people, and other affected groups. An actor was coded as responsible only when the surrounding wording associated it with harm, enabling, culpable inaction, legal responsibility, or a duty to protect. The analysis also considered specification and generalisation, individualisation and collectivisation, humanisation and abstraction, aggregation, and inclusion or exclusion (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Agency and responsibility were coded at clause level. The scheme distinguished active constructions, passives with and without an expressed agent, nominalisations, event-focused representations, explicit and indirect causation, and direct or mitigated blame. Each clause was read in context to determine whether an actor was named, recoverable, vague, or absent. Passive voice or nominalisation alone was not treated as responsibility avoidance; several features had to operate together in weakening the causal link. Overlapping codes were permitted, so totals represent coded functions rather than unique clauses or actors.

### 3.7. Framing and Ideological Interpretation

Each aligned paragraph was treated as a framing passage. Humanitarian, moral, security, legal, diplomatic, historical or collective-identity, and mobilisational frames were assigned only when supported by identifiable linguistic evidence. A frame was counted once per paragraph, although more than one could be recorded when several organising meanings were present. Mitigation, polarisation, legitimation, and delegitimation were coded separately as broader ideological patterns. Counterexamples and shared patterns were retained.

Van Dijk's (1998) ideological square was applied to recurring patterns rather than individual sentences. Its four operations were reported only where supported by the corpus. Contested political and legal terms were treated as the speaker's characterisations, and no claims were made about private intentions or actual audience effects.

### 3.8. Distribution, Sensitivity, and Reliability Safeguards

Raw and normalised findings were examined alongside their distribution across the seven documents. Leave-one-document-out checks were conducted for the principal lexical, social actor, agency, and framing comparisons by removing each text in turn and recalculating the relevant contrast. Patterns that retained the same direction were treated as stable within the selected corpus; those that changed direction were described as shared or document-sensitive.

Reliability safeguards included a written coding manual, pilot coding across all seven documents, review of ambiguous cases, a decision log, and original-language verification. The manual was refined after the pilot, and full first-round coding was completed. The required delayed recoding of the pilot sample remained pending at the time of drafting. No independent second coder participated, so no inter-coder reliability claim is made.

## 4. Results

The findings are presented in four related parts. The section begins with the lexical construction of victimhood and then examines the representation of victims and responsible actors, patterns of agency and responsibility, and broader framing and ideological positioning. Frequency is considered alongside concordance evidence and document distribution so that prominence in one text is not treated as a general characteristic of either speaker.

### 4.1. Lexical Construction of Victimhood

The direct comparison revealed stable lexical contrasts alongside a substantial body of shared humanitarian and political vocabulary. Table 2 presents selected lexical families associated with victims, responsible actors, suffering, protection and political response. Surface-form keyness guided item selection; related forms were then grouped into transparent lexical families, for which the table reports combined counts and comparative statistics.

**Table 2**: *Selected Lexical Patterns in the Macron and Erdoğan Sub-corpora*

| Lexical family | Macron, n (per 1,000; documents) | Erdoğan, n (per 1,000; documents) | $G^2$ | Log ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| terror* | 39 (9.57; 3/3) | 0 (0.00; 0/4) | 40.31 | 5.74 |
| population* | 24 (5.89; 3/3) | 0 (0.00; 0/4) | 24.81 | 5.05 |
| protection/protect* | 20 (4.91; 3/3) | 2 (0.72; 1/4) | 10.90 | 2.47 |
| Hamas | 17 (4.17; 3/3) | 1 (0.36; 1/4) | 11.66 | 2.98 |
| security | 21 (5.15; 3/3) | 5 (1.81; 3/4) | 5.32 | 1.40 |
| hostage* | 8 (1.96; 3/3) | 1 (0.36; 1/4) | 3.81 | 1.94 |
| brother/sister* | 0 (0.00; 0/3) | 20 (7.25; 3/4) | 36.29 | −5.92 |
| Islamic/Muslim* | 0 (0.00; 0/3) | 13 (4.71; 4/4) | 23.59 | −5.32 |
| child* | 1 (0.25; 1/3) | 14 (5.07; 4/4) | 19.09 | −3.84 |
| occupied/occupation | 0 (0.00; 0/3) | 7 (2.54; 3/4) | 12.70 | −4.47 |
| massacre* | 0 (0.00; 0/3) | 5 (1.81; 3/4) | 9.07 | −4.02 |
| ceasefire | 3 (0.74; 1/3) | 7 (2.54; 3/4) | 3.59 | −1.66 |

Note. Frequencies are normalised per 1,000 tokens. Document figures show the number of texts containing each family. $G^2$ was calculated from the observed

family counts. Log ratio was calculated after adding 0.5 to both sub-corpus counts. Positive log-ratio values indicate a higher relative frequency in the Macron sub-corpus; negative values indicate a higher relative frequency in the Erdoğan sub-corpus. Every contrast shown remained in the same direction when each document was removed in turn. An asterisk marks related word forms.

Macron's stable lexical profile centred on terrorism, Hamas, population protection, security and hostages. The terror family occurred 39 times across all three Macron texts and was absent from the Erdoğan sub-corpus. Its main collocates included Hamas, fight, groups and attack, connecting suffering to the attacks of 7 October and a broader counter-terrorism response. Hamas was likewise distributed across all three texts and was the most recurrently named harmful actor in Macron's selected discourse.

Security vocabulary was repeatedly linked to civilian protection and political settlement. In MAC02, Macron organised the proposed response around "the fight against terrorism," "the protection of populations and humanitarian aid," and "the political question and settlement of the Palestinian issue" (MAC02_P13). Security, humanitarian assistance and diplomacy were therefore presented as connected elements. Repeated references to hostages also maintained a distinct victim category associated with the attacks of 7 October.

Erdoğan's profile concentrated more strongly on children, kinship, collective identity, occupation and morally evaluated violence. The child family occurred in all four Erdoğan texts and was associated most clearly with women, innocent, babies and massacred. Kinship terms occurred 20 times, with Palestinian as their strongest recurrent collocate. The phrase "our Gazan and Palestinian brothers and sisters" placed the affected population within a shared political and moral community (ERD04_P16).

References to the Islamic or Muslim community appeared across all four Erdoğan texts, while occupation and massacre occurred across three. These patterns connected Palestinian suffering with collective responsibility, territorial injustice and explicit moral evaluation. Erdoğan also used ceasefire more often and across more documents than Macron, including a call for the rapid establishment of a "humanitarian ceasefire" (ERD01_P02).

The contrast was not absolute. Both sub-corpora repeatedly referred to Palestinians, civilians, humanitarian action, aid, peace and Palestinian statehood. Humanitarian occurred at closely similar normalised rates: 3.92 per 1,000 tokens in Macron's texts and 4.35 in Erdoğan's. The direction of several shared fields, including Palestinian, civilian, humanitarian and peace, changed when individual documents were removed. These are therefore treated as shared or document-sensitive rather than distinctive patterns.

### 4.2. Representation of Victims and Responsible Actors

The social-actor analysis showed that both leaders generally represented victims collectively but foregrounded different affected groups. Macron referred to Palestinians and Gazans alongside Israeli victims, hostages, civilians, French nationals and broader categories such as populations and lives. Erdoğan's references were more concentrated on Palestinians and Gazans, particularly children and women. Table 3 summarises the principal coded patterns.

**Table 3**: *Representation of Victims and Responsible Actors*

| **Category** | **Macron, n (per 1,000; documents)** | **Erdoğan, n (per 1,000; documents)** | **Higher normalised rate** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Palestinian or Gazan victims | 22 (5.40; 3/3) | 23 (8.34; 3/4) | Erdoğan |
| Generalised civilians | 15 (3.68; 3/3) | 4 (1.45; 3/4) | Macron |
| Other or unspecified victims | 28 (6.87; 3/3) | 8 (2.90; 3/4) | Macron |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Israeli victims | 8 (1.96; 2/3) | 1 (0.36; 1/4) | Macron |
| Hostages | 9 (2.21; 3/3) | 1 (0.36; 1/4) | Macron |
| Children or babies | 2 (0.49; 1/3) | 13 (4.71; 4/4) | Erdoğan |
| Women | 3 (0.74; 1/3) | 7 (2.54; 3/4) | Erdoğan |
| Humanisation | 45 (11.04; 3/3) | 47 (17.04; 4/4) | Erdoğan |
| Abstraction | 18 (4.42; 3/3) | 0 (0.00; 0/4) | Macron |
| Aggregation | 12 (2.94; 3/3) | 17 (6.16; 3/4) | Erdoğan |
| Hamas as responsible actor | 14 (3.43; 3/3) | 0 (0.00; 0/4) | Macron |
| Israel or Israeli administration as responsible | 4 (0.98; 2/3) | 27 (9.79; 3/4) | Erdoğan |
| Western actors as responsible | 0 (0.00; 0/3) | 13 (4.71; 3/4) | Erdoğan |
| International institutions or actors as responsible | 0 (0.00; 0/3) | 5 (1.81; 2/4) | Erdoğan |

*Note.* Figures are coded reference instances normalised per 1,000 controlled-English tokens. Codes could overlap, so categories should not be added as unique individuals or sentences. All directions shown remained unchanged when each document was removed in turn.

Collectivisation was common to both sub-corpora. Victims were more often represented as groups, populations, families, children, hostages or national communities than as named individuals. Macron nevertheless constructed a broader victim field. In MAC01, he referred to “all the victims of the spiral of violence triggered by the Hamas terrorist attack,” before mentioning the wounded, bereaved families and civilians in Gaza (MAC01_P04). Palestinian and Gazan victims appeared in all three texts but were frequently placed within wider categories of civilians, populations and people requiring protection, consistent with his higher rates of generalised and abstract representation.

Erdoğan gave greater visibility to age-, gender- and family-based suffering. Children appeared in all four texts and women across three. Humanisation drew

on bodily and familial detail, including children laid out in rows, mothers dying with their children and fathers searching through rubble (ERD03_P03). Aggregation was also more frequent, but commonly accompanied humanising categories. In ERD02, for example, a reported casualty percentage was immediately identified as consisting of "women and children" (ERD02_P02).

The allocation of responsibility also differed. Macron repeatedly represented Hamas as the principal harmful or threatening actor. Israel received fewer responsibility codes, although Macron stated that it had a responsibility to prevent and punish abuses against innocent Palestinian citizens (MAC01_P11). Erdoğan most frequently associated Israel or the Israeli administration with harmful action and extended responsibility to Western governments through support, silence and perceived double standards, and to international institutions through failure or obstruction.

These tendencies did not form an absolute division. Macron specified Palestinian victims and sometimes assigned responsibility directly to Israel. Erdoğan referred briefly to hostages and stated that lasting peace would also benefit "the people of Israel" (ERD03_P16). Specification occurred at similar normalised rates and changed direction during sensitivity testing. The stronger contrast concerns which victim identities and responsible actors were foregrounded, not whether only one speaker used specific labels.

### 4.3. Agency, Causation and Responsibility

The clause-level analysis identified 111 propositions relevant to agency and responsibility: 37 in the Macron sub-corpus and 74 in the Erdoğan sub-corpus. These are analytical proposition counts rather than word frequencies. Individual propositions could receive several codes, so the categories in Table 4 overlap.

**Table 4**: *Coded Agency and Responsibility Patterns*

| Category | Macron, n (per 1,000 tokens) | Erdoğan, n (per 1,000 tokens) |
|---|---|---|
| Active construction | 11 (2.70) | 35 (12.69) |
| Event-focused representation | 11 (2.70) | 8 (2.90) |
| Nominalisation | 5 (1.23) | 11 (3.99) |
| Agentless passive | 8 (1.96) | 15 (5.44) |
| Passive with expressed agent | 1 (0.25) | 4 (1.45) |
| Explicit responsibility | 23 (5.64) | 37 (13.41) |
| Indirect responsibility | 0 (0.00) | 23 (8.34) |
| Direct blame | 19 (4.66) | 59 (21.38) |
| Mitigated blame | 8 (1.96) | 1 (0.36) |

*Note.* Figures are coded instances normalised per 1,000 controlled-English tokens. Categories overlap and should not be added as separate propositions. The directions for active constructions, explicit and indirect responsibility, direct blame and mitigated blame remained unchanged when each document was removed in turn.

Erdoğan used active constructions more frequently, particularly when associating Israel or the Israeli administration with harmful action. In ERD02, the Israeli administration is represented as continuing to bomb civilian locations "with the full support of Western countries" (ERD02_P02). The clause assigns explicit agency and causation to the Israeli administration, while Western support is coded as indirect enabling responsibility. Comparable passages extended responsibility through support, silence, obstruction or failure to intervene.

Macron's explicit causal attribution was directed principally towards Hamas. In MAC03, he stated that Hamas had assumed responsibility for exposing Palestinians to "terrible consequences," before connecting Palestinian suffering with that of Israelis (MAC03_P04). Responsibility attributed to Israel occurred less often and commonly concerned legal or protective obligations. Macron

nevertheless stated directly that Israel was responsible for preventing and punishing abuses against innocent Palestinian citizens (MAC01_P11).

The grammatical difference was not a simple active-passive opposition. Erdoğan also showed higher normalised rates of agentless passives and nominalisations. Both leaders used event-focused and passive constructions, and surrounding context often made an omitted actor recoverable. Passive or nominalized form alone was therefore not coded as responsibility avoidance.

Only one Macron passage met the strict multi-feature threshold for responsibility avoidance, and this isolated instance was not treated as characteristic. The more consistent difference concerned the distribution and force of responsibility: Erdoğan showed higher rates of explicit and indirect responsibility and direct blame, while Macron used mitigated blame more frequently. The contrast lies less in grammatical voice than in which actors were connected with harm and how strongly responsibility was expressed.

### 4.4. Framing and Ideological Positioning

Both sub-corpora used humanitarian, moral, security, legal, diplomatic, historical or collective-identity framing, and mobilisational framing. The main differences concerned the density of these frames and the victims, responsible actors and proposed responses with which they were associated. Table 5 summarises the principal patterns.

**Table 5**: *Framing and Ideological Patterns Across the Two Sub-corpora*

| **Pattern** | **Macron, n (per 1,000; documents)** | **Erdoğan, n (per 1,000; documents)** | **Sensitivity assessment** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Humanitarian framing | 23 (5.64; 3/3) | 17 (6.16; 4/4) | Shared; direction document-sensitive |
| Moral framing | 19 (4.66; 3/3) | 28 (10.15; 4/4) | Erdoğan higher; stable |
| Security framing | 29 (7.11; 3/3) | 9 (3.26; 3/4) | Macron higher; stable |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Legal framing | 6 (1.47; 3/3) | 6 (2.17; 3/4) | Erdoğan higher normalized rate; stable but low-frequency |
| Diplomatic framing | 27 (6.62; 3/3) | 16 (5.80; 4/4) | Shared; direction document-sensitive |
| Historical or collective-identity framing | 9 (2.21; 3/3) | 25 (9.06; 4/4) | Erdoğan higher; stable |
| Mobilisational framing | 22 (5.40; 3/3) | 19 (6.89; 4/4) | Erdoğan higher normalized rate; stable |
| Mitigation | 11 (2.70; 3/3) | 1 (0.36; 1/4) | Macron higher; stable |
| Polarization | 7 (1.72; 3/3) | 19 (6.89; 3/4) | Erdoğan higher; stable |
| Delegitimation | 16 (3.92; 3/3) | 25 (9.06; 4/4) | Erdoğan higher; stable |

*Note.* Figures are coded passages normalized per 1,000 controlled-English tokens. Multiple frames could be assigned to one aligned paragraph, so categories should not be added as separate passages. “Stable” means that the direction remained unchanged when each document was removed in turn.

Macron most consistently connected victimhood with security, civilian protection and political settlement. Security was his most frequent frame but was repeatedly combined with humanitarian and legal qualification. His statement that Palestinian, French and Israeli lives were of equal value connected humanitarian, moral and legal framing within a universalized construction of victim worth (MAC01_P08). Likewise, Israel’s right to self-defence was accompanied by a responsibility to respect international law and protect civilians (MAC03_P06). These combinations produced recurrent mitigation through balance, qualification and legal constraint, not an absence of criticism or moral evaluation.

Erdoğan’s texts showed denser moral and collective-identity framing. Palestinian suffering was connected with occupation, historical injustice, Muslim

solidarity, territorial identity and collective duty. Mobilizational passages called for humanitarian assistance, shared political action, resistance and accountability. In ERD03, Erdoğan described Hamas members as "resistance fighters defending their homeland" and contrasted them with those he called "the occupiers" (ERD03_P04). His wording combined collective-identity framing, polarisation and legitimation, while Israel, Western supporters and some international institutions were subjected to broader delegitimating.

Humanitarian and diplomatic framing nevertheless occurred throughout both sub-corpora. Erdoğan called for aid, ceasefire, mediation, legal accountability, Palestinian statehood and a two-state settlement. Macron used explicit moral language, specified Palestinian suffering and assigned legal and protective responsibilities to Israel. Both also mobilized collective action, although Macron's mobilization was more often institutional and coalitional, whereas Erdoğan's was more closely connected with solidarity, identity and shared duty.

Van Dijk's ideological square was most clearly supported by its two emphasis operations. Macron represented France and its political community positively through humanitarian action, lawful security and diplomacy, while foregrounding harmful actions by Hamas. Erdoğan represented Türkiye, Palestinians and the Islamic political community positively through solidarity, aid and moral duty, while emphasizing harmful actions attributed to Israel, Western supporters and obstructive institutions. Evidence for de-emphasising in-group wrongdoing was limited and qualified in Macron's texts and limited but identifiable in a small number of Erdoğan passages. Evidence that either leader recurrently de-emphasized the opposing group's positive actions was insufficient. The ideological-square interpretation is therefore restricted to the operations consistently supported by the corpus.

## 5. Discussion

The findings indicate that Macron and Erdoğan construct victimhood through different combinations of lexical choice, social actor representation, responsibility and framing. These patterns cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between neutral humanitarianism and emotionally charged political rhetoric. Both sub-corpora contain humanitarian concern, moral evaluation, diplomacy, mobilization and recognition of Palestinian suffering. The more consistent differences concern which victims receive sustained visibility, which actors are associated with their suffering, and whether responsibility is stated directly, extended to additional actors or diplomatically qualified. This section interprets these differences in relation to recent victimhood and conflict-discourse research.

### 5.1. Victimhood as Selective Moral Visibility

Victimhood functions in the selected texts as more than a description of injury. It organizes sympathy, innocence, moral standing, blame and the need for protection. This supports Gray and Kubin's (2024) account of victimhood as a morally consequential political category. It is also consistent with Altahmazi and Abid's (2025) finding that victimhood narratives can perform an argumentative function. Although their study examined online comments rather than official political discourse, the same general relationship is visible here: identifying particular victims helps define the moral problem and makes some forms of responsibility and political response more salient.

Macron constructed a comparatively broad victim field involving Palestinians and Gazans, Israeli victims, hostages, French nationals, families and generalised civilian populations. His assertion of the equal value of Palestinian, Israeli and French lives created a universalising account of victim worth. However, breadth of recognition did not produce equal forms of visibility. Israeli victimhood was closely associated with the attacks of 7 October, Hamas and the hostages,

whereas Palestinian suffering was more often represented through civilians, populations, displacement and humanitarian protection. His construction was therefore plural but internally differentiated.

Erdoğan's victim field was more concentrated on Palestinians and Gazans. Repeated references to children, babies, women, families and Palestinian "brothers and sisters" made suffering bodily, familial and politically identifiable. Kinship language also reduced the distance between the represented victims and the political community addressed by the speaker, connecting recognition of suffering with solidarity and collective obligation. This broadly accords with Gafarli's (2025) postgraduate analysis of solidarity and collective responsibility in Erdoğan's post-October 2023 Palestine discourse. The present study adds direct corpus comparison and original-language verification to that contextual interpretation.

The findings also show that humanisation, collectivization and aggregation are not mutually exclusive. Macron used abstraction more frequently but also humanised victims in a substantial number of passages. Erdoğan combined bodily and familial descriptions with casualty figures, often specifying that the reported dead were women or children. Numerical representation therefore did not necessarily make suffering impersonal. A recent preprint on war-victim news coverage similarly suggests that aggregation may operate alongside individualisation and humanisation rather than simply replacing them (AlShebli et al., 2025).

Kljajić et al.'s (2025) distinction between inclusive and non-inclusive collective victimhood offers a cautious point of comparison. Macron's recognition of suffering across Palestinian, Israeli and French groups resembles broader cross-group victim recognition, while Erdoğan's denser kinship and identity framing produced a more bounded solidarity with Palestinians. These are textual

tendencies, not evidence of the speakers' underlying psychological beliefs. The contrast was also incomplete: Macron distributed visibility unevenly, while Erdoğan referred to hostages, security for Muslims, Christians and Jews, and the future well-being of the Israeli people. Victimhood in the corpus therefore operates through degrees of recognition, emphasis and political identification rather than through absolute inclusion or exclusion.

### 5.2. Responsibility, Blame and Ideological Alignment

The agency findings do not support a simple opposition between Macron's use of passive constructions and Erdoğan's use of active ones. Erdoğan showed a higher rate of active agency, but he also used more agentless passives and nominalizations. Both speakers sometimes represented violence as an event or condition without identifying an actor in the same clause. The more significant contrast therefore concerns which actors were connected with suffering and how directly, extensively or forcefully responsibility was expressed.

Macron's causal account was organized principally around Hamas and the attacks of 7 October. Hamas was repeatedly associated with Israeli deaths, hostage-taking and the wider consequences of the conflict. Israel occupied a more complex position. Macron recognized its right to self-defence while also assigning it legal and humanitarian obligations towards Palestinian civilians. Responsibility attributed to Israel was consequently expressed more often through duties, limitations and qualified criticism than through categorical condemnation. This pattern helps explain Macron's higher rate of mitigated blame. Mitigation should not be equated with neutrality: it operated through diplomatic qualification, legal constraint and the simultaneous recognition of several affected groups.

Erdoğan constructed a wider network of responsibility. Israel or the Israeli administration was repeatedly represented as the immediate cause of Palestinian harm, while Western governments were associated with political support, silence,

justification and perceived double standards. International institutions were also criticized through references to inaction, obstruction or failure to enforce legal and humanitarian norms. Responsibility therefore extended beyond the immediate military actor to those represented as enabling the violence or failing to prevent it. These patterns are consistent with van Leeuwen's (2008) account of social actors as participants who may be represented through direct action, institutional roles and collective identities. They also support van Dijk's (1998, 2008) view that ideological discourse operates through selective emphasis. Macron foregrounded harmful actions attributed to Hamas while associating France with humanitarian assistance, lawful security and diplomacy. Erdoğan foregrounded harmful actions attributed to Israel and enabling Western actors while aligning Türkiye, Palestinians and the wider Muslim political community with solidarity, aid and moral responsibility.

The contrast remained qualified. Macron directly criticized Israeli conduct in selected passages, while Erdoğan also used passive, nominalized and event-focused constructions. Only one Macron passage met the study's strict multi-feature threshold for responsibility avoidance, so agent concealment cannot be treated as a general feature of his selected discourse. Ideological alignment is therefore located primarily in the selection and extension of responsible actors and in the intensity of blame, rather than in grammatical voice alone. This interpretation is consistent with the consolidated evidence, which identifies contrasting organizations of victimhood and responsibility rather than an opposition between passive and active language.

### 5.3. Shared Discursive Repertoires and the Study's Contribution

Despite the stable contrasts identified in the analysis, both sub-corpora drew on humanitarian concern, civilian protection, aid, peace, ceasefire initiatives, Palestinian statehood and international responsibility. Macron combined security

and diplomatic qualification with moral evaluation and direct criticism. Erdoğan combined stronger moral and collective-identity framing with humanitarian, legal and diplomatic proposals. The findings therefore do not support a binary in which humanitarian discourse belongs to Macron and moral or political discourse belongs to Erdoğan. Both speakers used these resources, but connected them with different victim groups, responsible actors and political communities.

Some variation may also reflect communicative setting and source format. Macron's sub-corpus consists of complete delivered texts, whereas Erdoğan's consists of official records containing directly attributed passages. The Erdoğan records are more concentrated on Gaza-related material and may contain less surrounding procedural or transitional discourse. Normalised frequencies, document-distribution analysis and leave-one-document-out checks reduced the influence of document length and individual texts, but they could not remove every possible effect of genre, audience or editorial segmentation. The findings should therefore be understood as patterns within the selected corpus rather than as fixed characteristics of either leader's discourse.

The study contributes by integrating several dimensions that have often been examined separately. It compares the official discourse of two named state leaders, treats victimhood as the central analytical construct, and connects recurrent lexical patterns with social actor representation and clause-level responsibility. Translation-sensitive claims were checked against the French and Turkish originals, while source conditions, document effects and counterexamples were incorporated into the interpretation. This combination strengthens the link between corpus evidence and critical discourse analysis without treating frequency as self-explanatory or applying van Dijk's ideological square before the linguistic patterns were established. This combination addresses the bounded gap identified in the reviewed literature without claiming absolute originality.

## 6. Implications and Limitations

This section outlines the study's implications and the limits within which its findings should be interpreted.

### 6.1. Implications

The findings indicate that political victimhood is constructed through the interaction of victim identification, social positioning, agency, responsibility and framing. Both leaders recognised humanitarian suffering, but they differed in the victims given sustained visibility, the actors associated with harm and the extent to which blame was extended or qualified. Examining these dimensions together provides a more precise account of how victimhood acquires moral and political significance.

Methodologically, the study shows the value of combining corpus evidence with close linguistic analysis. Keyness and normalised frequencies identified recurrent tendencies, while concordance examination, social actor coding and clause-level analysis clarified how those tendencies operated in context. Document-distribution and leave-one-document-out checks also distinguished broadly recurring patterns from findings driven mainly by one text, an important safeguard in small, specialised corpora.

The translation-aware design enabled direct comparison through a controlled English layer while using the French and Turkish originals to verify claims about actor naming, agency, modality, evaluative intensity and contested terminology. Comparative political-discourse research should therefore treat translation as an analytical condition rather than a neutral transfer of meaning.

The findings also support a selective use of van Dijk's ideological square. Its two emphasis operations were more clearly evidenced than its two de-emphasis operations. The framework was most informative when applied after the linguistic

patterns had been established and only where recurrent evidence supported the interpretation.

### 6.2. Limitations

The study is based on seven purposively selected corpus items, and its findings are limited to the texts examined. The sub-corpora differ in size and source condition: Macron's materials are complete delivered texts, whereas Erdoğan's are official records containing directly attributed speech. Normalisation, document-distribution analysis and leave-one-document-out checks reduced, but could not eliminate possible effects of length, genre, audience, chronology and editorial segmentation.

Direct lexical comparison relied on a controlled English layer. Although translation-sensitive claims were checked against the French and Turkish originals, translation may still affect lexical equivalence and collocational patterning. The corpus also covers only 24 October to 4 December 2023 and cannot represent later developments in either leader's discourse.

The analysis concerns textual representation rather than intention or reception. Coding was conducted by the primary researcher; delayed recording of the pilot sample remained pending, and no independent second coder participated. No final intra-coder statistics or inter-coder reliability claim are therefore reported.

## 7. Conclusion

This study asked how Emmanuel Macron and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan constructed victimhood in seven selected official responses to the Israel–Gaza war. The comparison shows that they used overlapping humanitarian, moral, legal and diplomatic resources but organized victimhood through different patterns of visibility, responsibility and political alignment.

Macron constructed a broader but uneven victim field. Israeli victims and hostages were linked closely to the attacks of 7 October and Hamas, whereas

Palestinian suffering was more often represented through civilians, populations, humanitarian protection and legal obligation. Erdoğan constructed a more concentrated Palestinian-centred victim field, foregrounding children, women, families and kinship while connecting their suffering with occupation, collective identity and moral responsibility.

The principal contrast was therefore not between humanitarian and emotional discourse, or between passive and active grammar. It concerned which actors were connected with harm and how strongly responsibility was expressed. Macron attributed principal causal responsibility to Hamas and addressed Israel mainly through qualified legal and protective duties. Erdoğan attributed direct responsibility to Israel and extended enabling responsibility to Western governments and international institutions.

Van Dijk's ideological square was most clearly supported through positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, while evidence for its de-emphasis operations remained limited. Overall, the study shows that political victimhood is constructed through the selective connection of suffering, innocence, blame and legitimate response. Its contribution lies in a translation-aware, document-sensitive corpus-assisted approach that keeps ideological interpretation grounded in recurrent textual evidence.

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