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## **The Nuances of Populist Discourse: Analyzing the Continuities and Contrasts in US Foreign Policy between Bush and Trump**

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# The Nuances of Populist Discourse: Analyzing the Continuities and Contrasts in US Foreign Policy between Bush and Trump

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## Introduction

In recent years, especially since the 2016 election of Donald Trump in the United States (US), populism has emerged as a global force, capturing headlines, political campaigns, and academia alike (Wojczewski, 2020, p.292). With its vague promise to uplift the voices of the “people” against perceived elites, populist parties and movements have ignited fervent debates and reshaped political landscapes (Moffitt, 2016, p.1). US politics have been interwoven with populism for centuries, triggered by cycles of economic inequality, societal changes, and political discontent with established norms and elites (Brewer, 2016, pp. 250-251). Although scholars have extensively studied populism’s impact on domestic politics, its influence on foreign policy has only recently gained recognition (Chryssogelos, 2017, p.1; Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017, p.384). This is particularly relevant for the US, a superpower whose foreign policy decisions can lead to changes across the international system (Chryssogelos, 2017, p.1). History shows that populists’ enticing narratives can have an outsized impact. Politicians like Andrew Jackson, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan have been influential in US politics in their era and beyond, yet their established scapegoating against foreigners alleging collusion with domestic elites has received less attention in academia (Lowndes, 2017, p.232-234, Brewer, 2016, p.250).

Examining the relationship between populism and US foreign policy is essential for understanding both the state’s role in international relations and how the consequences of global populist policy reverberate back into the domestic system. This has become evident in recent decades, where populist rhetoric has been increasingly present in US presidents’ speeches and policies, particularly on the Republican side (Bimes & Mulroy, 2004, p.138; Foley, 2007, p.668). Following populist ideas, recent Republican presidents like George W. Bush and Donald Trump have not only won elections but also subsequently transformed global economic, social, and political structures with lasting impacts. Their populist moralism, framing international relations as a clear dichotomy of good vs evil dichotomy, has reshaped state interactions for decades (Foley, 2007, p.677). Therefore, understanding their populist discourse is vital to comprehending current and future policy choices at both national and international institutional levels.

Previous literature on populism's impact on US foreign policy has been challenged by the debated nature of populism, which is seen as a thin ideology, a discourse, or a political strategy (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p.2). This conceptual ambiguity leads to inconsistencies in classifying recent presidents as populist and interpreting their foreign policy choices. For instance, while Bush is often portrayed as having a compassionate conservative foreign policy compared to Trump's policies (Ashbee, Dumbrell, & Waddan, 2019, p.18), he is also described as staunchly populist in those few papers focusing on his foreign policies from a populist angle (Foley, 2007; Shogan, 2007). This dissensus must be investigated and the distinction between modern iterations of US populist foreign policies clarified.

The following research includes a literature review analyzing key works on US populism and its connection to foreign policy. This is followed by a theoretical framework defining inclusionary and exclusionary populism as key subtypes of populism and their relation to populist foreign policy. Then, the qualitative research design will be presented, detailing the case selection of Bush's and Trump's foreign policies. Next, the results of the discourse analysis are examined and discussed, contextualizing the findings within broader academic discussion. The conclusion summarizes the research findings and stresses the most relevant implications. Finally, avenues for further research will be presented.

## Literature review

The rise of populists to political fame globally in recent decades has garnered substantial academic attention. Populism in the US has garnered periodic attention since the 1970s, notably increasing within the Republican party in recent decades (Lowndes, 2017,p.233). Research tends to focus on internal causes, policies, and consequences of populism, with less attention on populism's impact on foreign policy. While individual assessments of administrations' populist foreign policies have been done, comparative work on the populist differences between Republican presidents in recent history is still missing.

## On US populism

Scholars agree that populism has been present in the American system since the 19th century but debate the types of contemporary populism in the US. Andrew Jackson's presidency is

commonly understood to be the beginning of populism in presidential politics, arguing for people's sovereignty and amassing a rural following. Most research on US populism are framed within a left/right-wing divide in populist discourse and action (Brewer, 2016, p.252; Foley, 2007,p.347). This distinction was clarified by Lowndes, who describes left-wing populists' emphasis on economic inequalities, while right-wing populism focuses on grievances against elites and non-white minorities (2017, p.233).

Kazin describes populism as deeply ingrained in the American political system (1995, p.2). In contrast to Lowndes, he argues that the flexibility of US populism transcends traditional political divides, with populist politicians adopting narratives typically seen as right and left-wing (Kazin,1995, p.3). Scholars in recent years have built on this understanding by introducing the concepts of inclusionary and exclusionary populism to distinguish different populist traits (Wetering, 2020, pp. 100-101; Stoecker & Witkovsky, 2020, p.132). Exclusionary populism, factions of the Republican party including Trump and his allies, focuses on invoking feelings of (symbolic and material) deprivation within a specific ingroup defined by race, income, and immigration status (Stoecker & Witkovsky, 2020, pp.136,141). Conversely, inclusionary populism targets solely government or economic elites, aiming to empower a more diverse group of people and excluding only such perceived elites (Stoecker & Witkovsky, 2020, p.136).

Beyond this, authors agree on core characteristics of US exclusionary populism, such as transgressions, charismatic leadership, and specific rhetoric. Transgressions, defined as actions or behaviors that violate norms and have long shaped American politics in both inflammatory language and physical violence (Lowndes, 2017, p.240-242; Wojczewski, 2020, p.303; Cha, 2016, p.85; 90). Populist leaders such as Trump encourage such behavior against the elites and outgroups, notably inciting violence after his election loss in 2020 (Crothers & Burgener, 2021, p.132). Trump's charisma as *the People's* leader is pivotal (Art, 2020, p.1007; Wojczewski, 2020, p.305). He creates, as have other populist leaders, a distinct social identity around himself and thus an easily identifiable figure for citizens to align with or oppose (Wojczewski, 2020, p.305-306). Finally, Lowndes emphasizes the pervasiveness of populist rhetoric in American political discourse, with Republican leaders using emotionally charged language such as "welfare queens" who seek to exploit the overgrown corrupt government to the detriment of the "silent majority" in rural "forgotten America," whom they claim to represent (2017, p.233). The

importance of rhetoric for policy action is shown by Shogan and Foley, who discuss Bush's moralism and anti-intellectualism, respectively (Shogan, 2007; Foley, 2007). Bush's tendency to justify policies, specifically foreign ones, through values and simplistic narratives of good and evil is a common populist narrative.

## On US populism and foreign policy

Because American populism is traditionally occupied with homegrown themes and inward scholarly perspectives, its impact on US foreign policy is a less studied (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017, p.384). However, research on European and Latin American populist foreign policy reveals that domestic populist influence international affairs as much as they are influenced by them (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017, p.384). For an influential state like the US, it is important to understand what populism means for foreign policy. Most literature on this topic consists of single case studies of presidential foreign policies, which provide insights into the broader impact of populism on foreign policy. For example, Wojczewski studies how foreign policy and populism jointly create identities of both the "self", understood as the "people" and the "other," which includes domestic elites and foreign forces, by researching Trump's first term (2020, p.294).

Concerning populism in foreign policy, scholars debate the distinctiveness of the recent presidents' populist foreign policy. Cha and Mead highlight similarities between Trump's 2016 proposed foreign policies and Jacksonian ideals, emphasizing a quasi-realist, isolationist perspective, mistrust of international institutions, and relying only retaliatory military power (Cha, 2016, pp. 84-86; Mead, 2017, p. 4). These features widely overlap with exclusionary populism, as mentioned above. Notably, Trumpian foreign policy is presented as a marked shift from the previous Republican foreign policy, which included at least tacit support of international norms and the US hegemonic position in the international system, more aligned with an inclusionary populist discourse (Cha, 2016, p.88; Mead, 2017, p.3).

Yet, Foley and Mead, in an earlier book, argue that Bush's foreign policy, particularly the Iraq War, also aligns with Jacksonian principles of severe military retaliation (Foley, 2007, pp. 682-683; Mead, 2004; Mead & Suri, 2005, p.304), creating a mismatch in the literature. The articles have weaknesses in argumentation: Cha's article includes reductive reasoning, as it fails to

clearly define populism and its exclusive yet descriptive focus on Trump, and Jackson ignores other potential influences on Trump, such as more recently established populist leaders, such as Reagan (Kazin, 1995). Reviewers of Mead discuss his generalizations of the term "Jacksonian," which allow for seeming contradictions like calling both Bush and Trump uniquely Jacksonian (Mead & Suri, 2005, p.304). These weaknesses in argumentation are also discussed by Wojczewski, who asserts that treating Jacksonism or Trumpism as fixed overlooks their variability, oversimplifying the analysis and leading to reductive conclusions (2020, p.293). While considering different populist influences, Foley's argumentation lacks evidence: While Bush's speeches substantiate parts of his arguments, others seem to rest solely on his reasoning. Hence, revisiting populism's presence in foreign policy in both administrations is necessary. To address these inconsistencies and prove a clearer understanding.

Other articles describing the US populism in recent decades create a further dissensus on the nature of Bush's and Trump's populist foreign policy. Some distinguish Trump as a deviant case among Republican presidents (Ashbee et al., 2019, pp.93-96, Steff & Tidwell, 2020, p.394), while others highlight that previous Republican presidents have been similarly populist (Brewer, 2016, p.250). No comparative works discuss the two most recent Republican presidents who could clarify this dissensus and offer a distinction beyond their ascribed Jacksonian, right-wing populist identity, such as their positioning within the spectrum of inclusionary and exclusionary populism.

Research using inclusionary and exclusionary populist conceptualizations in foreign policy is rare. However, multiple authors discuss traits of inclusionary and exclusionary populism in relation to recent presidents. Shogan describes Bush's moralist approach to counterterrorism, aimed at a wide domestic and international audience, which can be understood as inclusionary populist discourse (Foley, 2007, pp. 677-678). Wojczewski discusses Trump's demonizing of outgroups, like Democrats, immigrants, and foreign actors, as threats to the nation's security and prosperity, which is adjacent to previous domestic exclusionary characteristics. Direct research on their inclusionary or exclusionary nature has not been conducted.



## Theoretical Gap and Research Question

The literature debates on the conceptualization of US populism and its significance in contemporary politics. Literature on the populism of the most recent Republican presidents presents an interesting split: Those focused on Trump's foreign policy downplay Bush's populist traits, while those focusing on Bush's foreign policy emphasize his populism. Many articles focus solely on Trump, suggesting a deviant case, while potentially succumbing to recency bias. Articles focusing on a broader US populism contribute only vaguely to the different populist subtypes recent presidents could be classified into, and comparative articles typically analyze presidents from different eras. Therefore, this research aims to address these gaps in the literature in two ways: First, the research will compare modern Republican populist foreign policies, an analysis not yet undertaken. Second, it will reevaluate existing literature to clarify the dissensus on Bush's and Trump's foreign policies and examine how their foreign policy can be understood as affected by any type of populism. The following research seeks to answer the research question:

*How does inclusionary or exclusionary populism affect Republican presidents' foreign policy?*

## Theoretical framework

### Populist approaches

Despite the extensive literature on the subject, defining populism and its significance remains contentious among scholars. Most scholars agree that populism is defined by its promise to empower "the virtuous people" against "the devious elite" (Lowndes, 2017, p.233; Wojczewski, 2020, p.295; Kazin, 1995, p.1; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012, p.5). However, there is no consensus on how to conceptualize populism beyond this basic definition. It is variously seen as an ideology, a type of political discourse, or a rhetorical strategy (Pappas, 2016, pp.17-19). Mudde's widely accepted definition describes populism as "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* [general will] of the people" (Mudde, 2004, p.543).

Critics argue that populism as a thin-centered ideology oversimplifies its complexity, noting that populism encompasses various traditions and manifests differently in different contexts (Wetering, 2020, p.92; Wojczewski, 2020, p.293). In light of this, this research follows the approach of Laclau and Mouffe, who understand populism as a discourse, describing its dynamic nature by framing issues as a struggle between the people and the elite (2001). This approach emphasizes the role of rhetoric, societal symbols, and narratives in shaping populist movements and allows for a nuanced understanding of their policies. Wojczewski substantiates this approach, explaining how the discursive approach allows capturing the interactions of discursive concepts such as foreign policy and populism (Wojczewski, 2020, p.293).

Therefore, this research adopts the core definition agreed upon by most scholars, but applies it to a discursive approach, according to Laclau and Mouffe. This framework introduces the concepts of the “people” and the “other” as empty signifiers without a distinct meaning, allowing for a flexible interpretation depending on the political objectives of the actors involved (Laclau, 2004, p.85). As these conceptualizations are widely used, this research also incorporates them.

## The Theory of Inclusionary and Exclusionary Populism

The left and right-wing distinction is commonly applied in the literature and understanding of US populism (Lowndes, 2017, p.233) and will be used as a basis in this research as well. Lowndes describes how right-wing populists see the “people” in opposition to a coalition of resented minorities, a government catering to these minorities, and powerful international forces (2017, p.235). But this broad categorization cannot capture the nuances within right-wing populism yet, which is needed in empirical research. To address this, this research will use the sub-types of inclusionary and exclusionary populism.

The theory of inclusionary and exclusionary populism developed by Mudde and Kaltwasser among others, was built based on a comparative regional case study of populism in Europe and Latin America (2013). It suggests that populism in different regions can be classified as either inclusionary or exclusionary based on their leaders and party rhetoric and policies. Based on previous research, the theory offers three dimensions of inclusion and exclusion that can be studied: material, political, and symbolic (Filc, 2010, p.128-38). The material dimension involves the distribution of monetary and non-monetary state resources to specific groups in

society Inclusionary provisions aim to broaden access to institutions to previously excluded minority groups, while exclusionary populism denies certain groups' or favors other groups' access to these resources (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p.158). Political inclusion means that the government increases the political participation of targeted groups, whereas exclusionary political policies seek to marginalize certain groups and prevent their participation within the democratic system (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p.161). This occurs through marginalizing rhetoric or the implicit threat of transgression. Symbolic inclusion and exclusion are the least tangible dimension but are the most important, according to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013, p.164). Populists define the "people" implicitly labeling all other groups are part of the "elite" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p.164). This simplification aspect of populism was highlighted by Foley: In populism, complex relationships, and social structures are broken down into simple structures of "us vs. them" (Foley, 2007, p.277) Here, Stoecker and Witovsky's understanding of inclusionary and exclusionary populism can corroborate Mudde and Kaltwasser's theory. Both inclusionary and exclusionary populists simplify but differ in their definition of the "people". Inclusionary populists seek to unify a large part of the electorate, including marginalized groups. Exclusionary populists adopt a divisive, often ethnonationalist stance, pitting the "people" against social groups, such as immigrants, the media, and perceived political elites (Mudde, 2007, p.63).

It has to be emphasized that these dimensions are often expressed implicitly, especially in exclusionary populism: Material and political exclusion can be as intangible as symbolic institutions, achieved through marginalizing rhetoric in speeches and policies, or implicit threats, which a core feature of populist discourse. Further, Mudde and Kaltwasser highlight that no populist campaign is purely inclusionary or exclusionary but often includes elements of both (2013, p. 150; Laclau, 1977). However, they note that movements led by specific parties or leaders tend to lean towards in one direction, leading to distinguishable policy implications. Another advantage of the inclusionary and exclusionary populism theory is that it can classify actions within right-wing populism. Mudde and Kaltwasser compile multiple sources emphasizing inclusionary or exclusionary aspects of right-wing populism in Latin America (2013, p.156). The goal of this research is to capture nuances within the right-wing Republican party and this theory can serve this cause.

## The Link between Populism and Foreign Policy

While the theory of inclusionary and exclusionary populism provides nuanced insights into populist discourse, Wojczewski's research explores the connection between populist and foreign policy discourse. He expands the idea of the "people" to the concept of the "self," (people within the state) while describing the counterpart as the "other," (domestic elites and foreign forces) (Wojczewski, 2020, pp.293-294). His work identifies three ways populists use foreign policy to create antagonistic relationships between the people and the elite (Wojczewski, 2020, p.296). First, in the typical populist up/down antagonism present with both left- and right-wing populists, the "people" are portrayed as underdogs disenfranchised by a corrupt foreign policy driven by elite interests of powerful corporations or the military-industrial complex. This discourse seeks to unite people against an establishment accused of betraying the *volonté générale*. The second antagonistic relationship presented by right-wing populists introduces the "other" as a collusion of domestic elites and foreign forces, thus depriving the people of security within their borders. The third discursive strategy combines populist up/down with nationalist inside/outside antagonism that describes a nefarious transnational power elite seeking to interfere in sovereign national affairs.

Wojczewski's research aligns with the distinction of inclusionary and exclusionary populism, showing how foreign policy discourse can be used to either unify or divide both the American "people" and the international "people". In inclusionary populism, the people are portrayed as victims of a corrupt (international or domestic) elite-driven foreign policy, aiming to unify them around a leader and against the establishment. This rhetoric emphasizes common grievances and shared goals, which are hallmarks of inclusionary populism. Conversely, exclusionary populism creates divisions between a limited national community and external threats, including foreign entities and collaborating domestic elites, fostering an ingroup defined by aversion to perceived enemies.

Thus, combining Mudde and Kaltwasser's theory and Wojczewski's insights into foreign policy can address the main types of populist foreign policy discourse and offer coherent and nuanced assumptions of recent Republican presidents' impact. The created framework, based on Laclau and Mouffe's thinking, can be applied to build the theoretical expectation for this research:

Within right-wing populism, Republican President Trump's foreign policies are exclusionary in nature, coming from a populist and nationalist discourse, while President Bush's foreign policies reflect a more inclusionary approach, presenting a narrative of a trans-nationalist nefarious elite.

## Methodology

### Case Selection and Research Design

To research the nature of populism in recent Republican presidents' foreign policies, this study examines the cases of Trump's and Bush's foreign policies. These administrations are selected because they are chronologically the closest and most recent right-wing populist administrations to each other. Further, both have impacted and continue to impact their nation and the international system through regulations and international relations. Bush reshaped the US's security role in the world and especially the Middle East (Chengqiu, 2011, p.311). Trump significantly affected the strength of alliances and the functioning of international institutions (Steff & Tidwell, 2020, pp.396-398). Understanding their populist foreign policy discourse and the unique consequences of their expected subtypes is critical to clarifying existing literature and, therefore, has to be investigated.

Using a most-similar-systems design (MSSD), this research will conduct a cross-time comparison of these cases to analyze their foreign policy and populist discourses. The two time periods of foreign policy MSSD assumptions: The independent variable, the presidential administrations conducting foreign policy differs, but key control remain constant. During both periods, the US maintained its wealth, military and economic position, along with significant security and economic alliances. Nationally, the US system remained a federal republic with a majoritarian democratic system ensuring electoral and social accountability of elected officials. Both administrations shared similar ideological orientations, and, at times, even the same high ranking military officials. The differences in the administrations' policies suggest different populist discourses influenced their foreign policies.

## Data selection

A qualitative discourse analysis of presidential speeches will capture shifts in populist foreign policy discourse. The analysis will use presidential speeches to the nation or selected public groups, which were accessible shortly after delivery. The sources were chosen because the leader of the populist movement is established to be the central person of the discourse. Further, the US president is as commander-in-chief and leader of the executive the guiding authority in US foreign policy. Notably, Bush and Trump were proponents of the unitary executive theory, a legal theory that supported total presidential control of the executive, including the State and Defense Departments (Howell and Moe, 2023, p.159-163). Thus, their foreign policy decisions are closely tied to their presidencies, making their speeches pivotal in the discourse.

For Bush’s foreign policy, speeches from his first term in 2001-2005 were selected, while for Trump’s foreign policy, the speeches were from his first term, 2017-2021. These time frames are chosen because foreign policies are usually designed for one term, making it necessary to examine the entire term’s foreign policy discourse to accurately describe the populist discourse. Additionally, a longer period prevents overemphasis on short-term policy shifts and ensures comparability, given that Trump served only one term, as of now.

Not all speeches addressing the public in these time frames were included in the discourse analysis, to stay within the research’s scope. The sampling strategy was purposive, choosing speeches with similar structures and contexts to compare their discourse, such as the State of the Union (SOTU) and UN General Assembly speeches. Additionally, one to two additional speeches per year that address foreign affairs and national security will be selected, as they are most likely to reveal discursive links between populism and foreign policy.

## Coding Frame and Operationalization

Table 1. *Coding frame*

Category	Description	Indicators	Sub-Category	Code
Material Dimension: Foreign Policies	Prioritization of specific foreign policy related policy areas such as	Jobs policy, aid, Immigration policies, tariffs, military	Inclusionary material policies (e.g., promote policies of mutual benefit, respect for international norms)	MatInclu+

	immigration, trade, military intervention, and alliances	capabilities and intervention,	Exclusionary material policies (e.g., unilateral action, protectionism, assertion of national sovereignty as opposed to cooperation)	MatExclu-
Political dimension: International Actors	Portrayal of foreign governments and their leaders, international organizations, and participation in international institutions	Diplomacy, multilateralism, collective action, alliances, cooperation, national self-interest, unilateralism	Inclusionary attitudes towards international environment (e.g., portrayal of international treaties as beneficial to all parties)	IntActInclu+
			Exclusionary attitudes to international actors (e.g. portrayal of international institutions as hostile towards “the people’s” goals and rights)	IntActExclu-
Symbolic dimension: Values and Ideals	Mentions of value-based decision making to justify foreign policy decisions or actions	Democracy, human rights, freedom, Sovereignty, equality, exceptionalism, nationalism, American might/power/ dominance	Inclusionary values and ideals (e.g., justifications of foreign policy based on democracy and freedom to international people beyond the American people)	ValInclu+
			Exclusionary values and Ideas (e.g., justifications of foreign policies based on simplified ideas of evil foreigners)	ValExclu-
Symbolic dimension: National Identity	Depictions of insiders (“the people”) vs outsiders (“the elite” and/or “foreigners”).	Shared values, cultural heritage, historical narratives, understandings of unity, political participation	Definition of People (e.g. depictions of and characterizations of “the people”)	IdentPeople
			Definition of Other (e.g., characterizations of the elite, the enemy, the establishment, and foreign actors and their traits)	IdentOther

Definition of actors supporting the Other (e.g., portrayals of passive support by specific groups like the press).	IdentSup
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The coding frame applied in this research reflects the main dimensions of inclusionary and exclusionary populism: material, political, and symbolic. This framework, based on File's distinction, is broadened to include the breadth of foreign policy interactions and stakeholders.

The first category, the material dimension, encompasses material foreign policies and their framing. These policies include actions and regulations pursued solely by the US government and its subsidiaries, such as military, trade, and humanitarian policies. Immigration, refugee, and border policies are also included, as they are often treated as foreign policy by presidents. The category has two sub-categories: inclusionary material policies, framed as mutual beneficial and respectful of international actors, and exclusionary material policies, framed as unilateral action and protectionist measures that serve a subset of the American populace.

The second category is political dimension of populism, which analyzes the portrayal of foreign governments, international organizations, and the US's participation in the international system. The category also has two sub-categories: inclusionary attitudes towards the international environment, which includes positive depictions of diplomacy, multilateralism, and alliances as beneficial to the American public and the world. For an international attitude to be considered inclusionary, not every actor in the international system has to be included, or a beneficiary, but multiple actors apart from the US should be. Exclusionary attitudes involve negative depiction of the concepts above and a focus on national self-interest and unilateral action.

The third and fourth categories reflect two parts of the symbolic dimension described in the theoretical framework. The third category reflects the values and ideals invoked to justify foreign policy. The sub-categories include inclusionary values and ideals, which justify policies by evoking democracy, human rights, and people's freedom beyond a narrow conception. The second sub-category is exclusionary values, which justify actions based exceptionalism and



American nationalism. Moralistic attitudes, which include simplified narratives of good and evil to justify actions, are included in the exclusionary value sub-category. The fourth category consists of the discourses identifying the “people” and the “other.”, with indicators based on Wojczewski’s distinction of how foreign policy creates antagonistic discourses of foreigners. The coding unit is sentences.

These categories capture differing discourses between the administrations. Sentences can be coded within multiple categories. For example, the portrayal of a US program with international coordination as bad for the American people could be both an exclusionary attitude towards international cooperation and an exclusionary unilateral foreign policy. This is managed through the strict separation of indicators in the categories. The sub-categories represent opposing discourses, preventing double-coding within one category.

## Analysis

First, a summary of the research results, divided according to the coding frame categories, will be given. Then, the findings will be detailed, and examples from the speeches will be provided. Finally, the results will be discussed in the larger literature framework, and the research question will be answered.

## Summary of Results

Overall, the analysis of foreign policies, attitudes toward international actors, value statements, and identification of the people vs. the elite/enemy suggests that there is a difference between Bush’s foreign policies, which are framed in a more inclusionary discourse, and Trump’s foreign policies, which are framed more exclusionary. However, these findings differ in intensity and framing in each category, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. *Overall type of populism in Republican President’s foreign policy: summary of results*

	Bush, 2001-2004	Trump, 2017-2020
Policies	(+)* Inclusionary discourse about policies, with Bush emphasizing that policies will benefit a unified America and,	(–) Exclusionary discourse, with Trump describing select groups of Americans that will benefit from

	crucially, the wider community of allies.	trade, immigration, national security, and other foreign policies.
Attitudes to International Actors	(+/-) Mixed discourse, frequent and direct naming of allies, with almost all policy actions announced and done in the name of alliances. Positive mentions of international institutions, but ultimately casting doubt on the usefulness of the bureaucracy.	(+/-) Mixed discourse, naming of alliances, but immediately casting doubt on their fairness and usefulness for America. Stopping of international institutions such as trade deals in favor of more exclusionary foreign policies, such as more limited, American-focused trade deals. Discourse included understanding of international interactions as a zero-sum game.
Values and Ideals	(+/-) Frequent inclusionary discourse about the importance of freedom, democracy, liberty as main drivers of action in foreign policy. But Bush's discourse includes frequent moralist simplifications to justify actions.	(-) Use of exclusionary discourse, rare mentioning of values, focus on the importance of protecting a select group of the American people, highlighting values of sovereignty and autonomy of states.
Identity	<b>People:</b> Focus on unified American people. Discourse includes mention of foreign populace as target of inclusionary policies/values. American people and foreign people are divided, but both are mentioned as audience and reason for foreign policies. <b>Other:</b> Discourse portrays foreign governments and small groups, such as terrorism cells as a foreign elite and enemy	<b>People:</b> Contradicting discourse with a select understanding of the populace. Limited inclusionary discourse at the start of speeches, while often exclusionary discourse highlights a select few when the speech continues. Trump seeks to define "the people" through individual stories in speeches. <b>Other:</b> Contradicting yet decisively exclusionary discourse, frequent depiction of democrats as an elite colluding with foreign gang

aiming to hurt both domestic and international people. Enemies are exclusively foreign.

members, or foreign governments, while also deeming Democrats as enemies of such foreign governments. Selectivity of the Other shifts with the audience of the discourse: in front of international and national audiences, “the other” is elite groups of regimes and terrorist cells and gangs, while in front of favorable audiences, it can be entire continents or all foreigners. **Supporters:** Special out-group with Trump includes people supporting the enemies/elite passively while not actively colluding. Includes the press, career officials, and private business leaders.

\*(+) = overall inclusionary discourse; (-)= overall exclusionary discourse; (+/-)= both inclusionary and exclusionary discourse

## Category Analysis

### Foreign Policies

*“We have the power to help. The United States is committed to working with other nations to reduce suffering and spare lives.” – Bush, Proposal for Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis, 2001, para.5*

The quote encapsulates President Bush’s inclusionary populist discourse presented when justifying the US’s unilateral foreign policies. Bush put an emphasis on policies, such as the global HIV/AIDS fund, which provided multilateral benefits, sometimes for governments of foreign nations, but always for people globally (2001b, para.6; 2002a, para.15). Bush noted that policies solely implemented by American actors, such as the HIV/AIDS fund, were implemented

with the permission and cooperation of target countries (2001b, para. 10), highlighting the US's ability to support other nations, and explicitly aiming to save lives beyond America. Post 9/11, Bush's policies continued to be inclusionary, focusing on expanding food security and education globally and specifically in the Middle East (2003a, para.35). His speeches emphasized the benefit for all Americans in working together with international partners (Bush, 2002a, para.60).

In contrast, the Trump administration's policies are constructed to benefit selective American groups only, giving them an exclusionary character (Trump, 2020b, para.25). Unlike Bush, Trump did not mention global HIV/AIDS policies in the 12 speeches analyzed, the sole mention of HIV/AIDS research and support is exclusively targeting Americans (2019a, para.82; 2020b, para.70). As a noticeable pattern, Trump often presented vague inclusionary policies, such as a government-wide "commitment to improving opportunity for women (...) in developing countries" (Trump, 2019a, para.65) or definite, but comparatively narrow inclusionary policies, such as granting only young undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship (Trump, 2018a, para.84). These vague or limited inclusionary discourses are typically addressed to international audiences such as the UN General Assembly or widely televised speeches such as the SOTUs. However, in less international contexts, Trump presents much more far-reaching exclusionary policy language, such as his promise to Veterans to introduce tariffs against many close trading partners, that benefit the American workers (Trump 2018b, para.55). These findings highlight the importance of the specific environments the speeches are given in, which have an impact on the discourses he is part of. The specific discourses he portrays create a façade of inclusivity while promoting policies that ultimately serve a selective, exclusionary vision.

Summarized, both presidents employ a narrative that foreign policies are to help Americans. However, while Bush's narrative includes the possibility of mutual benefit, Trump's policies identified specific winners, excluding broader groups of Americans.

### Attitudes to International Actors

In constructing alliances and defining international actors' identities, a type of populist discourse is less apparent for both presidents, as they use both inclusionary and exclusionary language. They began their presidencies with similar inclusionary pledges to multilateral alliances and

institutions, a common discourse in front of international audiences (Bush, 2001a, para.25; Trump, 2017a, para.47-49).

*“The United States will forever be a great friend to the world, and especially to its allies. But we can no longer be taken advantage of, or enter into a one-sided deal where the United States gets nothing in return. As long as I hold this office, I will defend America’s interest above all else.”*

- *Trump, Address to United Nations General Assembly, 2017, para.25*

As seen in the example, Trump’s narrative often contradicts itself. He describes international alliances as useful in one sentence while decrying them as obsolete and burdensome in the next. His discourse begins a vaguely inclusionary statement about friendship, which implies cooperation, but then negates it by portraying “the world” and “the allies” as having exploited the US, framing the narrative in exclusionary terms. The “but” downgrades the previous point and stress his presumably more important opinion or policy. The Trumpian discourse often presents alliances as zero-sum games, particularly in economic matters, with either the US or foreign partners “winning” (Trump, 2019a, para.25; 2018b, para.61). This zero-sum narrative applies even to close partners like Canada and the EU, showing discourse that is both exclusionary and simplistic (Trump, 2018b, para.67). However, Trump occasionally present more inclusionary views on bilateral or multilateral security collaborations, particularly those not facilitated by international institutions. Here, Trump highlights that alliances against terrorism are important and welcome (Trump, 2018b, para.29; 2018c, para.25; 2017b, para. 137-138).

Bush uses similar combinations of inclusionary language followed by exclusionary language, albeit less frequently than Trump (Bush 2002b, para. 38; 2004a, para 30). His overall discourse is more inclusionary towards foreign allies, international organizations, and the international system, highlighting their importance to security and prosperity. Throughout his first term, he consistently frames international actors positively, whether international institutions or specific partners, suggesting they support all American actions for the benefit of the international people (Bush, 2003a, para.72). Yet, he consistently emphasizes that these alliances are secondary to American unilateral actions (Bush, 2003a, para.35, 50). Bush would be quite direct in pointing out flaws in specific international institutions, such as when he described the UN Security Council as ineffective when dealing with Saddam Hussein (Bush, 2003b, para.12).

In summary, while both presidents routinely engage in inclusionary populist discourses regarding alliances and international institutions, they also present exclusionary narratives, alienating both foreigners and Americans who might align with foreign interests.

## Values and Ideals

*“Freedom is worth fighting for, dying for and standing for – and the advance of freedom leads to peace. (...) We’ve reached another great turning point – and the resolve we will show will shape the next stage of the world democratic movement. Our commitment to democracy is tested in countries like Cuba and Burma and North Korea and Zimbabwe – outposts of oppression our world. The people in these nations live in captivity, and fear and silence (...) we will stand with the oppressed peoples until the day of their freedom finally arrives.”*

– Bush, *Remarks on Freedom in Iraq, 2003, para 15*

There is a clear difference between the values assigned to foreign policy actions by both presidents. As in the example above, Bush’s discourse frequently includes narratives based on values, such as freedom and democracy, to justify basing concrete security policy, and larger cooperations (Bush, 2003b, para. 8-12; 2003c, para.13-18). In the quote above, Bush situates his policies within a “world democratic movement,” presenting support for a “people” beyond Americans. Multiple such examples can be found in almost every single speech analyzed. Secondly, Bush’s discourse places these values in the “civilized world,” including America and, presumably, allied nations, making them broadly inclusionary (Bush, 2003a, para.52; 2004a, para.9; 2004b, para 10). He contrasts this with a small number of regimes and terrorist groups, described as an “evil that is real and must be opposed” (Bush SOTU 2003). Specifically in the first two years post 9/11, Bush’s discourse often simplifies foreign policy into moralist terms, such referring to an “axis of evil,” a group of states, posing “a grave and growing danger” to the world and the American “people” (Bush, 2002a, para.21). This discourse presented exclusionary, inflammatory language, as it excludes everyone who did not adhere to these simplistic value distinctions Bush’s discourse had created. Value justifications are especially prevalent in the speeches justifying the Iraq invasion (Bush, 2003b, para. 14-25; 2003c, para.39)

Trump, on the other hand, presents foreign policies more rarely with value justifications. He sometimes assures support for selective American groups, invoking values like sovereignty and

security to justify isolation and lack of cooperation, leading to a more exclusionary discourse (Trump, 2017c, para 15-16; 27). Importantly, they are not followed by inclusionary policies but rather by exclusionary policies mentioned above. Instead of using explicit values to justify policies, Trumpian discourse includes detailed individual stories of people suffering due to international actors such as foreign terrorists, gang members, or immigrants to underline the need for exclusionary immigration policy or interventionist security policies (Trump, 2019a, para.49; Trump, 2020b, para.109-114). Here, he implicitly mentions values but uses concrete examples to make them more palpable for his audience. This is a very stable feature of his discourse throughout his term (Trump, 2017, para.133-134; Trump, 2019b, para 31.). Similar to Bush's discourse, Trumpian discourse includes moralist narratives of the righteous Americans fighting evil, overwhelmingly foreign, terrorist, and gang members (Trump, 2017c, para.84; Trump, 2020a, para.114).

Overall, Bush aims for freedom and protection of American citizens through cooperation with other actors (Bush, 2002a, para. 61). In contrast, Trump aims for the same values through isolation and self-rule of international actors (Trump, 2017, para.22-23). Bush frequently uses inclusionary value statements to justify inclusionary policies, while Trump uses values more rarely, opting to use individual stories with implicit values to justify exclusionary policies.

## Identity

*Leaders in Washington imposed on the country an immigration policy that Americans never voted for, never asked for, and never approved – a policy where the wrong people are allowed into our country and the right people are rejected. American citizens, as usual, have been left to bear the cost and pick up the tab. On top of everything else, our leaders drifted from American principles. They lost sight of America's destiny. And they lost their belief in American greatness. As a result, our citizens lost something as well. The people lost confidence in their government and, eventually, even lost confidence in their future. But last year, all of that began to change. The American people rejected the failures of the past. You rediscovered your voice and reclaimed ownership of this nation and its destiny.*

– Trump, Remarks on National Security Strategy, 2017d, para.14-16

As presented in this quote, Trumpian discourse on identity is broadly exclusionary. The people he represents are a selective group of Americans who did not vote for previous governments. He creates a straightforward populist narrative and explains how American citizens have been abandoned and off their righteous path as a nation. Akin to Wojczewski's characterization of a pure up/down populist antagonism, the political elite is accused of marginalizing Americans and using foreign policy and immigration policy to purposefully allow "the wrong people" in, leading to a fundamental loss of "American greatness." These findings are exemplary of the exclusionary discourse found in the speeches: "The people" addressed are specific groups, such as workers or rural people, excluding minorities by omission (Trump, 2019a, para. 43). The identity of the Other is portrayed varied. In some speeches, the Other is framed as a colluding force between the democratic establishment and outside bureaucratic forces. Here, a distinction is made between sometimes presenting active ill-will by democrats (Trump 2018b, para.85) and passively allowing it to happen, but the tenor remains the same: The "corrupt" elite does not act for the "people." In other speeches, the discourse follows Wojczewski's third discourse angle, describing the troubles his selective domestic people experience as problems caused by an elusive international elite, often just defined as "them" (Trump, 2018b, para.67). Frequently, Trumpian discourses includes individual stories to personify both the people and the other, such as stories of Immigration Enforcement officers protecting the people against dangerous gang-affiliated immigrants (Trump, 2018a, para. 74-79). Additionally, Trump's discourse includes a separate category of supporters of the elite and enemies, bureaucrats (Trump, 2017c, para.87), and the press, saying, "The press doesn't cover [foreign human traffickers]. They don't want to, incredibly" (Trump, 2019b, para.31).

In contrast, the identity construction for Bush's discourse is broadly inclusionary: He presents a unified people in the Americans, a unified American government with foreign allies that represent a civilized world, and a separate but unified global people who benefit from his foreign policy (Bush, 2003a, para.70; Bush, 2003c, para.15). He frequently describes the "other" to these peoples as "enemy," which are adversarial foreign governments and terrorist cells identified by name. Notably, the domestic elite is not perceived as an enemy or even described as outside of the American people (Bush, 2003a, para.77). These foreign enemies are, following Wojczewski's third antagonistic relationship, presented as foreign elites, with Bush pointing out



their decadence and disconnect to their own people while seeking to impose their aims on the international peoples (Bush, 2003a, para.57).

A surprising verbatim commonality between the two presidents is the framing of terrorists and foreign governments as an elite enemy of their respective enemies, such as describing Saddam Hussein as “a brutal dictator (...) with. great potential wealth” aiming to threaten the American “people” (Bush, 2003a, para 57; 2003c, para.34; Trump, 2018c, para.28-29; 2019a, para. 43).

## Discussion

The speeches clearly present two presidential foreign policies shaped by populist discourses. This is especially important concerning President Bush, whom previous literature struggled to classify as either a populist or a principled conservative. The analysis presented a president who employs populist narratives to justify policy actions and attitudes toward international actors. More detailed, his populist discourse was often inclusionary, using values to define people nationally and internationally. When defining the other, he used extreme moralism and defined the “enemy” as a nefarious international elite. Recent scholars describing Bush’s foreign policies as “principled conservatism” and as an opposite to Trump’s populist policies either fell into recency bias or employed a too narrow view of the populism of Republican presidents, ignoring the potential of inclusionary populism.

President Trump’s populist discourse in his foreign policy was already well established in the literature, a conclusion this analysis agrees with. Trump sees himself in a new era, but as this analysis has established, even common rhetorical quirks such as a vague inclusionary sentence followed by a specific exclusionary sentence have been done before. This work has found that the shift between presidents was not from conservatism to populism but from inclusionary-leaning populism to more exclusionary-leaning populism. Specifically, there was a shift from value-based inclusionary actions to more exclusionary actions with less focus on the values behind them and more implicit exclusionary identity definitions. Trump is less pronounced in his exclusionary actions than Bush in his inclusionary worldview. The inclusionary and exclusionary populist discourses were stable for both presidents, respectively: Their messages did not receive a significant shift even after potential critical junctures like 9/11 and the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Conclusion

The research question posed at the beginning of this research asked how the Republican president's foreign policy reflects inclusionary or exclusionary populism. Previous literature was divided on this issue. To answer this question for the most recent Republican presidents, Bush and Trump, some nuance is required: While both presidents have inclusionary and exclusionary populist features in their foreign policy discourse, Bush leans more towards inclusionary populism, while Trump exhibits more exclusionary language. Their way of expressing these narratives differs: Bush, on the one hand, focuses more on value statements justifying inclusionary policies and combines limited exclusionary attitudes with broad endorsements of international allies and institutions. Trump, on the other hand, offers less open inclusionary or exclusionary populist value statements, but his discourse includes extensive exclusionary policies and sentiments, such as his isolationist tendencies. Both employ populist discourse to define the "people" they are a part of and seek to protect the "other," whom they often define as "enemies of the people." There are some similarities between their definitions, with Bush and Trump both initially defining the people as a broad, unified American group and foreign enemies as a nefarious elite. But in the details, their approaches differ significantly: Where Bush has an inclusionary definition of the people, defining them as a unified American group while also emphasizing the global people, Trump has a selective approach to the people, at times excluding minority groups and immigrants from his definition. Where Bush solidly defines enemies to the people as foreign and elite, arguing that these seek to destroy American values, Trumpian discourse has switched definitions. The enemy can be either broad, encompassing traditional adversarial countries and allies alike, or it can be specific small groups such as gangs and terrorist groups. Perceived domestic opponents, such as the democrats or the established press, are often mentioned in speeches with a favorable audience but absent in speeches to wider national or international audiences.

Despite the author's diligence in research design, there are inherent theoretical and methodological limitations for this research: The research question offered a broader scope, but due to time and space constraints, there are limits to the number of cases studied. Certainly, including more Republican presidents of the recent past could have led to a broader applicability of this study and offered the chance to create a broader theoretical exploration. Further, the

research has methodological limits, as it did not include all presidents' speeches in the selected time frames. Other potentially important sources, such as speeches by cabinet officials, policy papers, or other documents regarding foreign policy, were excluded as well, limiting the diversity of data investigated.

Despite or perhaps because of these limitations, multiple avenues of further research can build on the topics explored. As this research established the presence of inclusionary and exclusionary populist discourse impacting foreign policy, it would be interesting to explore how these discourses impact the domestic policies of these Republican presidents. Combined with the findings of this research, this would become a more complete investigation of inclusionary and exclusionary populism in the US. Then, the implementation of such populist stances in foreign policy could be investigated: How are the discourses of the presidents reflected in their actual foreign policy? Further, it must be considered that former president Trump is the Republican candidate in the upcoming presidential elections, which elevates the significance of correctly identifying his discourses. It would be interesting to research whether there is a shift in his populist discourse on foreign policy between his first term and his desired second term. Indeed, having a nuanced look at the populist discourse of Republican presidents remains relevant for the immediate and long-term future of American policy and the international system at large.

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