Article

Politeness and Solidarity in Online Apologies: A Sociolinguistic Comparison of Indonesian and American Political Leaders (2019-2025)

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A B S T R A C T

National leaders' political apologies are essential for rebuilding public confidence, mending diplomatic relationships, and rewriting history. However, rigorous assessments of apologies made particularly by political leaders are still few, and the majority of extant literature concentrates on apologetic tactics in broad communication settings—such as interpersonal contacts, media discourse, or institutional pronouncements. Furthermore, there is a significant vacuum in the research since few studies examine how linguistic framing affects the perceived sincerity, responsibility, and political effect of these apologies across various national settings. By analyzing how political leaders create apologies through word selections, framing techniques, and rhetorical appeals, this study fills up these gaps. The study examines apology writings by various political personalities in response to historical injustices and national crises using a qualitative discourse-analytic method. The results highlight the intricate role of language in negotiating accountability during times of public scrutiny by showing how political apologies strategically combine responsibility-taking, emotional alignment, and future-oriented commitments to shape public perception and minimize political risk.
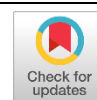
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INTRODUCTION

Politeness is an important aspect of human communication as it promotes societal stability, collaboration, and the reduction of possible conflict in private and public settings. As stated by Brown & Levinson (1988), being polite requires employing techniques to safeguard one's "face," or social self-image, during social interactions. These linguistic coping mechanisms demonstrate how people reconcile the need for social acceptance with their demand for autonomy in interpersonal interactions. Therefore, the social distance between interlocutors, the communicative context, and the power dynamics in a given environment affect how politeness is used. Politeness is not only a surface-level aspect of speech; instead, it is a reflection of wider cultural values, moral principles, and standards of communication that support social order and respect for each other.

An increasing amount of investigation has shown that different cultures, genders, and communicative contexts require different approaches to politeness. For instance, when Gulo & Afriana (2024) investigated apologies expressions in The Princess Diaries, they discovered that female characters generally used positive politeness methods, such expressing empathy and giving compliments, to keep their relationships harmonious and intimate. This implies that relationships with others, social context, and gender have each an important influence on how politeness occurs. Similar to this, Afriana et al. (2023) examined English business letters from Batam companies and found that understatement, hedging, and apologizing are frequently used negative politeness techniques employed to demonstrate

professionalism and avoid impressing on the recipient of the letter. In a further cross-cultural study, Zainuddin & Yaqin (2024) investigated the apologetic strategies used by Indonesian and Bruneian students and identified a clear tendency for positive politeness which featured greetings, affirmations, and comprehensive justifications. Wengkang & Senduk (2021) observed that Manado Malay speakers modify their politeness methods according to the solidarity scale, changing between formal and informal registers to indicate various categories of social hierarchy and closeness, provide substance to this.

According to Almora & Heryono's (2025) macro-level investigation into Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi's statement at the UN, the speech was dominated by positive politeness strategies that placed an emphasis on cooperation, unity, and collective accountability, each of that are important components of diplomatic language. Gever Ishor et al. (2020) further strengthen cross-cultural comprehension by demonstrating how Tiv speakers in Nigeria use solidarity and politeness techniques that are influenced by socioeconomic class and situation, thereby illustrating the interdependence of social identity and language choice. Additionally, online platforms are used to linguistically and semiotically generate solidarity in varied societies, serving as a kind of political expression that reshapes collective belonging (Theodoropoulou & Borresly, 2025).

These viewpoints are expanded into digital and post-pandemic situations by current studies. In their study of rudeness tactics on Instagram directed at influencer Tasyi Athasyia, Afriana & Mubarak (2024) found that platform affordances and digital anonymity promote sarcastic comments and bald-on-record rudeness, indicating how online communication alters conventional politeness standards. In the same way, Rifai & Prasetyaningrum (2016) looked into address expressions in Tangled and made the case that using them appropriately shows politeness and supports social cohesiveness. By examining post-pandemic recovery speeches by world leaders, Omar & Habil (2023) demonstrated how metaphors, proverbs, and tales serve as instruments of discursive solidarity in political communication, evoking communal resilience to foster solidarity. In contrast, Kamandoko et al. (2022) established how evaluative language, through displays of emotion, judgment, and appreciation, contributes to the development of social transformation and national solidarity in their analysis of Indonesia's 2019 presidential debates. Additionally, Surjowati (2021) emphasized that students with varying geographic and cultural backgrounds display distinctive variations of both positive and negative politeness, reinforcing the idea that linguistic politeness has a solid foundation in social norms and cultural variety.

Contexts of religious and academic study provide complementary ideas. In order to preserve social peace and conform to communal ideals, Rangkuti et al. (2025) demonstrated that Islamic preachers in Medan purposefully utilize illocutionary and politeness methods, such as expressing respect, confirming the opinions of the audience, and bringing up the concept of gotong royong (mutual cooperation). Similarly, Ali et al. (2025) found that Pakistani teachers use praise, code-switching, and gentler instructions to strike a balance between power and solidarity, which promotes moral instruction and healthy educational settings.

A significant field is still unexplored despite these significant findings. Although political apologies have been extensively studied in a variety of academic fields, there are still few cross-cultural comparative studies that specifically address the politeness tactics employed by political leaders, especially in digital communication. A large portion of the current research, which is frequently controlled by Western theoretical frameworks, largely examines political apologies through the prism of crisis management or image repair. This limited approach carries the danger of ignoring cultural logics that influence how people express, understand, and accept apologies. For instance, Western political speech, particularly in the United States, tends to emphasize personal accountability and transparency, but Indonesian political communication is heavily impacted by collectivist principles, respect for hierarchy, and an emphasis on communal harmony. This distinction emphasizes how crucial it is to see political apologies as culturally specific behaviors rather than as universal speech patterns.

The objective of this study is to address this gap through the comparison of the sociolinguistic analysis of online apologies offered by Indonesian and American leaders. It examines for the communication standards and cultural scripts that influence the way they speak and rhetorical choices in situations of political instability. It is essential to comprehend these culturally distinctive tactics because they show how leaders combine local principles of moral responsibility, respect, and solidarity with global requirements for transparency. Sociolinguistic theory carries at the risk of maintaining a culturally limited comprehension of political apologies in the absence of such comparative investigation, which could decrease its analytical flexibility and effectiveness in the increasingly integrated digital age.

Overall, the examined studies support the idea that politeness is a culturally variable behavior influenced by power dynamics, social solidarity, moral reasoning, and situational dynamics rather than an established collection of language standards. Apologies serve as complicated, high-stakes performances in political discourse, particularly in the digital age, when leaders carefully use culturally established cues of politeness and solidarity to restore credibility, rebuild trust, and strengthen ties within the community. Therefore, this study investigates how these processes are demonstrated by American and Indonesian politicians' online political apologies. It provides a fresh sociolinguistic viewpoint that sees political apologies as culturally scripted communicative acts, balancing traditional practices with the requirements of international exposure through contrasting two distinct cultural settings.

METHOD

Participant

The study's participants were political leaders whose apologies were made public using online platforms instead of those who were specifically recruited through investigations. Public apologies that were shared through reputable and verifiable internet channels, such as official government websites, respectable digital news portals, and verified social media accounts on YouTube, Instagram, Twitter/X, and TikTok, were the primary objective of the selection. Twelve apology speeches in all, six from American and six from Indonesian political leaders were chosen.

In order to make sure that the corpus represented current trends in political communication in the digital era, the data gathering period ranged from 2019 to 2025. At this particular period, social media involvement increased, public criticism of political behavior increased, and political leaders were expected to be more transparent. The chosen apology letters were reactions to major crises, public disputes, or political scandals that called for responsibility.

In order to ensure that every chosen text had both linguistic richness and political significance, an intentional sampling method was used. Only apologies that (1) addressed a politically significant occurrence, (2) were distributed via official or verified platforms, and (3) featured enough practical indicators of politeness and solidarity tactics were included. This method was required in order to concentrate the investigation on communicative actions that served as sociolinguistic manifestations of cultural norms as well as political performances. To ensure the relevance and representativeness of the analysis, twelve apology texts were selected based on various sampling criteria. Apology texts were included if they: (1) directly responded to a public scandal, political crisis, or significant institutional controversy. (2) were made by political figures in strategic positions such that public perception was influenced by their statements. (3) were published through official and verified platforms, such as government websites, credible news portals, or verified social media accounts. And (4) occurred within a two-week period. These criteria ensured that each text contained a clear linguistic realization of strategies of politeness, responsibility-taking, and solidarity. They also allowed for an equitable comparison between the two national contexts.

Research Design

This study focused on the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language use in political apologies using a qualitative comparative discourse analysis approach. Because it enables a deep investigation of meaning, context, and interpretation, elements that quantitative analysis is unable to completely capture, the qualitative approach was chosen. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative research is especially suitable when the objective is to comprehend complicated, contextually based phenomena that rely on cultural interpretation.

This study used a comparative approach to investigate how political leaders in Indonesia and the United States, two very different cultural and ideological settings, offered apologies to their audiences. The study sought to identify the underlying cultural scripts that influence these communication decisions in addition to similarities and variations in language methods. By using this method, the study went beyond simple description to look at how language represents more profound sociopolitical principles like responsibility, transparency, hierarchy, and harmony within the community. Therefore, the comparative design provided a methodological avenue to uncover the language realizations of politeness and solidarity in various political and cultural contexts.

Procedure

The data for this study was gathered using purposive selection, a qualitative sample technique that deliberately selects texts that are most relevant to the research themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The selection was particularly focused on politically sensitive and culturally significant apologies since these conversations are full of facework and politeness strategies. The corpus consisted of twelve apology statements written between 2019 and 2025, six from American leaders and six from Indonesian leaders. This period was chosen to represent recent political communication strategies in the modern digital era, as politicians are increasingly using online platforms to apologize to audiences both locally and internationally.

The dataset only contained formal apologies distributed through reliable online news sources, verified social media accounts (Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube), or official government websites in order to maintain authenticity and credibility. Since they did not constitute deliberate and authoritative acts of political discourse, leaked communications, ceremonial statements, and parody or spoof accounts were not included in the dataset. To identify eligible texts, systematic keyword searches were conducted in both English and Indonesian using terms like "*apology*," "*sorry*," "*maaf*," and "*permintaan maaf.*" These searches were connected to the timeline of major political scandals, crises, or controversies to ensure that the selected apologies were closely associated with important political events. The study was able to gather evidence apologies that were both linguistically rich and politically meaningful due to this method.

This study employed a multi-layered coding system to conduct the analysis. This system combined deductive and inductive methods. Brown and Levinson's (1988) taxonomy of politeness strategies, which includes on-record, negative politeness, and off-record politeness, served as the primary framework for coding pragmatic features. Patterns such as acknowledgment of responsibility, use of mitigation, religious references, institutional framing, and expressions of solidarity emerged through inductive thematic analysis. Linguistic markers such as pronoun choice, use of hedging and intensifiers, moral or religious expressions, lexical framing of blame, and commitment to future action were used to examine each text. To enable comparison between the Indonesian and American corpora, all these markers were systematically recorded using a structured coding sheet.

Three separate stages of the analysis were carried out, each based on the theoretical framework of the study. To find important linguistic elements, like the use of pronouns, lexical framing, rhetorical devices, and indicators of humility or religion, all apology writings were read and reread in the first phase. This inductive stage was crucial for recording the intricate ways in which leaders expressed their apologies before the use of formal coding. The texts in the second phase were coded using Brown & Levinson's (1988) taxonomy of politeness approaches, which distinguishes between bald-on-record, off-record, negative, and positive politeness. Through this classification, the researchers were able to determine whether

political leaders' apologies focused on indirect face-saving tactics, solidarity, or direct accountability while negotiating face-threatening actions (FTAs). In this instance, Wierzbicka's (1991) idea of cultural scripts was also used to pinpoint communication characteristics that are culturally distinctive. Religious invocations, hierarchical framing, displays of humility, and symbols of group togetherness (using "*kami*" rather than "*saya*") were some of these characteristics. These characteristics were seen as mirror images of the deeper cultural reasoning for the apologetic tactics.

To find more general cultural tendencies and differences, the findings were compared between the American and Indonesian corpora in the third phase. This comparative stage demonstrated how Indonesian political apologies prioritized collective responsibility, humility, and religiosity, frequently shifting accountability to institutions or calling upon higher moral and spiritual authorities, while American apologies tended to emphasize individual responsibility and transparency, frequently through explicit first-person admissions of fault. By demonstrating how different cultural scripts of accountability influence linguistic politeness techniques, this step operationalized the theoretical contributions of both Brown and Levinson and Wierzbicka.

Several techniques were used to improve the validity and reliability of the results. In order to create an audit trail of the analytical process, the researchers kept reflective journals throughout the process, including interpretive decisions, emerging themes, and coding difficulties. In order to reduce researcher bias and increase the validity of the interpretations, peer debriefing was also carried out, in which unbiased peers examined and assessed coding decisions. Systematic sampling, theoretically informed coding, and stringent validity checks were all used in the process to guarantee that the results were both culturally and methodologically sound.

Mechanism of Analysis

This study's analytical methodology concentrated on how political apologies discursively create ideas of moral, legal, and social responsibility within contexts that are culturally different. The research acknowledged apologies as socio-political acts that leaders use to negotiate legitimacy, authority, and credibility in the public eye, in addition to being language performances.

Language and cultural components that represent collectivist values, like humility, hierarchy, spirituality, and collective responsibility, were highlighted in the analysis of the Indonesian corpus. Religious greetings, collective pronouns ("*kami*"), and expressions evoking the will of God (*atas izin Tuhan*) were examined as symbols of moral reverence and unity. These characteristics show how Indonesian leaders employ cultural norms of peace and respect for one another to defuse tensions and rebuild respect.

On the other hand, democratic ideals like transparency, responsibility, and individual agency were the focus of the analysis in the American corpus. Explicit expressions of grief, sincere confessions of mistakes, and frequent use of the first-person pronoun ("*I*") were viewed as representative of an individualistic communicative culture. Sincerity, moral accountability, and conformity to the public's expectation of transparent government are highlighted by these language decisions.

Several interconnected stages made up the analytical process. First, the authenticity and comparability of the chosen apology texts throughout the two national corpora were confirmed. Second, an iterative close reading of the texts was carried out during the important rhetorical devices, vocabulary selections, pronoun use, and expressions of responsibility, humility, and solidarity were noted. Third, language realizations of comparable pragmatic purposes, such apologizing, explaining, or restoring credibility, were carried out in culturally distinct ways through cross-contextual comparison.

Furthermore, contextual interpretation connected the language results to more general sociocultural frameworks: in the Indonesian context, collectivism, spirituality, and social harmony, whereas in the American context, transparency, individuality, and democracy. An understanding of how each community views the relational and ethical components of public apology has been rendered possible by this interpretative synthesis.

To guarantee transparency and reduce subjectivity, audit trails, peer validation, and reflective documentation were all maintained current updated during the analysis. The analytical mechanism places political apologies as cultural performances—acts that transcend language function to strategically negotiate political credibility, moral legitimacy, and communal solidarity in the digital age through fusing politeness theory with cultural pragmatics.

To increase the reliability of the analysis, multiple researchers cross-checked each other's coding results. To assess consistency in determining politeness strategies and thematic patterns, an inter-coder comparison process was conducted on 30% of the total data. Discrepancies were then discussed and resolved, resulting in a more stable coding standard that was applied to the entire corpus. Additionally, an audit trail also referred to as an audit trail was maintained throughout the research process and included interpretive reflections, analytical decisions, and thematic progression. To enhance the validity of the interpretations, debriefing sessions with external reviewers were also conducted. The external reviewers provided an independent evaluation of the consistency of the analysis and potential researcher bias.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the research that has been conducted, the researchers found several data samples, including 6 data from the United States government and 6 data from the Indonesian government. The data are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Apologies Statements from U.S' and Indonesia's Leaders

Leader's Name	Apologize Statement	Source
Joe Biden (USA) 2024	"I formally apologize. As president of the United States of America, for what we did. I formally apologize. And it's long overdue." "It's horribly, horribly wrong. It's a sin on our soul."	https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/10/25/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-biden-harris-administrations-record-of-delivering-for-tribal-communities-including-keeping-his-promise-to-make-this-historic-visit-to-indian-country-lavee/
Andrew Cuomo (USA) - 2021	"I now understand that I acted in a way that made people feel uncomfortable. It was unintentional. And I truly and deeply apologize for it."	https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/cuomo-apologizes-amid-sexual-harassment-claims-says-he-won-t-n1259491
Ralph Northam (USA) - 2019	"I am deeply sorry for the decision I made to appear as I did in this photo and for the hurt that decision caused then and now,"	https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/01/us/politics/ralph-northam-yearbook-blackface.html
White House (on behalf of president) (USA) - 2024	"President Biden has deep respect for Gov. Hutchinson and admires the race that he ran."	https://x.com/The_Shumater/status/1747731211206709654
George Santos (USA) - 2024	"I deeply regret my conduct, I fully accept responsibility for my actions, and I understand my actions have betrayed the trust of my supporters," "I am dedicated to making amends for the wrongs I have committed," "This plea is not just an admission of guilt. It's an acknowledgment I need to be held accountable like any other American that breaks the law."	https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/former-rep-george-santos-pleads-guilty-fraud-charges-rcna129255
Mark Herring (USA) - 2019	"This was a one-time occurrence and I accept full responsibility for my conduct. That conduct clearly shows that, as a young man, I had a callous and inexcusable lack of awareness and insensitivity to the pain my behavior could inflict on others. It was really a minimization of both people of color, and a	http://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/06/politics/virginia-attorney-general-blackface/

	minimization of a horrific history I knew well even then."	
Nadiem Makarim (Indonesia) - 2020	"Dengan penuh rendah hati saya memohon maaf atas segala keprihatinan yang timbul dan berharap agar tokoh dan pimpinan NU, Muhammadiyah dan PGRI bersedia untuk terus memberikan bimbingan dalam proses pelaksanaan program yang kami sadari betul masih belum sempurna,"	https://www.instagram.com/p/CDNvnNvnR-R/
	Translate: *"I genuinely apologize for any worries that have been raised, and I hope that the leaders of NU , Muhammadiyah, and PGRI will continue to offer direction during the program's implementation phase, which we well understand is still not perfect."*	
Prasetyo Hadi (Indonesia) – 2025	"Tentunya kami atas namanya pemerintah dan mewakili Badan Gizi Nasional, memohon maaf karena telah terjadi kembali beberapa kasus di beberapa daerah," *Translate:* *"Of course, we apologize on behalf of the National Nutrition Agency and the government for the recurrence of multiple cases in some areas."*	https://x.com/kompascom/status/1969004391899300097
Sidiq Haryono (Indonesia) – 2025	"Kami memohon maaf sebesar-besarnya kepada para jemaah atas keterlambatan layanan konsumsi pada hari pertama pasca Armuzna. Beberapa mitra dapur mengalami gangguan operasional yang berdampak pada ketepatan distribusi. Kami segera mengambil langkah cepat dengan mendistribusikan makanan pengganti seperti nasi bukhari, shawarma, dan makanan siap saji (RTE), namun kami menyadari hal tersebut belum sepenuhnya memenuhi harapan." *Translate:* *"We sincerely apologize to the pilgrims for the inconvenience caused by the postponement of the meal services on the first day following Armuzna. Distribution timeliness was impacted by operational delays experienced by a number of catering partners. We acknowledged that this still fell short of expectations, but we moved quickly to provide replacement meals including shawarma, bukhari rice, and ready-to-eat (RTE) cuisine."*	https://bpkh.go.id/bpkh-limited-sampaikan-permintaan-maaf-atas-ketidaksempurnaan-layanan-konsumsi-jemaah-haji-pasca-armuzna/
Uya Kuya Indonesia – (2025)	"Dengan segala kerendahan hati, saya minta maaf yang sebesar besarnya kepada masyarakat Indonesia dan saya mohon ampun kepada Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala. Saya berkomitmen untuk menjadi pribadi yang lebih baik lagi dan lebih berhati hati dalam bersikap" *Translation:* *"I humbly apologize to the Indonesian people and entreat Allah, the Almighty, for their forgiveness. My goal is to improve myself and become more circumspect in my behavior."*	https://www.instagram.com/reel/DN-4PSUAU30/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
Puan Maharani (Indonesia) – 2025	"Atas nama anggota DPR dan pimpinan DPR, sekali lagi saya meminta maaf jika kami sebagai wakil rakyat belum bisa bekerja dengan baik secara sempurna," *Translation:* *"I sincerely apologize on behalf of the DPR's members and leadership if we have not yet been able to carry out our responsibilities as the people's representatives."*	https://www.instagram.com/reel/DN_wgdrE4-3/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Eko Patrio (Indonesia) – 2025	"Bismillahirahmanirahim dengan ini saya menyampaikan permohonan maaf yang sebesar-besarnya kepada masyarakat indonesia. Kejadian ini menjadi pelajaran yang sangat berharga bagi saya pribadi dan saya berkomitmen untuk menjadi pribadi yang lebih baik lagi." *Translation: "Bismillahirahmanirahim, I want to apologize to the people of Indonesia from the bottom of my heart. My personal life has learned a great deal from this tragedy, and I'm determined to improve myself."*	https://www.instagram.com/reel/DN-xjcHAceV/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Political Apologies in The United States

The principles of moral responsibility, openness, and personal accountability form the majority of the cultural underpinnings of American political apologies. This aligns with Brown & Levinson's (1988) definition of negative face, which is the speaker's candid admission of misconduct to uphold the audience's right to respect. A key component of credibility in the American political system is a leader's readiness to be honest and own up to their faults. Although defensive or mitigating tactics may be used, they rarely take the place of the expectation of direct accountability. American political apologies are therefore performative acts of democratic accountability as leaders show that they are prepared to confront misconduct and maintain transparency (Omar & Habil, 2023).

A prime example is Joe Biden's 2024 apology, in which he repeatedly states, "I formally apologize," and describes the offense as "a sin on our soul." A bald-on-record politeness strategy, where directness maximizes sincerity, is exemplified by the frequent use of "formally apologize" (Brown & Levinson, 1988). Omar & Habil (2023) contend that leaders use moral narratives and metaphors in political apologies to foster trust and togetherness, and the metaphor of "our soul," on the other hand, elevates the act above personal culpability to a matter of national morality. Wierzbicka's (1991) cultural script of accountability is best illustrated in the American context by this moral framing, which presents personal admissions of guilt as part of a collective democratic duty.

An illustration of finding a balance between accountability and mitigation is Andrew Cuomo's 2021 apologies. His admission of wrongdoing, "I did something that made people uncomfortable," is toned down by the phrase "it was unintentional." In order to protect the speaker's reputation from potential political or legal fallout, accountability is acknowledged but minimized in this instance of negative politeness. Mitigation is commonly employed in apologetic situations to preserve credibility while still meeting accountability standards, claim Zainuddin & Yaqin (2024). A recurrent pattern in American political apologies is shown by Cuomo's double technique: leaders must appear self-critical and honest while also creating linguistic safeguards that reduce potential harm.

Ralph Northam's 2019 apology, which situates specific offenses within the broader framework of historical injustice, adds another level of complexity. By expressing empathy for systemic racism, Northam says, "I am deeply sorry… for the hurt that decision caused then and now." This backs up Holmes' (1992) claim that apologizing is often a social ritual used to mend interpersonal and institutional harm. His use of language supports the finding of Almora & Heryono (2025) that constructive politeness tactics, such as relating to common ideals, are frequently employed in political discourse to fortify solidarity during disagreements.

The United States does not usually issue a direct apology. An example of the use of off-record politeness strategies to maintain institutional ties without openly admitting wrongdoing is the White House's 2024 statement regarding Biden's relationship with Governor Hutchinson, which stated, "President Biden has deep respect for Gov. Hutchinson." These evasive apologies prioritize political diplomacy in an effort to save face. Gever Ishor et al. (2020) observed similar trends in Tiv community discourse, where politeness strategies are driven by contextual needs to balance accountability and solidarity. In this instance,

indirectness supports two equally important cultural norms in American political discourse: respect and institutional dignity.

George Santos' 2024 apology takes a different approach by focusing on the cultural script of equality before the law: "I need to be held accountable like any other American." This illustrates how American politicians use civic equality, justice, and democratic standards to regain public trust. This strategy supports the claim made by Theodoropoulou & Borresly (2025) that online political unity is often redefined by language appeals to shared democratic values.

Finally, Mark Herring's 2019 apologies are an example of overt self-blame that conforms to American principles of transparency. "I take complete responsibility," he declared. This exhibits both moral self-condemnation and bald-on-record civility: "I had a callous and inexcusable lack of awareness." According to Goffman's (1967) face theory, publicly acknowledging guilt is one way to "restore face" with the audience. Herring's statement helps to restore public trust by reflecting the increased expectation that leaders must not only own up to their mistakes but also show that they are morally cognizant of the harm they have caused.

These U.S. cases share some similarities. First, first-person singular pronouns are consistently employed to identify the individual as the accountable agent ("I apologize," "I accept responsibility"). Second, apologies are frequently direct and honest, directly stating the offense. Third, explanations based on morality, justice, and fairness help to sustain democratic norms by illustrating that accountability is both a civic and personal responsibility. Even if mitigating strategies such as "it was unintentional" are occasionally used, they do not diminish the importance of personal accountability. According to Omar and Habil (2023) and Almora and Heryono (2025), political apologies function as both crisis interventions and symbolic reaffirmations of the accountability standards that underpin public trust in democratic societies.

The emphasis on personal responsibilities and accountability is further reinforced by a number of linguistic markers from the U.S. data, which serve as actual examples of these tactics. One example of a bald-on-record approach that is consistent with democratic norms for transparency is Biden's frequent usage of the formulaic "I formally apologise." Similarly, statements like "I fully accept responsibility for my actions" (Santos, 2024) or "I take full responsibility" (Herring, 2019) demonstrate clear responsibility-taking, a pattern that is seldom tempered by collectivising terms. These passages demonstrate how American leaders constantly emphasise the individual self ("I") as the main moral agent in instances of apology.

Political Apologies in Indonesia

Among the cultural underpinnings of political apologies in Indonesia include collectivism, hierarchy, humility, and spirituality. Indonesian apologies frequently employ institutional framing and collective pronouns ("kami"), in contrast to the American system of intensely individualized accountability. This is consistent with the idea of cultural scripts, as proposed by Wierzbicka (1991), which highlights the way in which language encodes cultural logics. The screenplay prioritizes shared responsibility and communal cohesiveness over personal shame in this instance. These strategies align with the paradigm of Brown & Levinson (1988), which emphasizes solidarity and reduces social distance, and off-record civility, which diminishes the imposition of direct self-blame.

A notable illustration of this is Nadiem Makarim's 2020 apology. His reference to "dengan penuh rendah hati" (with utmost humility) highlights submission, and his request for guidance from Muhammadiyah, PGRI, and NU shows how reliant he is on higher authority to back up his claims. According to Rangkuti et al. (2025), this is consistent with Indonesian Islamic preaching, which determined that religious and communal references are necessary to restore legitimacy and solidarity. Invoking humility and guidance, Makarim performs a political and culturally significant ritual of adoration while also adhering to Indonesian norms of respect for authority.

The 2025 apologies from Prasetyo Hadi also emphasizes institutional culpability by using the collective pronoun "kami" for "saya." "On behalf of the government and National

Nutrition Agency," he stated, "atas nama pemerintah dan Badan Gizi Nasional," which places accountability on the organization while downplaying personal liability. This strategy is consistent with Surjowati's (2021) finding that Indonesian speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds often employ collectivist forms of politeness to preserve harmony in hierarchical relationships. The use of "kami" demonstrates that Indonesian apologies are less about personal guilt and more about reaffirming institutional solidarity with the public.

Sidiq Haryono in 2025 apology adds another cultural dimension by combining humility with promises of corrective action: "kami segera mengambil langkah cepat" (we swiftly took fast action). This is consistent with Kamandoko et al. (2022), who found that in Indonesian political discourse, apologies are often included in pledges for the future, exhibiting accountability through speech that is improvement-oriented rather than self-absorbed. By portraying flaws as "belum sempurna" (not yet perfect), these vows reinforce the cultural narrative of ongoing improvement by portraying them as temporary obstacles in a collective endeavor to get better.

Religion plays a significant role in Indonesian apologies. For instance, Uya Kuya's 2025 confession, "saya mohon ampun kepada Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala," implores God to forgive him. In a similar vein, Eko Patrio begins with the ceremonial phrase "Bismillahirrahmanirrahim," framing his act of contrition as both spiritual and political. Internationally, Indonesian politicians frequently employ religious sentiments to show their sincerity and adhere to shared moral principles (Almora & Heryono, 2025). In a spiritually minded community, these invocations boost credibility and reassure the audience that the speaker's duty encompasses moral and spiritual obligations in addition to political ones.

Puan Maharani used the same institutional justification when he apologized "atas nama DPR" (on behalf of the parliament) in 2025. In Indonesian politics, officials act as representatives of larger bodies rather than as individuals, as evidenced by her comments. This is in line with a study conducted in 2024 by Zainuddin & Yaqin, which compared pupils from Indonesia and Brunei. The study found that collectivist and deferential apologetic forms are frequently used by Indonesian speakers, demonstrating the cultural significance of group affiliation and hierarchy.

When taken as an entire, Indonesian political apologies exhibit a clear trend: they emphasize spirituality, humility, and solidarity more than they do direct personal culpability. Words like "kami memohon maaf" (we apologize) and references to respectable institutions or divine pardon are examples of positive politeness strategies meant to maintain harmony and dignity. Mitigating terms like "belum sempurna" (not yet perfect) reduce blame and reframe mistakes as part of a continual process of improvement, which is consistent with Brown & Levinson's (1988) theory of limiting face-threats. These language strategies not only rebuild audience unity and moral alignment, but they also restore trust. As indicated by Wierzbicka's (1991) theory, apologies in Indonesia are deeply ingrained in cultural norms that prioritize peace, hierarchy, and spirituality over the Western emphasis on transparency and individual responsibility.

Additionally, the Indonesian data shows distinct linguistic markers of religious grounding, collectivism, and humility. As seen by Prasetyo Hadi's and Sidiq Haryono's apologies, leaders often use the collectivised phrase "kami memohon maaf," which places the blame on institutions rather than the individual speaker. Formulas as "Bismillahirrahmanirrahim" (Eko Patrio, 2025) and "saya mohon ampun kepada Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala" (Uya Kuya, 2025) frame the apology within spiritual accountability, highlighting moral and religious arguments. These illustrations show how Indonesian apologies deliberately use moral and religious perspectives to create sincerity and unity that go beyond simple political duty.

Comparative Analysis

The results show that the underlying cultural scripts of accountability and solidarity, which essentially influence the language manifestation of political apologies, clearly differ between the American and Indonesian contexts. Based on the bald-on-record tactic and Brown & Levinson's (1988) notion of politeness, American political apologies are

characterized by a high level of directness, transparency, and personal responsibility. This language usage reflects the societal assumption that a speaker's credibility and sincerity are increased when they explicitly admit their mistakes. Explicit first-person pronouns, such "I apologize," "I am responsible," or "I take full accountability," are frequently used by American politicians in this context to express personal responsibility for mistakes. By establishing the apology as a performative act of ethical repair, these language indicators support the idea of personal moral responsibility. This is consistent with Goffman's (1967) face theory, which holds that offering an apology serves as a ritual to repair a damaged public image and restore social balance. Transparency is a crucial component of political legitimacy, according to Omar and Habil (2023), who also highlight how political leaders in democracies typically use plain, moral, and unambiguous language in order to gain back the public's trust.

On the other hand, Wierzbicka (1991) explains that Indonesian political apologies function within a collectivist, hierarchical, and spiritual context. In order to shift responsibility from the person to the group, leaders commonly employ plural pronouns like kami (we) or apologize atas nama (on behalf of) organizations or the country. The societal norm that prioritizes interdependence and community peace over personal responsibility is reflected in this rhetorical device. Surjowati's (2021) results, which indicate that Indonesian speakers often define blame as shared in order to preserve social balance and reduce conflict, are in line with these inclinations. Furthermore, theological and moral elements, such as Bismillahirrahmanirrahim or mohon ampun kepada Allah, as well as expressions of humiliation, such as dengan penuh rendah hati ("with deep humility"), are frequently used in Indonesian political apologies. These verbal and spiritual expressions show that Indonesian apologies go beyond simple political expression; they are also moral deeds that reaffirm respect for divine authority and spiritual sincerity. In a comparable direction, Rangkuti et al. (2025) noted that in order to maintain credibility and uphold communal norms, humility and divine reference are commonly used in Indonesian religious discourse.

Their different perspectives are further revealed by the way in which the two cultures generate togetherness. In the United States, demands for democratic equality and civic responsibility are used to linguistically construct solidarity. George Santos invoked solidarity based on equality and justice when he said that he should be held accountable "like any other American." This is consistent with Theodoropoulou & Borresly's (2025) claim that online political communication increasingly redefines solidarity in terms of shared democratic values and civic responsibility. On the other hand, spiritual veneration and respect for social hierarchy are how Indonesian political leaders foster unity. Relational and moral hierarchies are deeply embedded in the vocabulary of public personalities like Nadiem Makarim, who demonstrates respect for religious groups like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, and entertainers like Uya Kuya, who express their apologies as requests for God's pardon. Instead of using egalitarian language, these phrases serve to reestablish solidarity via respect for authority and a common spirituality.

The level of directness with which fault is expressed is another noteworthy distinction. Even when dealing with politically delicate subjects, American apologies are usually clear and concise. Ralph Northam's mention of racial insensitivity, for example, demonstrates how American politicians accept some offenses as a necessary component of democratic accountability. This is a reflection of what Almora & Heryono (2025) refer to as the importance that culture put on transparency and openness. Indonesian apologies, on the other hand, are more indirect and linguistically moderate. The mitigating phrase belum sempurna, which means "not yet perfect," is sometimes used to describe errors instead of outright acknowledgments of guilt. This tendency is consistent with the results of Zainuddin & Yaqin (2024), who noted that in order to preserve mutual respect and social peace, Indonesian speakers favor gentler phrases. Avoiding direct self-blame in this situation serves as a culturally acceptable tactic to preserve communal coherence and dignity rather than as concealment.

When combined, these results support the claim that political apologies are not universal language behaviors but rather culturally constructed performances (Wierzbicka,

1991). American apologies come from a communicative heritage that reflects a democratic logic of responsibility by associating transparency with sincerity. However, in order to regain credibility within a relational moral system, Indonesian apologies rely on spiritual sincerity, social accountability, and hierarchical respect. Both types of apology, in spite of their cultural distinctions, have the practical purpose of reestablishing social cohesion, credibility, and trust. In the end, the comparative research shows that although political apologies are universally recognized as beneficial gestures, each society's unique cultural logics of politeness, authority, and communal solidarity have a significant influence on their meanings, forms, and moral foundations.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that political apologies are culturally programmed actions shaped by various moral and communication logics, rather than merely crisis management strategies. Goffman's (1967) concept of facework posits that forthright self-blame reinstates personal credibility, whereas Brown and Levinson's (1988) bald-on-record politeness strategies are evident in American apologies, which emphasize democratic transparency and individual accountability. The cultural belief that transparency and fairness are fundamental to democratic trust is bolstered by the regular employment of first-person pronouns and explicit acknowledgments of misconduct by American leaders. In contrast, Wierzbicka's (1991) concept of cultural scripts is in line with Indonesian political apologies, which are organized around collectivism, hierarchy, humility, and spirituality. Leaders frequently use religious terminology, speak on behalf of organizations ("kami"), and frame errors as a necessary part of a continuous process of development ("belum sempurna"). These tactics demonstrate constructive politeness that is focused on deference and solidarity, where credibility is restored via submission to authority and moral alignment with communal and religious beliefs. The study's comparison of these two situations demonstrates that solidarity and politeness are culturally particular rather than universal. Although the pragmatic objective of restoring legitimacy and public trust is shared by both Indonesian and American leaders, their approaches differ in terms of cultural logics: relational and spiritual harmony against direct democratic accountability. This result supports previous research that suggests political apologies are best understood as discursive acts situated within larger cultural, moral, and institutional frameworks (e.g., Omar & Habil, 2023; Almora & Heryono, 2025; Zainuddin & Yaqin, 2024; Rangkuti et al., 2025). By demonstrating that Brown & Levinson's politeness model needs cultural contextualization, the study theoretically improves sociolinguistics. Analysis that ignores relational and spiritual aspects of non-Western discourse runs the risk of favoring Western standards of transparency. In practical terms, the results emphasize the significance of culturally aware political communication interpretations, particularly in the digital age where leaders' apologies are quickly viewed by audiences throughout the world. Overall, by showing how American and Indonesian leaders use distinct but equally valid apologetic tactics, this comparative study offers a fresh viewpoint. Whether through accountability to democratic standards in the United States or through humility and moral deference in Indonesia, it demonstrates that political apologies are not just actions of repair but also symbolic reaffirmations of cultural values.

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