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Us and Them: Populism in the United States

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Us and Them: Populism in the United States

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Honors Thesis

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Populism basks in the limelight today—the word being used by scholars, journalists, and ordinary people alike to describe a wide variety of political rhetoric. American media outlets have not hesitated to co-opt the term to discuss politicians in eye-catching headlines: “The Global Wave of Populism that Turned 2016 Upside Down” from *The Washington Post*; “‘Populism’ Isn’t Conservative. It’s Crazy” from *USA Today*; “Trump Presents a New, Twisted Version of ‘Populism’” from *MSNBC*; “Donald Trump is Transforming the G.O.P. into a Populist, Nativist Party” from *The New Yorker*; “Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump are Speaking for the Same Voters—which Should Worry Joe Biden” from *The Washington Post*; “Trump Was a Corrupt Populist Demagogue, Not a Would-Be Fascist Dictator” from *MarketWatch*; and “Does Anybody Know What ‘Populism’ Means?” from *The Atlantic* (Taylor 2016; Medved 2021; Benen 2016; Cassidy 2016; Blanco 2020; Lind 2021; Serhan 2020).

Journalists and columnists invoke “populism” in news and opinion stories, though it is rarely sufficiently or consistently defined there. Some outlets discuss populism as a dangerous right-wing movement (Bunch 2020; Douthat 2021), while others maintain that genuine populism is a left-wing economic movement that has its virtues (Müller 2020; Bloomfield and Edgar 2021; Krugman 2021). Each approach encounters a problem of terms in assuming that populism can be housed under a single political ideology.

Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders are two figures who have been frequently characterized as populist despite their political differences (Cassidy 2016; Johnson 2016; Blanco 2020; Sullivan and Costa 2020). Their union in populism could be true, but “populist” may also be a pejorative label that the media assigns to politicians outside the norms of the democratic electoral process. Though Trump and Sanders are discussed most often, they are not alone.

Former White House Chief Strategist to Trump Steve Bannon is a rare actor who self-identifies as populist (Hjelmgaard 2018). Observers have also identified Republican Representative Jim Jordan (R-OH), Senators Josh Hawley (R-MO), Tom Cotton (R-AR), Marco Rubio (R-FL), and even “NeverTrumper” Mitt Romney (R-UT) as populist, mostly because of their commitment to the working class (Chait 2020; Strain 2020; Levitz 2020, 2021). Though discourse on right-wing populism appears in the media far more frequently than left-wing populism, Democrats have been identified as populist as well. Often because of affinities to socialism in economics, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and President Joe Biden have been called populist (Wallace-Wells 2019; Smarsh 2020; Goldmacher 2020; McCormick 2021; Schneider 2021). Suffice to say, the politics of supposed populists are all over the map.

The use of the term in the media is nevertheless an adequate starting point into the discussion of the meaning of “populism” because it represents the general public’s understanding of the word—in fact, my questioning of the vague yet punishing usage of the term sparked this project. While the media fails to address a true definition of populism, my goal is to identify one. But can “populist” be a meaningful descriptor? My study, through quantitative and qualitative content analysis of campaign speeches, will determine whether populism is actually a significant and useful concept with which to characterize political rhetoric, or whether it is simply a trendy descriptor that is nevertheless empty. The main question I seek to answer in this thesis is this: *Can we define populism with sufficient clarity and precision as to make it a useful term with which to analyze political rhetoric?*

Because the term “populist” originated with the late-nineteenth-century People’s Party, we begin our investigation there in Chapter 2. The People’s Party was a left-wing movement that

empowered farmers and workers against the establishment. Although it did not enjoy long-term success in electoral politics, the movement established a sort of template for what populism can look like in the United States. As such, analysts have applied the label “populist” to parties and politicians that seem to resemble the People’s Party and its left-wing style of politics. The label “populist” has also, however, come to be applied to movements across the political spectrum, indicating an expansion of the term from its left-wing origins and complicating the effort to pinpoint a consistent definition.

I review the political theory relevant to populism in Chapter 3 in order to further ground the concept in established thought. The idea of populism is in many ways counter to our constitutional republic in its support of direct democracy which may feed passions, create divisive factions, and even develop into the tyranny of the majority. Despite the several dangers cited, some see populism as a necessary corrective in the case that power becomes unjustly concentrated in the hands of the few.

With background and theory being a solid foundation, Chapter 4’s literature review completes the task of defining populism. In the scholarship, academics have approached and explained the subject in many different ways and from many different geographic perspectives. The variety in the study of populism means there is no single, agreed-upon definition of the term in the field, especially not regarding populism in the United States. To make up for this confusion, I will knit together the most important elements of populism’s disparate conceptions to form a unique definition: *Populism in the United States is a mode of political persuasion characterized by an effort to promote the interests of “the people,” understood to be a monolithic and moral group of ordinary Americans, against a “corrupt” elite or establishment which obstructs these interests.*

In Chapter 5, I test whether this new account of populism can work as a useful concept in political analysis. To identify candidates who use populist rhetoric, I employed three distinct methods on the speeches of major presidential nominees since 1952. The first method consisted of quantitative readability statistics to measure the complexity of language of speeches. Simpler language was expected to be more populist. Second, I used AntConc software to perform a quantitative dictionary-based content analysis, which tested for the frequency of key populist terms and phrases in every speech. The words in the dictionary were mostly compiled from the dictionaries used in established studies of comparable methods, in order to ensure that the selected words were indeed accurate populist indicators. Populist word frequencies were presented as percentages of the total number of words, and scores were calculated for several categories—plural possessive language, people-centrism, general anti-elite sentiment, political anti-elite sentiment, and economic anti-elite sentiment—for each campaign. The third method was a qualitative content analysis, in which readers holistically scored a sample of speeches from each campaign according to a rubric developed in Hawkins and Kaltwasser's (2018) study. The value of the quantitative methods was their ability to analyze large amounts of data, and the value of the qualitative method was the readers' abilities to pay attention to tone and context in speeches. The study found Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders to use the most populist rhetoric, followed by George McGovern, Walter Mondale, Richard Nixon, and Bob Dole.

I further interpret these results with an in-depth qualitative literary analysis of a few selected speeches in Chapter 6. I begin with an analysis of the famous Cross of Gold speech made by People's Party leader William Jennings Bryan. Then, I analyze the rhetoric of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, who were expected to be populist and were identified as such. Next, I turn to candidates who were not originally expected to be populist and were found to use

populist rhetoric, namely McGovern, Mondale, Nixon, and Dole. Finally, I review some candidates—Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lyndon B. Johnson—who were neither expected to be populist nor were found to be, in order to further differentiate populism by comparison. Reviewing the content and quotations of speeches in conversation with our new definition will shed light on the rhetoric of populism.

After a thorough assessment of American populism, theoretical and in-practice, I conclude that “populism,” as I have defined it, is, in fact, a useful term with which to describe political rhetoric. Populism refers to the narrative of the conflict between “the people” and the “evil” elite, and it harnesses the frustrations of “ordinary” people with the establishment by framing politics as a struggle between us and them. My study finds that populism does exist in the political rhetoric of American presidential campaigns, meaning that the term “populism” is indeed useful in describing such language.

Chapter 2: Historical Background

The History of Populism in the United States: People's Party to Donald Trump

We are all familiar with language that acclaims “the people” in this country. Our Constitution begins, “We the people,” claiming authorship on behalf of the masses (U.S. Const. Preamble). In closing the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln describes the union as “of the people, by the people, [and] for the people” (Lincoln 1863). Our government was, after all, founded on the idea that the people are sovereign. Given this history, it is not surprising that politicians invoke “the people” in their rhetoric.

Appealing to the people is not inherently populist. As the American political system revolves around the sovereignty of the people, political candidates and leaders seek to satisfy the desires and needs of the people in order to succeed. “The people” of populism, however, is distinct from the general public of everyday political affairs. It refers to a specific group of people who feel, or have been told to feel, disenfranchised or otherwise wronged by another group, usually identified as the elite or the establishment.

This chapter consists of an overview of populism in the United States, starting with the People's Party and ending with Donald Trump's rhetoric today. After a thorough explanation of the platform of the People's Party, I touch on several figures since that era who have been identified as populist in the scholarship in the United States, as well as in Latin America and Europe. A review of populism in those regions puts American populism into perspective.

The story of American populism generally begins with the People's Party of the 1890s. The word “populist” originated in reference to members of this party, also known as the Populist Party. A left-wing agrarian movement, the People's Party aimed to defend farmers and other workers against abuse by the wealthy elite class. There were prior iterations of populist attitudes,

but none bore the name until the People's Party. One such example which is sometimes noted by populists comes from the legacy of Andrew Jackson, who understood the population as divided between the producers of the middle and working classes and the consumers of the elite class (Kazin 1995). In his message vetoing the act to recharter the 2nd Bank of the United States, Jackson pointed to the problem of the bank being controlled by too few individuals: "It is easy to conceive that great evils to our country and its institutions might flow from such a concentration of power in the hands of a few men irresponsible to the people" (Jackson 1832). As a result of his suspicion of power in the hands of the few, Jackson sought to use the democratic process to mobilize people against the elite "money power" (Kazin 1995, 19).

Around seventy years after Jackson's presidency, the People's Party found its roots in several contentious agrarian causes of the post-Civil War era. Many farmers in the South and the Great Plains at the time struggled financially despite the economic success of the Gilded Age in urban areas. Farmers began to develop organizations to advocate for themselves, and they blamed "plutocrats" like bankers and corporations for taking advantage of them (Kazin 1995). The farmers viewed themselves and other workers as the true "people" of the country, and they believed they were being oppressed by the wealthy elite minority who held too much political power.

This dual struggle is what came to be known as populism, as the founding of an official Populist party loomed. Having common interests and shared ideas, several groups like the Grangers, the Greenbackers, Farmer's Alliances, and labor groups united to form a new party separate from the dominant Democratic and Republican parties. The Granger movement consisted of farmers in the 1870s Midwest, who opposed the monopolistic transportation of grain (Kazin 1995). The Greenback movement of the same decade sought to increase the amount of

money in circulation in order to ease farmers' economic situations (Kazin 1995). Farmers' Alliances were formed from a large agrarian movement in the 1870s and 1880s, which advocated for better economic conditions for farmers (Kazin 1995). Small Southern and Midwestern farmers mostly initiated the Populist movement, but the People's Party also assembled a conglomeration of various outsider groups: "the middle-class anti-saloon crusaders of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Prohibition Party, ... the urban workers of the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor, ... the salon utopians of Edward Bellamy's Nationalist Clubs and the mostly working-class advocates of Henry George's single tax on land, ... [and] Christian Socialists" (Kazin 1995, 28). The cohesion of the coalition depended on rhetoric strong enough to connect these disparate groups—the narrative of a powerful corrupt elite working against the interests of the common man.

In July 1892, these smaller agrarian groups joined together to form the People's Party. There was a national convention in Omaha, Nebraska to designate a presidential nominee for the Party and to adopt an official platform. Ignatius L. Donnelly, a former Granger, gave a demanding and inspiring preamble to the new Populist platform created by the convention's participants. Donnelly's strong language supports the legitimacy of the party platform by evoking the narrative that "the people" have been wronged by the corrupt and evil elite. One of its most passionate passages reads:

Corruption dominates the ballot-box ... The people are demoralized ... The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled, public opinion silenced, business prostrated, homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrating in the hands of capitalists. The urban workmen are denied the right to organize for self-protection ... The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of those, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes—tramps and millionaires. (Donnelly 1892)

After describing the corruption of the establishment, Donnelly proclaimed that the members of the new party “seek to restore the government of the Republic to the hands of ‘the plain people,’ with which class it originated” (Donnelly 1892). Following Donnelly’s colorful remarks are the demands of the original populist platform: the printing more money to facilitate borrowing, the elimination of the national bank, the “free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold” in order to create inflation to ease the debts of farmers, a graduated income tax, government ownership of railroads and communications institutions, and a prohibition on foreigners owning land (People’s Party Platform 1892). All of these aim to benefit those understood to be “the people” against the oppression from elite power.

In 1892, the party nominated for president James B. Weaver of Iowa, the 1880 Greenback presidential nominee, with James G. Field of Virginia as the vice-presidential pick. Though Weaver lost the election, the ticket was fairly effective, winning 1,026,595 popular votes out of about 12 million votes, and 22 electoral votes out of 444.

The presidential nominee of the People’s Party in the 1896 election was William Jennings Bryan, a man whose rhetoric is essentially model “populism.” As such, I analyze the rhetoric of Bryan’s famous Cross of Gold speech in-depth in Chapter 6. Bryan was also the most successful leader of the Populists, being simultaneously the presidential nominee for both the People’s Party and the Democratic Party. This combination of left-wing interests, however, weakened the independent character of the People’s Party, and many Populists began to identify more strongly with the Democratic Party. In the late 1890s, the economy began to recover and people were not as dissatisfied with the status quo, making Populist anti-elite rhetoric less effective. Bryan lost the election of 1896, as well as the election of 1900, where he was again nominee of both the People’s Party and the Democratic Party. After this loss, the People’s Party

largely faded away into the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party. Though not directly successful, the People's Party is a part of progressive history in United States and is recognized as a precursor to the New Deal.

The conception of "the people" in nineteenth-century Populism was specific, and closely linked to a "producer ethic" (Kazin 1995, 13). Though they saw their movement as a struggle between the many and the few, Populists defined their "many" narrowly; "having an occupation, doing the necessary work of society, was what entitled 'the people' to have power" (Kazin 1995, 13). This criteria was originally mostly met by free white men in the working class and middle class because they had the ability to participate most in the economy.

In the late-nineteenth century, people reconciled with the new social landscape of the post-Civil War era. The People's Party originally appealed to the white farmer's experience, though the movement later expanded to include African Americans who shared the economic interests of the party (Kazin 1995). However, many Populists resisted considering African Americans their equals in the middle class—the class deemed to be "the people"—and African Americans in turn were not eager to join a movement that did not welcome them (Kazin 1995, 15). The understanding of "the people" in racial terms persists during the rise of right-wing populism in Europe and in the United States (though less overtly) in the late-twentieth century.

Though there has never been another self-proclaimed populist movement in the United States since the People's Party, politicians in state and local arenas and across the political spectrum have since been called populist by scholars and commentators. Huey Long, Governor of Louisiana in 1928 and Senator in 1932, was a prominent twentieth-century left-wing populist, whose motto was "every man a king." He demonized corporations, especially Standard Oil, and created social programs for the people. Long proposed his Share Our Wealth program to

stimulate the economy after the Great Depression, and many of its proposals were included in President Roosevelt's Second New Deal.

Another supposed American populist figure is Father Coughlin, a Catholic priest and radio host who never held public office. People liked Coughlin because he spoke for the common man and criticized elite bankers who acted against the public interest. During the early 1930s, Coughlin was a proponent of the New Deal, though as war approached at the end of the decade, Coughlin's views became more conservative. Coughlin turned to antisemitism and began to blame Jewish people as the elite group oppressing society, which ultimately translated into his support for fascism abroad. In both his left-wing and right-wing views, Coughlin viewed society with a populist lens, as separated between the ordinary people and the elite.

George Wallace, segregationist Democratic Governor of Alabama (1963–1967, 1971–1979, 1983–1987), essentially set the stage for right-wing populism in the United States. His conception of “the people” was working-class Christian Southerners who were being mistreated by “inept bureaucrats, slovenly and unpatriotic protesters, and criminal minorities” (Kazin 1995, 224). He was able to tap into the powerful feelings of resentment towards elites and minorities felt by white Americans across the country at the time (Kazin 1995). Similar energy has supported movements led by those identified as right-wing populists ever since.

[The new audience of the Republican Party] required broadening and softening the Alabamian's contentious definition of “the people.” Rather than suggesting a takeover by angry steelworkers and street cops, emblems of the blue-color backlash, conservatives announced their solidarity with the concerns of an imprecisely defined “silent majority” of producers and consumers—taxpayers, white ethnics, housewives, “Middle Americans” who felt scorned by the New Left and besieged by powerful liberals. (Kazin 1995, 246)

This new energy contributed to the success of Richard Nixon, who appealed to the concerns of this group more subtly than Wallace. Nixon was found to use populist messages in his rhetoric, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. Another similar actor was Pat Buchanan, who actually

coined the phrase “silent majority” for Nixon to characterize people like Wallace’s supporters (Stirewalt 2018). Ross Perot also utilized these right-wing frustrations during his independent campaign which emphasized that the people “own” the country (Kazin 1995, 269). Perot was a political outsider, a suspected characteristic of populists, so he was able to capture people’s dissatisfactions with the establishment in his campaign.

In the United States, the idea of populism also seems to have experienced a renaissance in the twenty-first century. The Tea Party and the Freedom Caucus were conservative movements sometimes characterized as populist because of their anti-establishment beliefs and distrust of political norms (Kabaservice 2020). On the other side of the aisle, the Occupy Wall Street movement fought against big banks in a left-wing economic populist fashion. Their motto was, “we are the 99 percent,” a claim that echoes the populist vision of the ordinary people’s struggle against a powerful wealthy few, in this case the 1% (Stewart 2019). Despite political differences, these movements demonstrated hostility towards elites, a stance which was subsequently adopted by candidates Trump and Sanders in 2016, who were duly anointed as “populists” by the press. The 2016 presidential campaign was thus an important milestone in twenty-first century populism. It introduced Donald Trump, whose anti-establishment rhetoric and general political actions have often been considered populist by the media. Additionally, Bernie Sanders, who challenged Trump from the far left, has seemed to embrace economic populism in his campaign against the economic elite.

The populism of the People’s Party in the late-nineteenth century was largely socialist and was concerned with making the economic elite and establishment responsive to the people. Populist elements of modern Democratic campaigns echo their concerns. The Democratic candidates in my study who used a lot of populist rhetoric—Sanders, McGovern, Mondale—

supported an economic populism not dissimilar to what the People's Party originally supported. The People's Party's dispersion of itself into the Democratic and Socialist parties continues to be felt today. American populism on the right was less commonplace until later in the twentieth century, when George Wallace incited a wave of populist support in the working class that other Republican populists have essentially ridden. The political differences between left-wing and right-wing populists is no doubt a reason why scholars have had such difficulty in establishing a catch-all definition of populism.

Global Perspectives

The concept of populism has also been used to describe politicians and political movements outside of the United States; in fact, most of the academic study of populism before the twenty-first century has been by international sources. Scholars have traced contemporary "populist" movements to early predecessors developed in Latin America around the time of the Great Depression. In Europe, there was an early "populist" movement in nineteenth-century Russia, as part of the agrarian *narodnichestvo*. Otherwise, movements were not really called "populist" in Europe until after the second World War, and even more so after the 1990s, despite earlier political movements' proclivity to populist ideas. Reviewing populism in other areas of the world will help us contextualize the populism of the United States through comparison.

Populism in Latin America is described as predominantly left-wing and usually centering economic policy (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011). Kirk Hawkins discerns three distinct areas of populism studies in Latin America: economic policy, political regimes, and political strategy. The first approach features scholars who understand populism as "short-sighted macroeconomic policies adopted for electoral purposes" (Hawkins 2017, 515). Such policies commonly create negative public attitudes towards populism because of its links to "demand overstimulation,

inflation, and structural adjustment” (Hawkins 2017, 515). The second approach has to do with political regimes and structure, and it is associated with dependency theory. Here, populism is said to be a “a cross-class, charismatic movement motivated by an ‘anti-status quo ideology’ [that] pursues import-substituting industrialization” (Hawkins 2017, 515). The third analytical approach focuses on political strategy, “associat[ing] populism with mass movements led by charismatic outsiders using an anti-elite discourse and governing in a top-down fashion” (Hawkins 2017, 515). A similar understanding of populism in Latin America is that it is “a political movement which enjoys the support of the mass of the urban working class and/or peasantry” against the status quo, “but which does not result from the autonomous organizational power of either of these two sectors” (Di Tella 1965, 47). This approach agrees with most literature about the broad existence of the two conflicting groups, and defines class as an important identifier of “the people” in Latin America.

Hawkins’ ideational approach, which emphasizes the content of populist ideas, is similar to Ernesto Laclau’s (1997, 2005) conception of populism in Latin America. Interpreting populism within post-Marxist theory, Laclau emphasizes the importance of class structures. In his perspective, “populism is... an expression of the moment when the articulating power of [a] (dominated) class imposes itself hegemonically on the rest of society” (Laclau 1979, 194). Laclau’s conception emphasizes populist actions and strategy, whereas Hawkins’ approach focuses more on populist language, like my own definition. Both Latin American scholarly approaches nonetheless “locate populism in the realm of ideas” and are centered around the conflict between the people and the elite (Hawkins 2017, 516). Some notable figures widely considered to be populists in Latin America include Juan Perón and Carlos Menem of Argentina,

Getúlio Vargas and Evo Morales of Brazil, Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, José María Velasco Ibarra of Ecuador, and Alberto Fujimori of Peru.

Populism in Europe is increasingly related to racial or ethnic exclusion, as scholars and commentators primarily label “populist” the right-wing parties anxious about mass immigration of non-Europeans. European populists support democracy, but they believe liberal representative democracy gives too much power to “(ethnic) minorities,” subverting the will of who they deem the “true” people (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011, 27). This manifests in the desire to exclude certain groups from benefiting from the welfare state or gaining certain rights in the country. Specifically, European populists are hostile towards “criminal illegal aliens (opposed by all parties)[,] legal noncitizens (e.g., guest workers, refugees)[,] citizens of foreign decent (e.g., Muslims) [and] ethnic minorities (e.g., Hungarian speakers in Slovakia)” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011, 29). Populists oppose these groups’ assimilation into their countries and cultures, and they essentially support “ethnocracy, or ethnic democracy” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011, 28). The identification of the group that makes up “the people” in the eyes of European populists is therefore closely related to race and nationalism. Europe has developed populist parties more often than individual populist leaders. Some include the Hungarian Civic Alliance, the National Rally of France, the Northern League of Italy, and the Freedom and Direct Democracy party of the Czech Republic (Pew 2019). Though less common, there are some left-wing populist parties in Europe as well, like Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece (Pew 2019).

Despite their frequent racial exclusivity, populists in Europe also have propagated political methods to amplify the voice of the people. Populists—though associated with political parties themselves—claim that other elite political parties have acted in their own interests without assent of the people. Therefore, European populists often advocate for increased use of

direct democracy, as in referenda and recalls to restore political power to the people. The Brexit Referendum, which occurred in 2016, is considered an recent and potent example of populism, as the people, inspired partly by anxiety around immigration, voted to leave the European Union. Although the vote was only 52–48, it has been considered a populist win by the UK Independence Party (UKIP). Nigel Farage, then-leader of the UKIP, gave a victory speech for the movement to leave the EU, essentially calling the results of the referendum before they were officially announced. In it, he exclaimed that, “this will be a victory for real people, a victory for ordinary people, a victory for decent people. We have fought against the multinationals, we have fought against the big merchant banks, we have fought against big politics, we have fought against lies, corruption and deceit” (Farage qtd. Withmall 2016). This characterization of the “ordinary people” and their struggle against the “corrupt” elite, and in this case also immigrants, is populist.

Evidently, the vagueness of definition allowed “populism” to be broadly applied, creating problems for scholars attempting to weave the qualities of many movements into one cohesive definition today. With this important background established, we look to another sort of background, theory, to foster our refinement of the fragmented study of populism to a single, workable definition.

Chapter 3: Political Theory

In order to paint the fullest picture of populism, it is important to establish the relevant political theory of the concept. There is a significant, though slight, distinction to make between the populist and the demagogue, which will help us distill our understanding of populism further. In terms of political theory, certain qualities of populism were described as harmful to our political system by the writers of the *Federalist Papers*, though they did not yet use the word “populism.” Alexander Hamilton and James Madison wrote that political passions, factions, and the tyranny of the majority were all threats to our institutions. Our republic values pluralism, which views society as made up of many different overlapping groups that need to be represented. By contrast, populism sees two main groups, the people and the elite, and it may be considered a threat insofar as it argues that only certain people’s interests need to be represented. Other thinkers actually view populism as a helpful in certain cases. In its very opposition to some of our political processes, populism may be able to serve as a necessary check on government if elites do indeed hold disproportionate power. Thinking about populism in political theory builds the foundation on which we can understand populist rhetoric later.

Populist or Demagogue?

Contributing to the difficulty of defining populism is that the term is sometimes used interchangeably with or in tandem with demagoguery, and the difference between the two is not established in scholarly literature. A recent target of such twofold accusations is Donald Trump, who has certainly been called a populist but also a demagogue by scholars like Eric Posner (2020), as well as by the media (Pankaj 2020; Lind 2021; Signer 2021). The English word “demagogue” was first used in the mid-seventeenth century, although the French used *demagoge* as early as the fourteenth century, and the word’s roots are ultimately ancient Greek (*Oxford*

English Dictionary 2018). “Demagogue” comes from the Greek word *dēmagōgós*, which means “popular leader” or “leader of the mob,” and was first used around the fifth century B.C.E. in Athens; there is also evidence that the term has been used as a pejorative since its conception (*Merriam-Webster Online* 2021; *Online Etymology Dictionary*).

We can measure the usage of the words “populist” and “demagogue” over time using the Google Books NGram Viewer, which will allow us to see an overview of the words’ historical popularity. The NGram Viewer graphs the frequency of search terms as a percentage of total words within a corpus of English books. The graph tell us that the capital-P “Populist” experienced a large spike during the 1890s during the era of the People’s Party, and that the use of the more general small-p “populist” has risen since the 1960s (fig. 1). Both of the wider terms “populist” and “populism,” have experienced a sharp rise in the 2010s (fig. 1; fig. 2). The term “demagogue” has been in decline since the mid-nineteenth century, though “demagoguery” has experienced a general upward trajectory since then; both, however, have experienced upward trends in the 2010s (fig. 3; fig. 4). It is clear also that “populist” and “populism,” since their conception in the 1890s, have been used more than “demagogue” and “demagoguery” in general. The latter language was not initially used to describe the People’s Party likely because their agenda was largely policy-based, and even William Jennings Bryan was not such an overbearing and domineering leader to qualify as a demagogue. It is interesting, then, that the meanings of “populist” and “demagogue” have come to have such overlaps today.

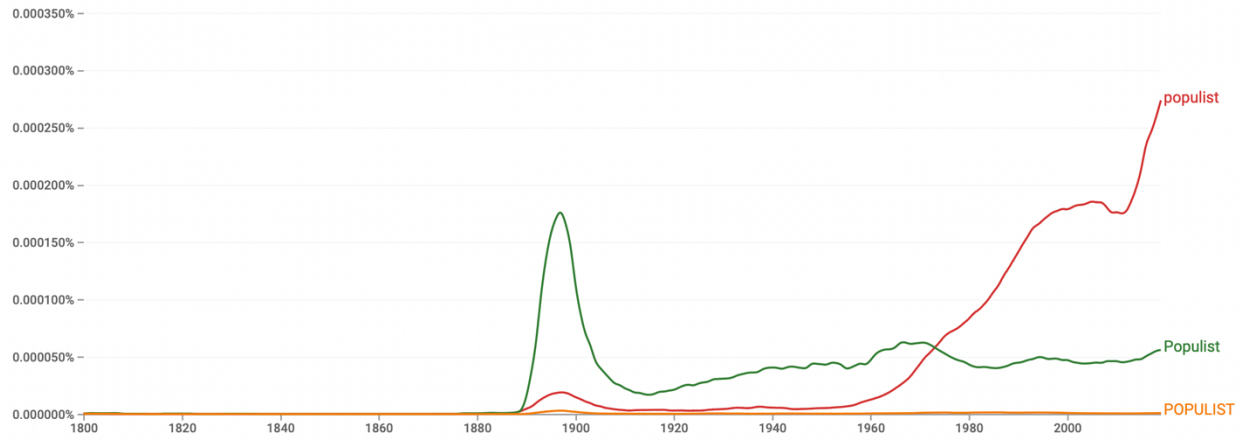


Figure 1. Google Books NGram Viewer for “populist.”

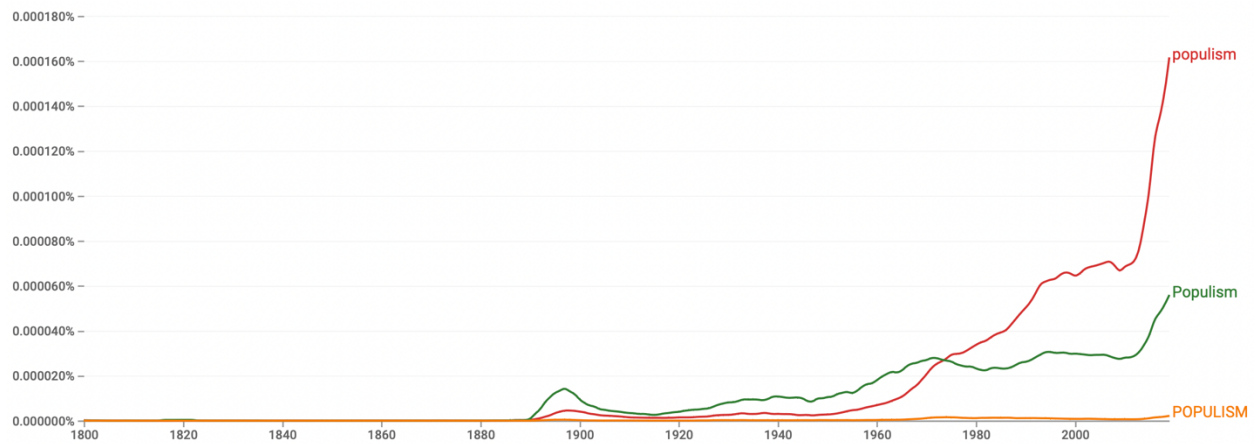


Figure 2. Google Books NGram Viewer for “populism.”

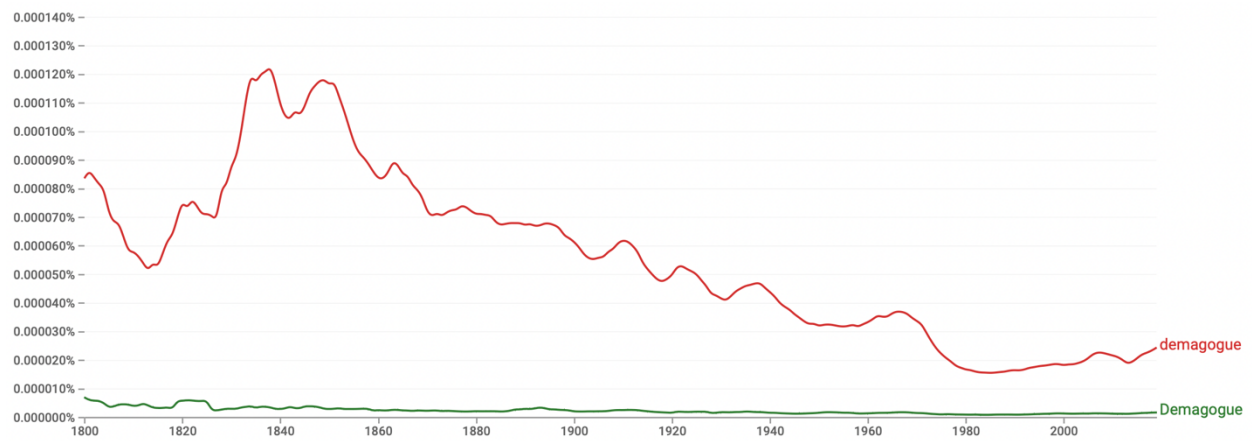


Figure 3. Google Books NGram Viewer for “demagogue.”

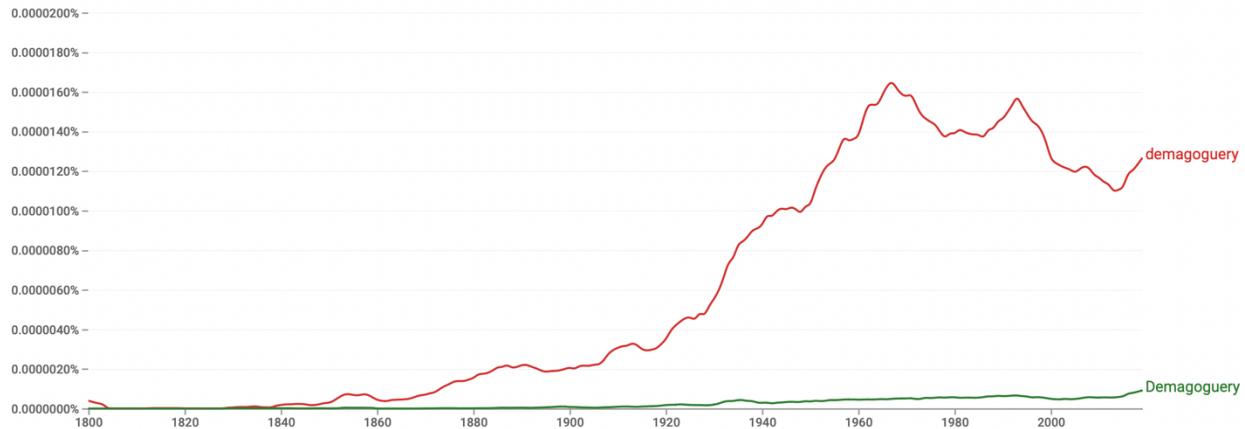


Figure 4. Google Books NGram Viewer for “demagoguery.”

Like “populist,” “demagogue” has also been used as a derogatory term. It may be the case, then, that these words are useful only to describe that politician who we do not like, and not to convey useful meaning for political analysis (Arnold 1937). Thurmond Arnold, a New Deal-era antitrust lawyer, described the use of “demagogue” as follows:

There is no difference between the demagogue and the statesman, except on the basis of a judgment as to the desirability of the social ends and social values which move the one or the other. The man with the social values you do not like, you will call the demagogue. You will say that he appeals to emotion and not to reason. This, however, is only because “reason” is the respectable end of the two polar terms, “reason” versus “emotion,” and you instinctively want it to point toward your own organization. (Arnold 1937, 380)

Arnold proposes that “demagogue” has no real meaning except being an insult. However, like populism, there actually is a useful definition of the term that can be applied to political rhetoric and behavior.

The two terms, populist and demagogue, describe similar concepts, yet they have some key differences which necessitate their differentiation in scholarship. Whereas I will describe the populist as someone who uses political rhetoric that promotes the interests of their conception of “the people” against a “corrupt” elite or establishment, Eric Posner describes the demagogue as such:

“a charismatic, amoral person who obtains the support of people through dishonesty, emotional manipulation, and the exploitation of social divisions; who targets the political elites, blaming them for everything that has gone wrong; and who tries to destroy institutions ... that stand in their way. The demagogue is frequently considered to be ... crude, vulgar, and violent—contemptuous of manners, civility and norms, which the demagogue sees as structures that keep the elites in power.” (Posner 2020, 9)

Other writers, like Charles Zug, have not determined anti-elite sentiment to be essential to demagoguery, instead arguing that demagogues are solely identified by their harsh rhetoric which “disrupts deliberation through popular appeals to non-rational passions and considerations instead of reason” (Zug 2019, 1). Of course, passionate rhetoric is also relevant to populism, but I argue that the populist has a narrower focus in the content of his message (the conflict between the people and the elite); whereas, the demagogue is willing to appeal to any narrative as long as it is motivated by emotion and power.

The primary difference between a populist and a demagogue, therefore, is that a populist is mostly concerned with political or institutional change for the people he represents, and a demagogue, while he may support that goal too, is more interested in abusing passions to gain power for himself. It is possible, therefore, for populism to be a necessary or even desirable corrective to excessively concentrated, or oligarchic, power in governmental institutions. Conversely, demagoguery has no such silver lining because it only seeks power for its own sake.

The line between these two concepts is thin, so it is often the case that a political actor is both at once. There can be a demagogic populist, who advocates for hostility towards the elite, or the clients of the elite, while striving for power and embracing vulgar and passionate rhetoric. For example, Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary and member of the Hungarian Civic Alliance, has heavily damaged Hungary’s democratic institutions by engineering unfair elections, rejecting the rule of law, and limiting freedoms like the press, all so that he can remain in power and continue to institute his right-wing populist anti-migrant and anti-Muslim platform

(Beauchamp 2018). This kind of extreme demagogic populism is not often found in the United States because our institutions have remained stable enough to not allow this kind of power-grab; however, in its embrace of passions over reason, it is clear that populism sometimes overlaps with demagoguery. Nevertheless, this thesis focuses on populism, whose conception has been further narrowed by this discussion of demagoguery.

Populism, Representation, and Direct Democracy

The United States is not a pure democracy but a constitutional republic where our basic rights are protected by the Constitution, and we elect representatives to govern in our place. In *Federalist* No. 51, James Madison explains that “a dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions” (Madison 1788, 269). In many ways, our institutions and produces were purposely designed to foster deliberation and slow decision-making. We have bicameralism and the separation of powers in order to ensure that decisions are made thoughtfully, and that no group has too much power. Precautions also take the form of institutional barriers that translate the will of the people and otherwise filter the people’s direct voices. The opinions of the public are instead “refined” by “wiser” individuals who “will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations,” and who translate the voice of the people into ideas more likely to satisfy the public good (Madison 1787, 47). There is always the unfortunate possibility, however, that the person elected may in fact “betray the interests of the people” (Madison 1787, 47). This is what populists are concerned with when they reject such representative systems.

Constitutionalism has proven a formula for stable governance, though there is some debate about its effectiveness. Populists, at least, are thought to believe that our government does not listen to the people enough. They are impatient with the limits that constitutional governance

places on the will of the people, and they instead may advocate for purer democratic rule.

Populism therefore adopts the virtue of democracy as the fuel and justification for its movement and advocates for corresponding changes to our constitutional system.

Because of the limits placed on populism by representative politics, populists may advocate for increased instances of direct democracy in their system in order to meet their desires. Populists may be hostile to representative politics because they believe that representatives are too responsive to the interests of the elite, overlooking the needs of the people. Alan Ware posits that in the United States, “populism often arises when constitutional procedures seemingly frustrate democratic input to the policy making process” (Ware 2002, 103). Our system values pluralism, which encompasses all kinds of groups and encourages deliberation in order to reconcile many differing views. Populism, by contrast, is often Manichaeian, viewing most issues on a moral binary where the populist idea represents what is right and good, and those who disagree are evil and working against their interests. Therefore, populists are especially unwilling to compromise and may seek to challenge pluralism.

Though populists in the United States seek to center the people, they do not argue for direct democracy as fervently as do populists in Europe. There, populists have promoted referenda in order to voice frustrations about the European Union and the role of elites in all levels of government (Youngs 2018). In negotiating the role of the EU, countries like the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Greece, and Hungary have used referenda instead of deliberation-based alternatives (Youngs 2018). There have also been pushes for more direct democracy in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania by populist parties in those countries (Youngs 2018). Wherever they occur, populist movements often challenge the functioning of representative

democracy because they believe the people are the *only* legitimate actor in government (Mény and Surrel 2002).

The Dangers of Populism

Populism is inherently related to democracy in its focus on appealing to the people, except some describe populism as a pathology (Shils 1956; Hofstadter 1964; Mény and Surrel 2002; Taggart 2002; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). The negative view of populism is supported by the very fact that the term is used as an insult—people want to bring down politicians by accusing them of being something believed to be harmful to our institutions. It is also viewed as a threat because of its manipulation of the democratic ideal of popular will, among other complaints. Edward Shils has a scathing take on the matter, equating populism with Nazism and McCarthyism, and calling it “an irrational protest ideology” (Shils 1956, 124). Richard Hofstadter reinforces the negative connotation of populism, by arguing that “the People’s Party had mobilized irrational hostilities, i.e., elements of anti-Semitism and generalized xenophobia against immigrants” (Hofstadter 1969, 12). Hofstadter also argues that the term is indeed meant to be pejorative because it has “greater affinity for bad causes than good” (Hofstadter 1964, 77). Alan Ware asserts that populism can “merge easily with an authoritarian style of politics,” even in the United States, because populists do not take in as much popular input as they claim; they just presume they are the sole voice of an agreeing people (Ware 2002, 103). Populism has not shed these negative associations in its common understanding. This is probably because populism does have some substantive cause for concern in representative systems. Thinkers have identified three main vices of populism: it appeals to passions, it strengthens factions, and it encourages the tyranny of the majority.

Populism is often fueled by passion rather than reason—a malady that the founders of the United States addressed in the *Federalist Papers*. With the people being sovereign in the United States, it may be hard to conceive that following the will of the people could be damaging. It is in the difference between popular passion and popular reason that this exception lies.

Madison, in *Federalist* No. 49, explains the need to guard against abuses of power if certain branches of government concentrate too much power in too few individuals (Madison 1788, 260). The people are indeed essential in solving this: “the people are the only legitimate fountain of power, and it is from them that the constitutional charter, under which the several branches of government hold their power, is derived” (Madison 1788, 261). Madison, however, sees problems in appealing to the people too often: frequent dependence on the people to solve governmental problems suggests a weakness in governmental structure and would make society turbulent by “interesting too strongly the public passions” (Madison 1788, 262). Too much trust in the people is also unwise because they are likely to agree with opinions that are shared by the masses, further inciting passion, instead of generating independent thought. Madison contends that “when men exercise their reason coolly and freely on a variety of distinct questions, they inevitably fall into different opinions on some of them. When they are governed by a common passion, their opinions, if they are so to be called, will be the same” (Madison 1788, 266). This is an idea that populism capitalizes on, as it purports to be the majority opinion in order to gain more support.

Madison continues the discussion of the extent to which the people are swayed by passions as opposed to reason. Madison holds: “It is the reason of the public alone, that ought to control and regulate the government. The passions ought to be controlled and regulated by the government” (Madison 1788, 264). Populism is largely motivated by strong feelings that the

people have somehow been wronged or betrayed by the elite or establishment. Instead of advocating for small effective changes in policy, populists may therefore insist on reformation of the whole system—a stance informed by their passions. The passions of populist leaders allows them to whip up followers’ passions as well because it is easier to take on a strong position when one knows they are supported by a group. Groups inspired by such passions, as explained by Madison, are not fit to govern.

Populism is also related to the harmful idea of factions that the American system was designed to protect against. Alexander Hamilton wrote in *Federalist* No. 9 that an advantage of the republic is that the union could subdue popular factions and their insurrections (Hamilton 1787). In *Federalist* No. 10, Madison concurs that one of the most important benefits of a strong union is its “tendency to break and control the violence of faction” (Madison 1787, 42).

What is a faction and is populism inherently factious? Madison defines a faction as “a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community” (Madison 1787, 43). Populists create faction based on their passion to restore power to the people from some corrupt elite, which is damaging because of its ignorance towards issues raised by others outside the group. Populist veneration of popular will is contrary to the general good because of its reliance on passion and its overlooking of minority viewpoints. Especially when a populist movement actively oppresses the minority, it is a faction in the worst sense.

The harms of factious spirit exist in the “distrust of public engagements, and alarm for private rights,” which are some of the effects of a single faction gaining too much power (Madison 1787, 43). To remedy these, Madison proposes two solutions for dealing with factions:

“removing its causes” or “controlling its effects” (Madison 1787, 43). The former could only succeed through eliminating liberty or ensuring every citizen hold the same opinions—each wildly unfeasible in our democratic system. The causes of faction have to do with human nature and the inevitable formation of different opinions based on a plethora of distinct circumstances and experiences that cannot be equalized (Madison 1787, 43). This inevitability of difference means that government must instead control factions by reconciling many perspectives through deliberation.

Madison acknowledges that factious leaders may be able to gain power within their states under representative democracy, but believes they rarely are able to spread their influence to other states, let alone the entire union. Though if we are considering populism to be a faction, this idea may not be true. At least in this study, I am considering populism that has already reached the national level. Perhaps another study may observe the possibility and frequency by which the faction of populism spreads beyond a single state. It may be true, in line with Madison, that in most cases, populism never spreads nationally. The existence of populists like Donald Trump on the national level indicates that this barrier can be breached, however, even if populists’ success at this level may be limited; but again, there could be more populists in local and state governments that simply have not been the subject of much press coverage or scholarly interest.

Today we have lived for over two hundred years in the proposed republic, and we can analyze the state of factions within it. Though the past decade has seen the rise of a populist faction stronger than in many other eras, the United States has not experienced as much populism overall as have countries in Europe or Latin America. Populism is not the only faction that may arise in our system, though; it can be argued that the two-party system in the United States

houses the very passions and sameness of opinion that the founders warned about in factions. Therefore, many successful political movements within this system believe they truly are correct and reject the idea that they must reconcile their beliefs with others, like the historical conception of factions. Despite the apparent proliferation of factions in the United States, is widely agreed that factions like populist movements, are bad for the republic.

Populism can also be understood in reference to the tyranny of the majority, another pathology to democratic systems. The dominion of the majority is based on the widely-accepted principle that “the interests of the greatest number must be preferred to those of the few” (Tocqueville 1835, 405). The issue with this principle, though, is that it allows for the interests of the few to be disregarded.

It is possible that a majority be virtuous; in *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville explains that “in the United States, ... the majority governs in the name of the people. This majority is composed principally of a mass of men who, either by taste or by interest, sincerely desire the good of the country” (Tocqueville 1835, 404). The advantage of this kind of majority rule is that the majority possesses a “moral dominion” over smaller groups because the larger size indicates that the knowledge of many men has been combined, meaning its wisdom has been strengthened in total (Tocqueville 1835, 404).

While this sounds beneficial, there is no guarantee that the majority in fact will be as ideal as Tocqueville describes there. Tyranny of the majority occurs when one group becomes omnipotent in its ability to enact governance. Tocqueville accordingly compares the power of the majority to the power of a single individual to act. In the United States, we would not allow an individual with a certain opinion to impose it on those who do not agree, so likewise we should not allow groups to do the same. When a majority gains too much power, it can silence

dissenters in the community and disrupt the general public good that comes from the voices of the minority being recognized. As such, Tocqueville, in agreement with Madison in *Federalist* No. 51, explains the importance for governmental bodies to “represent the majority, without necessarily being the slave of the majority’s passions” (Toqueville 1835, 415).

To determine whether populism involves the tyranny of the majority, we must consider whether populist movements indeed make up the majority of a given electorate. Populists may proclaim their group to be a majority in order to bolster their legitimacy (Taggart 2000). They may also truly believe the majority supports them, since they claim to seek to defend the masses against unfair treatment by the elite minority. Whatever the case, populist leaders allege to speak for the majority. If it indeed consists of the majority, it is possible that a successful populist movement could result in tyranny, especially because their support for a system of direct democracy counters the existing system’s checks on such a tyrannical group.

Our representative system limits some of the effects of the tyranny of the majority, which would be worse in a purely democratic system—the system that many populists advocate for. Popular government in such a system would allow for a domineering majority faction to threaten the rights of the minority and the total public good through the strict imposition of its will. Madison’s goal in conceiving our representative system was to “secure the public good, and private rights, against the danger of ... faction[s], and at the same time to preserve the spirit and the form of popular government” (Madison 1787, 45). The will of the people is of course important in our system, but the founders also considered carefully the adverse effects of too much power in the hands of the majority.

To preserve popular government while defending against majority factions, we return to Madison’s two solutions: “either the existence of the same passion or interest in a majority, at the

same time, must be prevented; or the majority, having such co-existent passion or interest, must be rendered, by their number and local situation, unable to concert and carry into effect schemes of oppression” (Madison 1787, 45). A pure democracy is not sufficient to confront the problem of factions because of the ease in forming factions in that system, but our republic addresses these concerns. Madison explains that society “whilst all authority in it will be derived from, and dependent on the society, the society itself will be broken into so many parts, interests, and classes of citizens, that the rights of individuals, or of the minority, will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority” (Madison 1788, 270). In other words, tyranny of the majority may be solved by creating a society so diverse that a tyrannical majority will never form.

Populism as a Necessary Check

While arguments that view populism as a threat to our republic have merit, some scholars understand populism as having potential for good if used in small doses. Populism is sometimes used as an effort to solve some of democracy’s problems, such as “the survival of oligarchies and the ensuing persistence of group power as opposed to the ‘one man, one vote’ principles, the prevalence of particularism as opposed to the general interest, [and] a lack of decisional transparency” (Pappadopoulos 2002, 47). Pappadopoulos (2002) even argues that representative democracies are inherently oligarchic. If such accusations are true, populism may be the solution to the unjust accumulation of power in the hands of the elite.

Some scholars argue that populism’s ability to adapt to such a wide variety of political movements over time makes it useful for keeping governments accountable (Di Tella 1965; Wiles 1969, Mudde 2004). Di Tella (1965) indeed believes populism is a helpful tool in instituting reform. Though radical changes to the political process could damage our institutions,

the desire for reform also acts as a “warning sign” about the limits and deficiencies of current systems of government (Mény and Surrel 2002, 17). In this way, populism can be a helpful check on democracy to ensure it is functioning in a way that serves the people—not the populist “people,” but all citizens. In general, populism reminds us “that democracy is not a given but is instead a constant enterprise of adjustment to the changing needs and values of society” (Mény and Surrel 2002, 17). Populism, then, may have a legitimate role to play in the upkeep of representative government.

Even though populists often support direct democracy, which may make the concept suspicious, the desire for more democracy in institutions is not always harmful. Many reforms for more democratic governance in the U.S. have been successful. The 17th Amendment replaced the election of senators by the legislature with the direct election of senators by the people—a reform supported by the People’s Party. This change was thought necessary to overcome the power that had become concentrated in wealthy businessmen, and it is an example of when a populist idea was helpful in actually restoring power to the people from the elite class and fostering more accountability. There is also the fact that many states have direct democratic participation in the form of referenda or propositions. Such measures were introduced in the early twentieth century, and were at least partially influenced by the People’s Party’s platform. They are populist in that they give the power directly to the people’s vote, yet state referenda are also considered helpful.

Other populist ideas exist in several modern arguments for reform to the U.S. government that many support. For example, the desire to abolish the Electoral College and instead determine the presidential election solely by the popular vote echoes populist philosophy. It seeks to allow for the rule of the majority by abolishing the protections the Electoral College affords to state

with smaller populations. Another example is the desire to abolish the filibuster, which is also populist in its objective to curb the power of minority dissenters and strengthen the power of the majority (Litt 2021). These are just a few examples of when populist ideas may be part of positive reform in the United States.

Populism is understood to be successful insofar as it advocates for its own version of democracy, often direct democracy, where the people are sovereign and will be heard. Populists may convince their followers that this is the best system because it is most responsive to the people, but, as has been previously discussed, there are good reasons that the United States is not a pure democracy. Our government is not overly responsive precisely to avoid passions like those which rise from populism. In a country as large as the United States, as Madison theorized, people have diverse experiences which breed diverse opinions, so the populist vision of a unified popular will is not likely as monolithic as is claimed. Appealing to the public opinion more often therefore may not be as productive as is hoped. Even so, populism does have several virtues, namely its ability to act as a corrective to governments that have strayed too close to elitism.

Now that we have reviewed the history of populism and grounded the concept in theory, we can dive in to the task of defining it more precisely. In the next chapter, I will review the scholarly literature on populism and form a new definition by identifying the most important and accurate components of many different takes. The new definition will be a combination of content, which is the political message of populism, and form, which dictates what populism actually is.

Chapter 4: Literature Review of Empirical Study of Populism

Populism has long been considered a fractured concept, even a “spectre” that evades concrete definition because of the vast variety of movements the term has been used to describe (Ionescu and Gellner 1969, 1). The problem of classification lies in the fact that the word “populist” has existed before a clear definition has been attached to it; many movements like those discussed in Chapter 2 were identified as such before populism became a relevant field of study. Thus, scholars already had a set of cases to work with in discerning a definition. Peter Worsley (1969) identifies a problem in that the field might have assumed what it set out to prove: that these so-called populist movements do, in fact, have important characteristics in common, in spite of their broad differences, which legitimize their classification as populist.

Regarding a general definition of populism, there is more agreement in the literature about populism’s content than about the form that it takes. The content of populism mostly has to do with what kinds of narratives and messages so-called populists frequently invoke. The question of form is more overarching and has to do with the way in which these messages are communicated. Accordingly, I will discuss the characteristics of populism first before coming to a conclusion about the definition of populism’s form. My research, from the operationalization of my definition, will ultimately allow us to determine whether “populist” is a useful and meaningful term with which to describe political rhetoric in the United States.

Although populism is widely agreed to have roots in the United States, scholars and commentators have also applied the concept to others areas of the world. These literatures in Latin America and Europe are somewhat independent of that of the United States, and their geographic dispersion has complicated the task of defining populism as well. Much of the scholarship on populism in Latin America and Europe features greater emphasis on direct

political participation, charismatic leadership, and class consciousness than the study of American populism (Kaltwasser et al. 2007). Discussion of populism in the United States, on the other hand, has traditionally been categorized by historical analysis rather than political analysis, though the discourse has expanded in recent years. The wide diffusion of populism studies creates a problem of definition because each regional field has its own ideas and terminology; attempts to connect these literatures have only really become successful in the twenty-first century. Because of this gap in scholarship, much of the literature that helps us understand populism in the United States comes from the fragmented discussion of a universal definition of populism, of which American populism is merely a part. This task of defining populism, though it seems basic, continues to be an important yet unstable aspect of populist scholarship that we must address.

The Content of Populism

Though different movements in different regions have attracted the label of “populism,” some of the content of their universal messages is agreed-upon in the scholarship as comprising populism. Namely, populism always prominently features appeal to “the people.” Though the exact identity of the “people” shifts across nations and time, the sentiment remains. In the vast majority of cases, populism also includes a vilification of some elite that the “populists” have deemed evil and hostile to the legitimate interests of the people. Such rhetoric uses a Manichaean view of politics, meaning every issue has a strong binary moral dimension. These three traits—appeal to “the people,” hostility to some “elite,” and a Manichean outlook—are the most important signifiers of populism, though there are secondary traits that some scholars have identified in their accounts as well. The review of relevant literature will thus be organized around these primary and secondary key terms.

Primary Traits

The literature uniformly identifies appeals to “the people” as a necessary element of populism (Hofstadter 1969; Wiles 1969; Worsley 1969; Laclau 1979, 2005; Canovan 1981, 2002; Taggart 2000, 2002; Mény and Surrel 2002; Ware 2002; Mudde 2004; Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Moffitt and Tormey 2013; Aslanidis 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017a). “The people” is commonly understood to be a monolithic entity of simple folk, either real or an “abstract construction” (Mény and Surrel 2002, 6). Peter Wiles’ early definition of populism includes the idea that “virtue resides in the simple people, who are the overwhelming majority” (Wiles 1969, 166). Whether the people of populism really are the majority is contested, but the characterization of this population as simple persists (Taggart 2000). The populist notion of the people importantly does not actually include all citizens of a country, but often divisively categorizes the people in terms of class or “blood, culture, race and so forth” (Mény and Surrel 2002, 6).

Examining populism in American history, Richard Hofstadter describes the people as “innocent folk, victimized by economic catastrophes for which it shared no responsibility” (Hofstadter 1969, 17). “The people,” imagined as an idealized mass whose members embody the virtues of “the common man” is an important rhetorical image that recurs often in populist thought, especially in the United States. Margaret Canovan (1981) argues that this allegory garners support for the movement by allowing populism to evade the task of accurately explaining who the common man is and what his interests are. The simplicity of the people also manifests in their initial reluctance to participate in politics—important because their lack of enthusiasm in politics actually awards their participation when it finally occurs, because they act as a new voting base (Taggart 2000).

Paul Taggart made significant contributions to the collective understanding of the meaning of the people in populism, the most lauded portion his argument being his coining of the term “the heartland” to describe the common location ascribed to the people (Taggart 2000). The heartland is the home of the “virtuous and unified population” that populism fights for (Taggart 2000, 95). Taggart’s heartland, however, is not necessarily real (any more than “the people” need really be a unified majority); it often incorporates a nostalgia that populist movements wish to revive. This new terminology is useful in that it separates the exclusive populist idea of the people from the true democratic idea of popular sovereignty—two concepts that have been conflated in the common understanding of populism (Taggart 2000, Mudde 2004). This ambiguity has been helpful to populists because it allows them to “reinforce their democratic credentials while allowing them to reject the particular democratic politics of representation,” affording them initial access to the political process (Taggart 2000, 98).

Juxtaposed to the conception of a noble people in the populist narrative is an enemy presumed to be working against their interests; they are usually at odds because of demands that the people believe are warranted but that the establishment will not grant (Judis 2016). This characterization of the enemy as the elite or the establishment is almost as ubiquitous as the people in characterizing populism (Moffitt and Tormey 2013; Judis 2016). Most scholars refer to the enemy of the people as the corrupt elite (Hofstadter 1969; Wiles 1969; Laclau 1979, 2005; Canovan 1981, 2002; Taggart 2000, 2002; Mény and Surrel 2002; Ware 2002; Mudde 2004; Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Aslanidis 2015; Judis 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017a). The foundation for this antagonism is that the people believe, or have been persuaded to believe, that the corrupt elite has betrayed them and that they must fight to restore the “primacy of the people” (Mény and Surrel 2002, 13).

Taggart explains that supporters of populists are bonded more effectively by hate for an enemy rather than comradeship amongst themselves as “the people”: “populists are often more sure of who they are not than of who they are,” and they participate in othering by “demonizing” a certain group with the aim of garnering support for the populist movement and fortifying cohesion within it (Taggart 2000, 94). It is not only the elites themselves who are the enemy of populism: “the primary antagonism of ‘the people’ may be other groups in society” (Moffitt and Tormey 2013, 391). Canovan explains that in addition to the powerful and corrupt elite, populists also attack “those they identify as clients of the elite and beneficiaries of taxes paid by ordinary, hard-working people: typically, asylum-seekers, immigrants, minorities who have been granted special treatment, welfare recipients and so on” (Canovan 2002, 32). By defining the authentic “people” in opposition to the elite, the establishment, and other demonized groups, populism is understood to be exclusive. I will henceforth refer to this hatred for the elite, the establishment, and such groups together as anti-elite sentiment, because populists often understand the establishment as institution of the elite, and the other demonized groups as clients of the elite, so overall, populists are hostile towards the elite. In any case, populism is usually a battle between the people and their enemy—this two-fold identification is echoed in almost every definition of populism and is one of its most coherent features.

Many scholars also find that those identified as populists share a Manichaean outlook, though this characteristic is not as universal an element as the conflict between the people and the enemy (Hofstadter 1969; Mudde 2004; Hawkins 2009, 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Kaltwasser 2017, Hawkins et al. 2019). To be Manichaean is to describe every issue in terms of binary morality, characterizing things as either good or evil, right or wrong; it may also result in the use of bellicose language in politics (Hawkins et al. 2019). The concept appears most

prominently in the populist determination of the people as good and the elite as evil (Shils 1956, Wiles 1969, Mudde 2004). Edward Shils clarifies in his early work that populism associates the people's will with "justice and morality," an idea which becomes a common part of future descriptions of populism (Shils 1956, 98). The Manichaeian descriptor is somewhat elusive as it in appears largely within the manner by which populists communicate messaging; nevertheless, it is a key concept in identifying populists.

Secondary Traits

In addition to the three key traits of people-centrism, anti-elite sentiment, and Manichaeian outlook, scholars have identified other characteristics of populism that vary relatively widely across movements (Wiles 1969; Canovan 1981; Moffitt and Tormey 2013). According to Taggart, "populism has an essential chameleonic quality that means it always takes on the hue of the environment in which it occurs" (Taggart 2000, 4); the wide diversity of recorded populist cases accounts for the many number of traits identified, but no instance of populism encompasses every one.

One of the most widely agreed-upon secondary traits of populism is anti-intellectualism (Wiles 1969; Worlsey 1969; Canovan 1981; Taggart 2000; Moffitt and Tormey 2013). This characteristic is a specific form of the promotion of the common man against elites, which idealizes a "common-sense" approach to politics. The idea is that the experiences of ordinary people yield a certain understanding of reality that should guide politics if government is supposed to be responsive to the people; elites are understood to rebuff this "common-sense" approach because they are too influenced by their higher education, which is not considered to be valid experience that contributes to the formulation of "common sense." As such, anti-intellectualism in populism may manifest itself as a hostility towards politicians, intellectuals,

and experts, as well as a general distrust of modernization, progress, and science (Worsley 1969; Canovan 1981). In practice, populist leaders may aim to present their policy proposals in simple terms—avoiding jargon—so as to delegitimize more complicated policies and further appeal to the ordinary man (Wiles 1969; Canovan 1981; Taggart 2000). The appeal to the people in decision-making instead of experts implicitly includes a preference for common knowledge over book smarts, outlining the anti-intellectualism often found in populist thought (Taggart 2000).

Populism is often understood as reaction to crisis, or perceived crisis, in its country (Taggart 2000; Moffitt and Tormey 2013; Judis 2016; Mudde 2004). To distinguish modern American populism from its history, Judis (2016) argues that populism revitalized as a result of the Great Recession, an idea that follows the idea that populism may be intensified by perception of crisis. He also asserts that populist movements are simultaneously “warning signs of a political crisis” (Judis 2016, 16), as populist leaders signal to the major parties that there is unrest with the status quo. Mudde (2004) qualifies the idea that crisis causes populism; he instead contends that populist movements mobilize only in the face of “persisting political resentment, a (perceived) serious challenge to ‘our way of life,’ and the presence of an attractive populist leader” (Mudde 2004, 547). Taken together, crisis is certainly intertwined with instances of populism.

Though populists often promise improvements through their leadership, populism’s capacity for electoral success is innately limited; it is reliant on political and social conditions which collapse populism when they experience change (Minogue 1969; Worsley 1969; Taggart 2000; Aslanidis 2015). There is a sense of temporality in populism, and it has even been characterized as “merely a hastily constructed rationalization of difficult times, which could be abandoned once things improved” (Minogue 1969, 208). The strongest supporters of populist

movements are often those who are not regularly involved in politics, so once they feel satisfied with the populist leader's political actions, they return to their normal apathy (Taggart 2000). Canovan describes the difference between "bringing the people into politics, and taking politics to the people," wherein populism has trouble targeting politically disinclined masses (Canovan 2002, 42-43). In this way, it is implicitly limited and therefore unlikely to achieve long-term success. At least in the United States, populist movements only gain official power through the very institutions its campaigns usually oppose, inciting a paradox which confuses its own messaging and authority over its arguments. Nevertheless, although populism often fails to achieve long-term official power in politics, it frequently recurs in campaigns (Worsley 1969, Aslanidis 2015).

The lack of core ideological values in populism frequently leads to the susceptibility of populist followers to support charismatic leaders who communicate directly to the people (Canovan 1981; Taggart 2000; Mudde 2004; Mazzoleni 2008; Hawkins 2009). While this is a characteristic that is more important to definitions produced by scholars of populist movements in Latin America, it appears in other locations as well. Charismatic leadership, however, is sometimes at odds with populist calls for increased direct democracy, as is common in Europe. In light of this conflict, Mudde does not dwell on the importance of a strong and charismatic leader, arguing that it "facilitate[s] rather than define[s] populism" (Mudde 2004, 545). Populism in the United States does not call for increased instances of direct democracy as often as in Europe because its supporters are not often eager to participate politically (Taggart 2000, Mudde 2004). As the heartland is not innately politically active, it requires an outside force to bring it into politics (Taggart 2000). Further, because of their usual political detachment, these people

want a leader to represent them by “knowing” what they want rather than “listening” to them (Mudde 2004, 558).

There are several more characteristics of populism that are helpful in recognizing the phenomenon. Populist politicians may eschew etiquette; this idea of “bad manners” can best be understood as an aversion to the social norms and political correctness of the establishment (Canovan 1999; Moffitt and Tormey 2013). This is representative of a further appeal to the common man in attempts to relate to ordinary people through behavior.

Populism has also been described as nostalgic for a past when desires were once met (Wiles 1969; Canovan 1981). Usually politically against the establishment and the status quo, populists may advocate for a shift back to the politics of a time before the people’s alleged exploitation. Conspiracy is also a component of populism noted by several scholars (Shils 1956; Hofstadter 1964; Wiles 1969; Taggart 2000). Populists sometimes feel the need to explain the corruption of the evil elite with conspiracy theories that depict the people and the populist in a better light.

Populists are thought to have a special relationship with the media because populists communicate political messages to the people *through* media. This is not to say that other politicians do not utilize the media—of course they do—but populists demand more media attention and often use media differently than other politicians. Their tactics may include the following: “playing the underdog, using abrasive speech, earning media spaces by a ‘bullying’ style against the establishment, and staging “newsworthy’ political events” (Mazzoleni, 2008, 182), in addition to holding rallies and attempting to gain free media publicity in general (Mazzoleni et al. 2003).

What is Populism: Ideology, Strategy, or Style?

So, what is populism? While scholars' identifications of populism's traits have been diffuse and overlapping, three main characteristics of populism emerge: people-centrism, anti-elite sentiment, and Manichaeian outlook (though other secondary traits may be included depending on the circumstance, or depending on who you ask). There is yet to be a unified definition of populism accepted in the field. In fact, there is even wider disagreement on the form that populism takes than on what ideas or themes are common to politicians called "populist." The literature essentially falls into three camps: ideology, strategy, and discursive style. After considering the merits and drawbacks of each, I will use the discursive approach in my study.

Many scholars purport that populism is an ideology. (Taggart 2000; Mudde 2004; Pauwels 2011; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). The scholar at the forefront of this first approach is Cas Mudde, who presents a new definition of populism that has become widely accepted by scholars: populism is "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous 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, 543). Explaining his vision of the populist ideology, Mudde clarifies that his idea of populism is based on Michael Freeden's conception of a thin-centered ideology, meaning it has a core too weak to exist independently but may be attached to certain other political ideologies (Freeden 1996). This characterization of populism as a thin ideology solves the problem of categorizing as populist movements that are so politically diverse. Recently, both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump have been widely called populist, despite their obvious partisan differences about public policy. In its thinness, populism is capable of attaching itself to ideologies like liberalism or conservatism without completely altering its identity.

Though this position is well represented in the literature, it has received valid criticisms. Bonikowski and Gidron (2013) argue that the ideological approach is too binary to apply to real situations, because populism exists on a spectrum and must be measured as such. Others dismiss the ideological approach for its faulty attempt to construct a fundamental essence of populism; these scholars believe that any effort to identify a core is bound to fail because, as noted in the prior section, the conception of populism is so diffuse. Canovan (1981) contends that an ideology cannot exist without settled political views, which populism has none; it is ultimately reactive to political context, so it cannot be an ideology. Further, while some ideologies, like liberalism and communism, experience worldwide interconnectedness, populism usually does not connect with parallel global movements, as its identify shifts in every case (Worsley 1969; Canovan 1981).

Populism's ability to appear in both right-wing and left-wing movements within individual countries, as well as across the globe, contributes to its elusiveness as a concept. Judis argues that "right-wing populists champion the people against an elite that they accuse of coddling a third group" and "left-wing populists champion the people against an elite or an establishment" (Judis 2016, 15). Worsley concedes that populism can occur within left-wing or right-wing ideologies but believes it is more frequently left-leaning (Worsley 1969). Usually, Latin American populism is more associated with the left, and European populism is usually associated with the right.

Proponents of populism as an ideology champion that their approach is applicable to right and left-wing populism (Mudde 2004). Charles Postel critiques this notion, however, for actually failing to explain right-wing populism in the United States. He even classifies the general conception of populism in the United States to be "ahistorical" because of its failure to differentiate left-wing from right-wing populism in defining the term.

The second approach sees populism as a form of organization and focuses largely on political strategy and mobilization. It emphasizes the relationship between leaders and followers rather than focusing on the content of policies or style of communication used. As such, this approach is often used by scholars of populism in Latin America (Weyland 2001; Mény and Surrel 2002; Roberts 2006; Barr 2009; Jansen 2011).

Weyland offers the clearest definition, writing: “populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland 2001, 14). This approach emphasizes the means by which populists communicate their messages, but it is not as accurate as the third approach, which has a similar focus. This definition is more responsive to phenomena observed in Latin America, there, but as the United States offers a different political environment, it needs another definition.

Most relevant to American populism, the third camp regards populism as a form of political discourse (Hofstadter 1964; Kazin 1995; Canovan 2002; Laclau 2005; Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Hawkins 2009; Moffitt and Tormey 2013; Gidron and Bonikowski 2013, 2016; Judis 2016; Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017a). Michael Kazin, scholar of populism in the United States, asserts that populism, “more an impulse than an ideology, is too elastic and promiscuous to be the basis for such an allegiance” as other ideologies enjoy (Kazin 1995, 3). This observation underlines the fluidity of the discursive approach, which allows it to be applied to a wide range of populist movements. The discursive approach to populism also dovetails with media studies, whose scholars argue that the relationship between populism and the media has heretofore been overlooked (Mazzoleni et al. 2003; Negrine and Papathanassopoulos 2011; Mazzoleni 2008; Block and Negrine 2017). Block and Negrine define the “populist style” as

having “deeper roots associated with identity and culture, a specific style of rhetoric, and savvy use of various communication channels ... through which populists connect with the political feelings, aspirations, and needs of those who feel disenchanting” (Block and Negrine 2017, 179). Focusing on the means of communication in addition to aforementioned content, Kazin further describes populism in the discursive style approach: “populism [is] a flexible mode of persuasion. [It] use[s] traditional kinds of expressions, tropes, themes, and images to connive large numbers of Americans to join their side or to endorse their views on particular issues” (Kazin 1995, 3).

Even on the surface, discursive style is a better approach than searching in vain for a unified or coherent ideological structure to populism that does not exist (Canovan 2002). The value of this approach is indeed in its “lack of content, and hence its readiness for use in a range of different contexts for a variety of different purposes” (Canovan 2002, 32).

Jagers and Walgrave characterize populism as a “communication style of political actors that refers to the people,” and their definition was important in pioneering quantitative analysis in populism studies (Jagers and Walgrave 2007, 3). I was initially reluctant to support the discursive style approach because of its seemingly fleeting quality, but I realized its value in its focus on the importance of communication in populism. Almost every quantitative study on populism uses the discursive approach. Even those who classified populism as an ideology operationalize their theories in terms of discourse and rhetoric. As the primary unit for analyzing populism is its discourse, it makes sense for the concept to be defined in terms of communication (Aslanidis 2015). The discursive style thus has two distinct advantages: “it resonates better with the cognitive aspects of the populist message; and it provides a solid methodological framework for empirical research” (Aslanidis 2015, 98).

Review of Established Methods

My definition of populism as a kind of political communication lends itself to operationalization. The use of this sort of definition in the field has widened the array of quantitative studies on populism as well (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Pauwels 2011; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Bos and Brants 2014; Aslanidis 2015; Bonikowski and Gidron 2016; Oliver and Rahn 2016; Popping 2017; Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2018). These studies analyze populist discourse by searching for populist content within political communications.

One of the founding studies of this nature was completed by Jagers and Walgrave (2007) on Belgian populist parties. They defined populism as a communication style whose content consisted of three factors: mention of the people, anti-elite sentiment, and exclusivity (Jagers and Walgrave 2007). They operationalized these elements using dictionary-based content analysis in order to analyze party broadcasts and manifestos, which were selected because they are a direct form of communication from the party to the people (Jagers and Walgrave 2007). As a result, the study was able to measure the degree of populism utilized by a wide selection of Belgian political parties.

Moffitt and Tormey (2013) were similarly successful in measuring populism by analyzing discourse. They worked with an existing set of leaders who were already accepted as populists, then identified the characteristics that they had in common. They focused on “appeal to ‘the people’; crisis, breakdown, threat; and ‘bad manners’” in their study, so as to emphasize aspects of populism not often studied (Moffitt and Tormey 2013). By measuring these, they determined to what degree several leaders were populist, and established more groundwork for understanding populism as a political style.

Bonikowski and Gidron's (2016) study analyzed speeches by American presidential candidates from 1952 to 1996, using a quantitative dictionary-based method to identify populism. They used individual speeches as their unit and characterized them on a binary of populist or not populist. This was one of the few studies focusing on populism in the United States, but a drawback of this study is that they did not analyze campaigns from past two decades, despite this era being a time populism has been observed as spiking. Their findings included support for the differentiation between left-wing economic populism and right-wing political populism, as well as for the idea that populism that using populist rhetoric is part of a larger political strategy of challengers.

In another rare American study, Oliver and Rahn (2016) measured the populism in the language of seven presidential candidates in the 2016 election, finding that right-wing populism is more prevalent than left-wing populism today. They measured in terms of people-centralism, political or economic anti-establishment sentiment, and the extent of "everydayness" (Oliver and Rahn 2016, 193). To measure "people-centrism," they counted the amount of times candidates said "the American people" or "Americans" as well as "our country" or "our nation" in speeches. They also accounted for the words "we-they" as a percentage of total words in a speech, so as to tease out exclusivity. They used content-analysis software, and the number of text matches in each transcript was standardized as a percentage of its total words. I will borrow this method, as well as the idea of measuring for "we-they" and "everydayness" of the language. Appealing to the common man is an important part of populism, so one would expect populist politicians to simplify their language in order to communicate effectively with them. While this study had some useful methods, its limitation to one election does not tell us much about populism in context.

Another method in the study of populism is qualitative content analysis, which has been practiced by the team behind the Global Populist Database (Hawkins et al. 2019). Although this method is less common than quantitative techniques, Kirk Hawkins presents it to be part of the future of the study of populism because of its ability to analyze data across countries and across time more easily. This same method was also used to analyze populist discourse in the United States during the 2016 election, and the study found that there was moderate populism across the board (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2018). In each study, speeches was graded by four coders each using holistic grading with a rubric. I adapted this rubric for use in the qualitative portion of my study, as seen in Appendix B. The findings make up the Global Populist Database, which lists populist scores for leaders and parties in forty countries (Hawkins et al. 2019).

My study is more ambitious than previous studies of American populism in its scope of time and range of methods. Where other studies have opted to use either quantitative text analysis or qualitative content analysis, I opted to use both in order to make up for the deficiencies of each. Each also serves as a check on the other; candidates who scored high on each test are more likely to actually be populists than candidates who scored high on only one. Bonikowski and Gidron (2016) solely used text analysis and only reviewed campaigns that took place between 1952 and 1996. Oliver and Rahn (2016) also used text analysis, but they only studied candidates of the 2016 election. Hawkins et al. studied a very wide variety of actors, though they only used the holistic grading method. My study is wider in that it analyzes 3,147 speeches from thirty-eight American campaigns from 1952 to the present, using both quantitative content analysis of every speech and qualitative grading of a sample of speeches to gain a more complete understanding of populism in the United States.

A New Definition

Because of populism's fractured nature, as well as its frequent invocation without heed for definition, there is debate about whether it is even a useful concept in understanding of political movements. The general consensus of the literature is that there is indeed use to the term despite its complications—a stance that is implied in the very existence of the field of populism studies (Worsley 1969; Canovan 1981; Mudde 2004). This partly stems from the fact the populism has already been used so widely over the course of the past century in the media in many different languages (Canovan 1981). Worsley (1969) explains that because historical movements have already been characterized as populist, it is necessary to find commonalities within them to better understand populism, despite widely varying contexts. Some scholars push the question of meaning to the extreme, as in Laclau's conception, which is so broad that it allows for the interpretation of almost all politics as populist (Laclau 2005). Summed up by Canovan: "it's here so we should use it" (Canovan 1981, 10).

Regardless of meaning, some scholars think it is a mistake to define populism using a single, catch-all definition (Canovan 1981, Judis 2016). However, conceptualizing populism will allow us to operationalize populism in order to measure it in real life. Understanding populism "will enable us to understand populist movements, and which will, perhaps more importantly, allow us to understand essential elements in the politics of representation" (Taggart 2002, 62). My research will shed light on this question of meaningfulness in the United States.

After considering the many perspectives on populism, I argue that that the definition of populism in the United States should largely follow from Hawkin's (2018) discursive approach because of its wide applicability and ease of operationalization. However, I don't think Mudde's (2004) ideological approach is completely without merit. De Vreese et al. were able to combine

the two into their own definition of populism as a “communication phenomenon” (de Vreese et al. 2018, 425). It reads: “populism can be understood as a discursive manifestation of a thin-centered ideology that is not only focused on the underlying ‘set of basic assumptions about the world’ but in particular on ‘the language that unwittingly expresses them’” (de Vreese et al. 2018, 425). Their definition combines the importance of both content and form in addressing populism, whereas many definitions mistakenly focus on one or the other. The other advantage of this approach is that it can be easily operationalized in order to determine “degrees of populism” in discourse, solving the problem of the binary ideological method (de Vreese et al. 2018 426). As I agree on the importance of the various components of de Vreese et al.’s definition, my definition is similar in structure and applicability.

Of course, harmony of content and form is crucial in defining populism. The content, though not sufficient to form the core of an ideology, is fairly well-identified by scholarship. Features common to all populist movements in America include appeals to “the people,” who are understood to be ordinary Americans who are part of an exclusive heartland, as well as anti-establishment or anti-elite sentiment against “corrupt” actors who thwart the interests of the common people. This content is usually communicated with a Manichaeian outlook of strong binary morals. As for the transmission of this content to the people, populism emphasizes communication and takes the form of a political discourse in which politicians appeal to the common man. My definition of American populism is as follows: *Populism in the United States is a mode of political persuasion characterized by an effort to promote the interests of “the people,” understood to be a monolithic and moral group of ordinary Americans, against a “corrupt” elite or establishment which obstructs these interests.* This definition is tailored to

American populism, and its operationalization will help us understand the rhetoric of American political figures.

Chapter 5: Hypotheses, Methods, and Results

As a mode of political persuasion, populism is expected to appear most clearly in political rhetoric. Because of this, my study analyzes campaign speeches of presidential nominees. I utilized three distinct tests employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to search for evidence of populism in these speeches. First, Microsoft Word's Readability Statistics allowed me to measure the simplicity of language used in the speeches, as "everydayness" of language was identified as a trait of populism by Oliver and Rahn (2016). Second, I used quantitative dictionary-based content analysis on my universe of speeches to identify populist language as a percentage of the total words per campaign. The method entailed creating a dictionary mostly conglomerated from other studies of words that signify populism in terms of people-centrism and anti-elite sentiment. The benefit of this method was the ability to analyze large amounts of data quickly and in a uniform reliable way. Third, I directed four readers in scoring random samples of speeches per campaign using qualitative content analysis based on a rubric. This method included measures for people-centrism, anti-elite sentiment, Manichaeism, and populism as a whole. Though less reliable, this method was advantageous in that it allowed for the interpretation of tone and context where the dictionary-based content analysis could not. The individual strengths from several different methods serve to check the others and yield more accurate results.

In this chapter, I will walk through my hypotheses, methods, and results. After explaining the reasons behind my several hypotheses, I will describe more thoroughly the methods that I used to test them. Then I will share the results of the study and interpret which candidates used the most populist rhetoric. The findings will be discussed briefly here, and a more in-depth literary analysis of some candidates' rhetoric will be conducted in Chapter 6.

Hypotheses

Based on what scholars have identified as markers of populism and based on what I perceived as common expectations of populism based on media portrayal, I formulated several hypotheses, most of which will be tested using multiple methods.

Hypotheses
<i>Hypothesis 1.</i> Donald Trump is more populist than any other presidential candidate since 1952.
<i>Hypothesis 2.</i> Republicans are more populist than Democrats.
<i>Hypothesis 3.</i> Populism is more prevalent in presidential campaigns between 1992-2020 than between 1952-1988.
<i>Hypothesis 4.</i> Challengers are more populist than incumbents (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016).
<i>Hypothesis 5.</i> “Democrats rely primarily on economic populism and Republicans rely primarily on anti-statist (political) populism” (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016).

Figure 5. Table of hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. Since Donald Trump’s announcement of his presidential campaign in 2015, the media has characterized him as a populist. Some headlines include “Donald Trump Elected President, Riding Populist Wave” from *The Wall Street Journal*, “Nativism and Economic Anxiety Fuel Trump’s Populist Appeal” from *NPR*, and “Trump Was a Corrupt Populist Demagogue, Not a Would-Be Fascist Dictator” from *MarketWatch* (Hook et al. 2016; Liasson 2015; Lind 2021). This was presumably because of his rejection of the political establishment and its norms, and his promise to fight for working class. I was interested in testing whether these accusations hold water, or whether “populist” was simply a pejorative term that the media used to describe an unconventional candidate whom they did not like. Such a classification has

not been made about other presidential candidates in recent memory save Bernie Sanders, whom the media cites as riding the same populist wave as Trump in 2016 and 2020.

Hypothesis 2. In the media's characterization of Trump as a populist, they paint other members of the Republican party with the same brush. Politicians like Jim Jordan, Josh Hawley, Tom Cotton, Marco Rubio, and Mitt Romney have been implicated as populist by the media recently (Chait 2020; Strain 2020; Levitz 2020, 2021). Because Republicans have been characterized as populist more often than Democrats today, and because the modern media portrays populism as primarily a right-wing movement, it was expected that populists would most often be Republicans. This hypothesis was also formulated in response to the rise of right-wing populism since the 1990s in the United States, as noted in the literature, where such actors as the Tea Party and the Freedom Caucus were identified as populist.

Hypothesis 3. In its attention to partisan trends, this hypothesis overlaps with Hypothesis 2. In response to the aforementioned right-wing resurgence of populism in the 1990s, I expected that candidates during that era would be more populist overall. I also imagined that this right-wing populist energy would mean right-wing presidential candidates were more populist than those of the left-wing during this era, and that this era would represent most of the populism found in the study.

Hypothesis 4. This hypothesis was adopted from Bonikowski and Gidron's (2016) article, which found that incumbents were indeed less likely to rely on populism than challengers. As explained by Bonikowski and Gidron, the rhetorical strategy of populism is more effective when used by political outsiders than members of the political elite because it purposefully targets the political establishment. I therefore expected that challengers, or candidates who have not previously held presidential office, would be more populist than incumbents. The

aforementioned “self-limiting nature” of populism also plays a role here in that even if candidates were indeed populist during their initial presidential bid, once in office, they become a member of the political elite, diminishing their ability to successfully harness anti-elite sentiment.

Hypothesis 5. Also adopted from Bonikowski and Gidron’s article, this hypothesis analyzes the specific content of anti-elite sentiment, relating to the identities of the elite. Part of the elusiveness of populism is that these identities shift over time and between political parties. Like the original left-wing People’s Party, the Democratic Party is expected to value the redistribution of wealth from an oppressive economic elite. By contrast, the Republican Party is expected to be more skeptical of the government as is also consistent with history. If supported, this hypothesis would also give credence to the separation of populism from partisan ideological bounds and justify its definition as a freer mode of rhetoric.

Methods

Campaign speeches made by party nominees see candidates directly address constituents and fight for their support, meaning they are likely vessels for populist rhetoric. The analysis of campaign speeches allows for the inclusion in the study of candidates who did not win the presidency; as populism may be short-lived in power, the study of runners-up will allow us to better track candidates over time. Also, using campaign speeches allows the analysis of a broad sample of politicians to be studied, not only those who are already believed to be populist, as in other studies. Speeches made along the campaign trail may also be a better indicator of populism than speeches made in office, because candidates are more likely to present their unfiltered beliefs there than in speeches made after election where unity and compromise are more valued. One might object that a populist would be a populist in their presidency as on their campaign, but

official presidential speeches would not be very fruitful to this study. Though a candidate may not change their political approach in office, their rhetoric during the campaign is not only bound to be less filtered, but also it communicates the essence of why voters should choose them, therefore emphasizing the importance of the people, a key aspect of populism. I analyze every major presidential campaign since 1952, not only those suspected to be populist. Looking for populism within campaigns, where it is expected to be most detectable, is the best way to discover whether measures of populism will differentiate between populist and non-populist candidates.

There have been eighteen presidential elections between 1952 and 2020, and therefore there are thirty-six campaigns to analyze. I also chose to include Bernie Sanders' 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns, increasing the total to thirty-eight, because he has been identified as a populist in the media as well as in scholarship (Staufer 2020). Other figures historically identified as populist, like George Wallace, were not included because there was not enough available campaign material to analyze. For each campaign, I analyzed via computer-based quantitative methods every speech I could locate between September 1 and election night of that year, in addition to the candidate's party nomination acceptance speech. For Sanders' special case, I included every speech of his I could find in the three-month period before his dropping-out of the race in 2016 and 2020. There were 3,147 total speeches, all of which I analyzed using Microsoft Word Readability Statistics and quantitative dictionary-based content analysis (Appendix A). As for the qualitative content analysis, which was more time-consuming, five speeches from each campaign that exceeded one-thousand words were randomly selected to be analyzed, in addition to the party nomination acceptance speech for each campaign (with the exception of Sanders). Four readers scored the populism of these 226 speeches using a holistic

grading method (Appendix B); each speech was read by two readers whose scores were averaged.

I accessed speeches made between 1952 and 1996 using the Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse. The archive contains transcripts of presidential campaign speeches of major party nominees made between September 1 and election night. I maintained this three-month range with the speeches I accessed from other sources. Barry Goldwater's 1964 campaign was not included on the Annenberg/Pew Archive, so I accessed his speeches using the Arizona State University Library. For campaigns between 2004 and 2020, I accessed speeches from the University of California, Santa Barbara's The American Presidency Project. While many modern speeches were available there, some candidates' material was missing. I was able to access speeches from Trump's 2020 campaign from Rev's Transcript Blog, though other campaigns were only available on the C-SPAN website: Gore 2000, Bush 2000, Bush 2004, Sanders 2016, and Sanders 2020. It is important to note that Rev and C-SPAN only offered uncorrected closed-captioning records which included filler words and typos, whereas archives like Annenberg/Pew and UCSB had either edited speeches of such language, or provided speeches "as prepared for delivery." Though I corrected the spelling and grammar errors identified by Microsoft Word, I could not manually read and edit every speech. Consequently, the data for sentence length and ease of readability may have been affected. However, I alerted the readers to the situation and directed them not to allow the state of the spelling and grammar affect their interpretation of a candidate's eloquence.

As the 2020 election ran concurrent to the COVID-19 pandemic, methods of campaigning in that race differed from years past, which is a possible confounding factor. Joe Biden made few in-person public appearances, choosing instead to campaign mostly virtually.

Although he made some in-person remarks to crowds, Biden also released many virtual statements to the public, which I included in his campaign file because they nevertheless featured him speaking directly to the public. Donald Trump's campaign style was less affected by the pandemic, as he continued to host in-person campaign events and rallies.

I performed two methods of quantitative analysis to identify indicators of populism using Microsoft Word Readability Statistics and AntConc's concordancing and text analysis software in addition to qualitative content analysis. The data consisted of 3,147 speeches from thirty-eight candidates' presidential campaigns between 1952 and 2020. Varying levels of accessibility to campaign material for different candidates yielded a wide range in the number of speeches per campaign, from twelve to 312. The average number of speeches per candidate was about eighty-three, and the median was sixty-six. I will discuss the results and implications of the Readability Statistics first because they do not seem to be a very good indicator of populism. Quantitative dictionary-based content analysis and qualitative content analysis were more successful; I will explain the methods of these two approaches before analyzing the results in depth as related to my hypotheses.

Quantitative Readability Statistics

Because appealing to the common man is an integral aspect of populism, populists are expected to use language that is easy to understand. They may eschew jargon and simplify complex issues as a facet of anti-intellectualism (Wiles 1969; Canovan 1981; Taggart 2000). Oliver and Rahn (2016) even coined the term "everydayness" to express the off-the-cuff quality of populist rhetoric (Oliver and Rahn 2016, 193). To code for these indicators, I recorded the following categories in Microsoft Word's Readability Statistics: words per sentence, characters per word, Flesch Reading Ease, and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. This method did not prove to

be very useful; every category experienced a trend towards simplicity as time went on, which is probably more indicative of larger trends in communication than an increase in populism in political rhetoric.

The words per sentence in the presidential campaigns measured has declined since 1952 (fig. 6). Kennedy's 1960 campaign used the most words at 23.8 per sentence, whereas Trump's 2020 campaign featured the lowest value of words per sentence, 9.1; his 2016 campaign had the fifth lowest, 13.8. Other low scorers included Gore 2000, 11.2; Bush 2000, 11.6; and Dole 1996, 13.5.

The characters per word measure is also interesting because of its small range: 4.2 to 4.7 (fig. 7). In the English language, any speech is going to have a similar average of word lengths because of the high frequency of short words like articles and prepositions and the rarity of longer words. Nevertheless, Romney 2012 and Trump 2020 tied for the minimum value of 4.2, whereas Stevenson 1956 and Reagan 1980 tied for the maximum value of 4.7. The average characters per word in general in English has been determined to be 4.7 (Norvig 2013).

The next measure was Flesch Reading Ease, which is a calculation involving the average sentence length and the average number of syllables per word, developed by author Rudolph Flesch in 1948. It is scored from 0-100, with 100 being the easiest to read. Within my dataset, Trump's 2020 campaign had the highest readability at 80.5, and Reagan 1980 had the lowest at 52.2 (fig. 8). The mean was 64.3, and the median was 64.0.

The Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level follows a similar formula with the same units, but they are weighted differently, yielding slightly different results. The test indicates the grade level reading ability necessary to understand the text. The Trump 2020 campaign scored the lowest

grade level of 4.2, and the McGovern 1972 campaign scored the highest grade level of 11.3 (fig. 9). The mean and median were 8.5 and 8.6.

The Readability Statistics certainly indicate that Trump's 2020 campaign used simple language, but Trump's 2016 campaign fell in the middle of the pack, which was interesting because outsiders are supposedly more populist; I expected the first campaign to use simpler language, if it had been, as I hypothesized, more populist than the second. Perhaps Trump began to speak more casually during the second election because he gained confidence from his supporters throughout the presidency. These results may have also been affected by the fact that material from both of Trump's campaigns were not available from a single source, so there may have been discrepancies in the datasets not caused by a difference in language. The other suspected populist, Bernie Sanders, did not use exceedingly simple language and actually often fell around the mean on this measure. I conclude that simplicity of language alone is not a great measure of populism. Instead, we can look to indicators that measure the content of messaging from candidates.

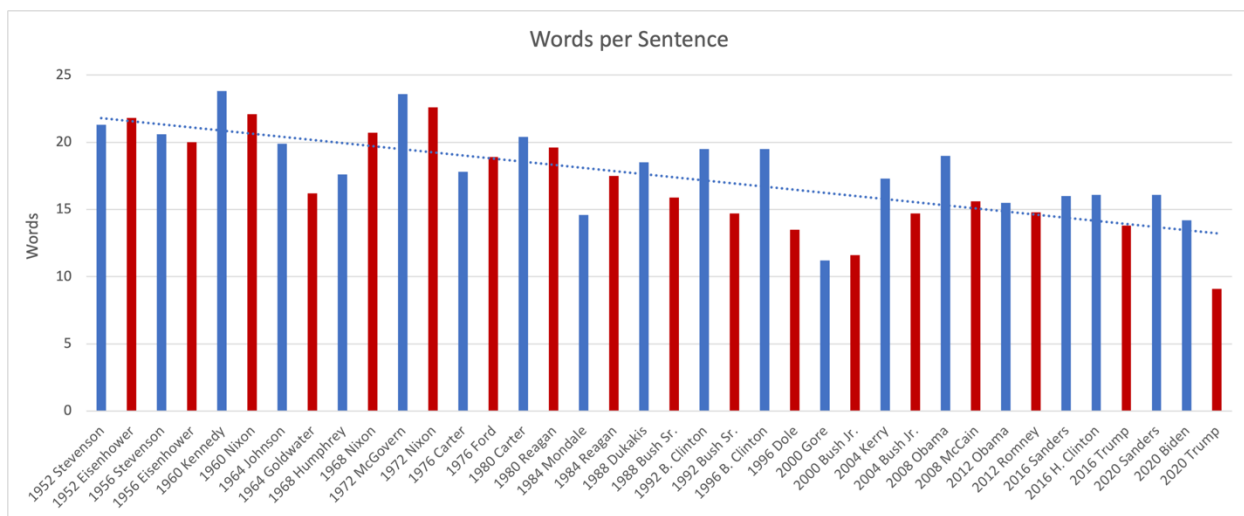


Figure 6. Words per sentence as calculated by Microsoft Word Readability Statistics

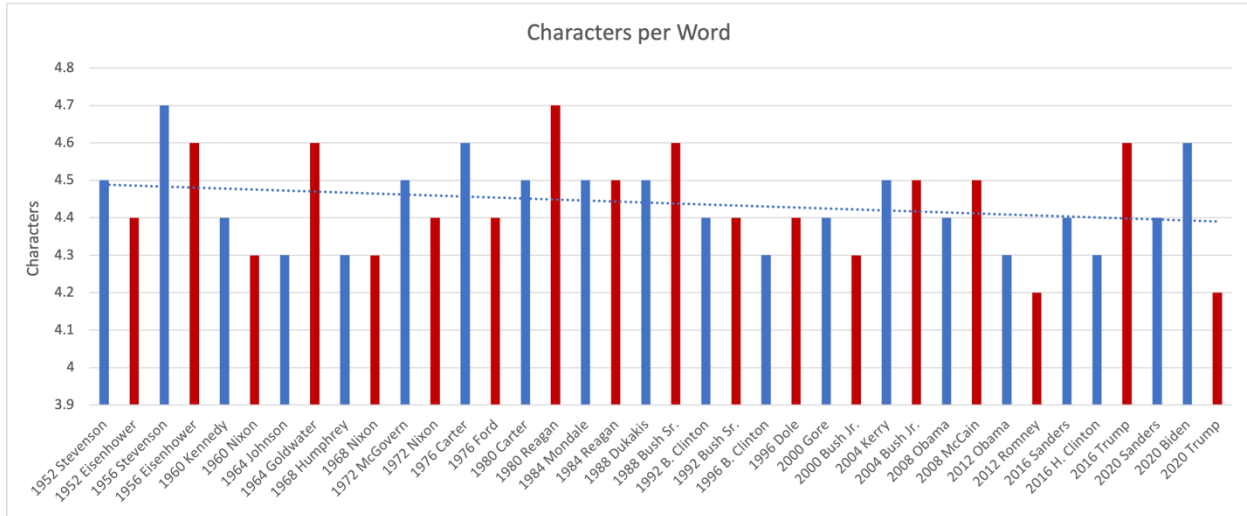


Figure 7. Characters per word as calculated by Microsoft Word Readability Statistics.



Figure 8. Flesch Reading Ease score as calculated by Microsoft Word Readability Statistics.

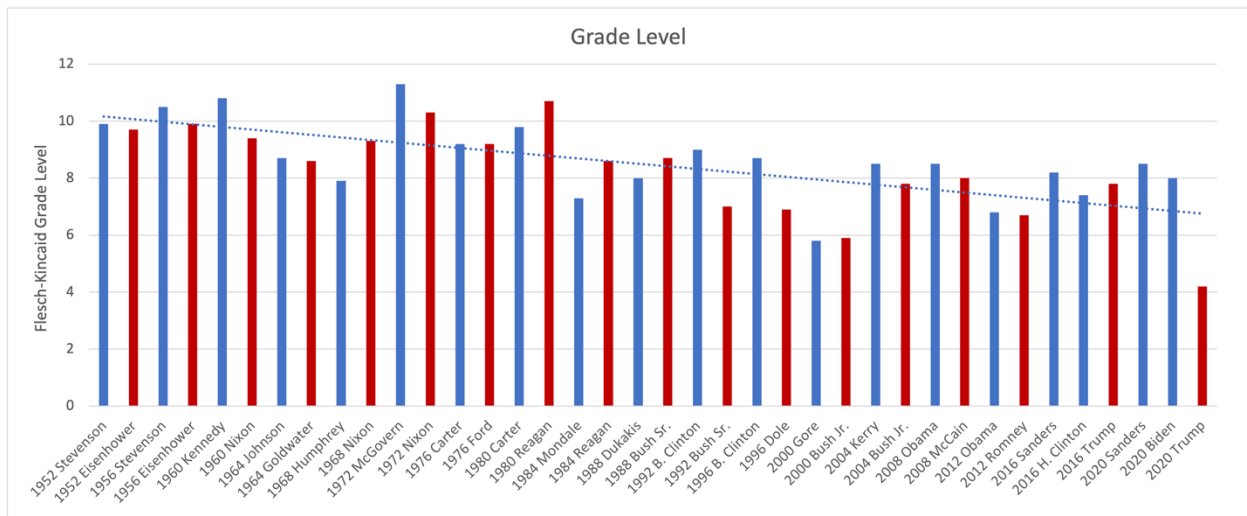


Figure 9. Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score as calculated by Microsoft Word Readability Statistics.

Quantitative Dictionary-Based Content Analysis

I performed quantitative dictionary-based content analysis on all 3,147 speeches to detect populist words and phrases. I coded for the extent to which rhetoric was people-centric and anti-elite, borrowing specific words from established studies (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Bonikowski and Gidron 2016; Oliver and Rahn 2016). I used AntConc content analysis software to run the tests on documents which held the text from every speech I used for each candidate's campaign. Populism was measured as a percentage of the total words of each candidate's campaign that were identified to be on the word list. Higher percentages indicated more populist speech. The full list of terms used is presented in Appendix A.

For the people-centric measure, I calculated sections "we-they" and "people-centrism." The "we-they" section was adapted from Oliver and Rahn's 2016 study, and simply searched for instances where the candidate used the plural pronouns (fig. 10). I chose this measure because it insinuates groupings, and a main indicator of populism is favor or hostility towards different groups. Because pronouns are used very often—and often not to refer to populist groups or enemies—the percentage is not only large, but it may not be a very accurate indicator.

The second part of the "people-centrism" measure is reference to the people (fig. 11). Such language should be a main indicator of populism, because it cannot exist without exalting "the people." To code for this, I included in the dictionary phrases like "the people," "the voters," and "the taxpayers." It was important that these words were preceded with "the" rather than searching for the single words alone because politicians use these practical words in many non-populist ways; including "the," however, indicates a greater populist spirit in the designation of these actors as groups. The category was a conglomeration of words from several studies (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Bonikowski and Gidron 2016; Oliver and Rahn 2016). The

dictionary includes references to the “common man,” and possessive nationalist language like “our nation” and “our country.” An interesting result of this category was that Trump’s 2016 and 2020 campaigns were at the two extremes, being .27% in 2020, and .70% in 2016. Ultimately, this category did not seem to identify populists with success because some of those who used “people” language the most (Carter, Clinton, McCain), were not consistently identified as populist by other indicators.

The existence of an evil enemy who targets the people in populism was measured in the “anti-elite sentiment” category, consisting of four sub-categories: “general,” “political,” “economic,” and “common-sense.” The language for the “general” category was adapted from Rooduijn and Pauwels’ (2011) compilation of anti-elite words, as well as from Bonikowski and Gidron’s (2016) list of populist words and phrases (fig. 12). They selected such words by looking at their contexts and making sure they were populist more than half of the time, which justified the inclusion of such words in my own study. The general anti-elite sentiment category sought to identify instances of discontentment with the elite by searching for words like “elite,” “establishment,” “corrupt,” and “betray.” I also ensured through the concordance feature of AntConc, which displays the words in their context, that most of the instances of their use were indeed populist.

In addition to general anti-elite sentiment, I also tested for rhetoric against political elites and economic elites separately (fig. 13, fig. 14). This relates to Bonikowski and Gidron’s (2016) idea that Republicans are more often against the political establishment and Democrats are more often against the economic elite, which will be discussed further in relation to Hypothesis 5. While both inevitably overlap with the “general” category, the “political” list included such words and phrases as “bureaucrat,” “the system,” “lobbyist,” and “donor” in order to isolate

specific political motives. The “economic” list included words like “millionaire,” “billionaire,” “one-percent,” and “CEO.”

The primary value of computer-based content analysis is that it allows for the analysis of a lot of data. However, this comes with a trade-off; it is less valid because of the reduced ability to interpret nuances in tone and context. While I was able to view words in context using AntConc’s concordancing software, I could not check every case, meaning not every use of every term was populist. Therefore, in addition to these quantitative methods, I also included qualitative content-analysis of randomly selected speeches for each campaign, which allowed for the interpretation of context more readily.

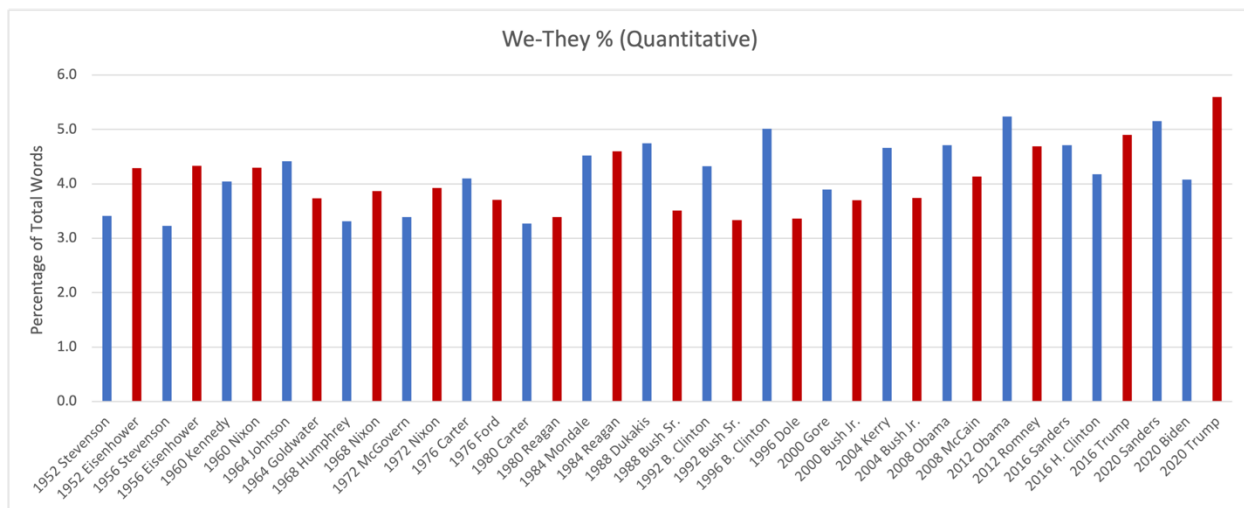


Figure 10. Use of plural pronouns as a percentage of total words.

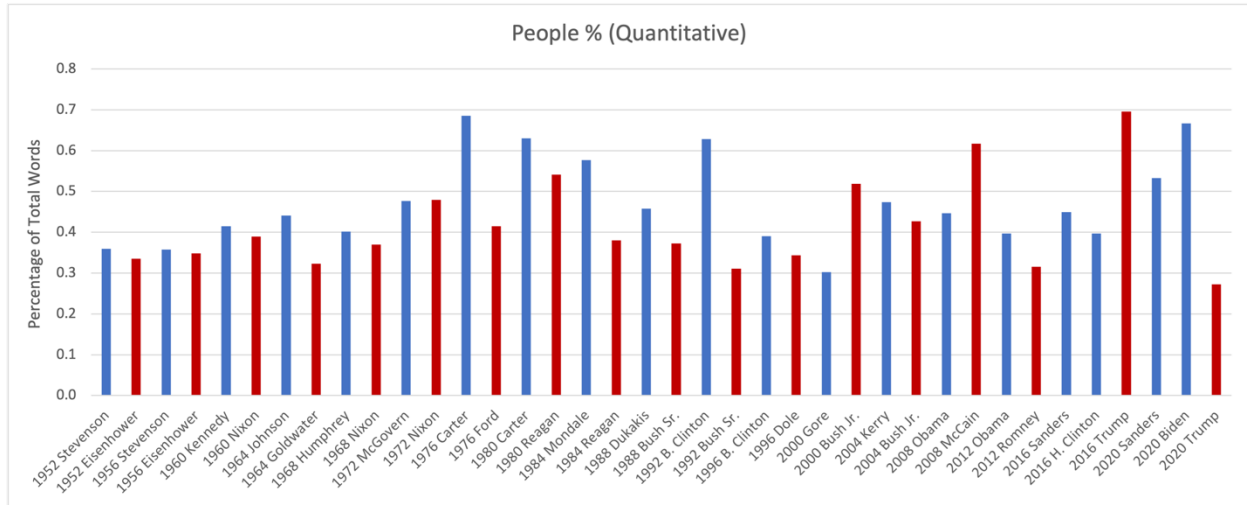


Figure 11. Use of words relating to "the people" as a percentage of total words.

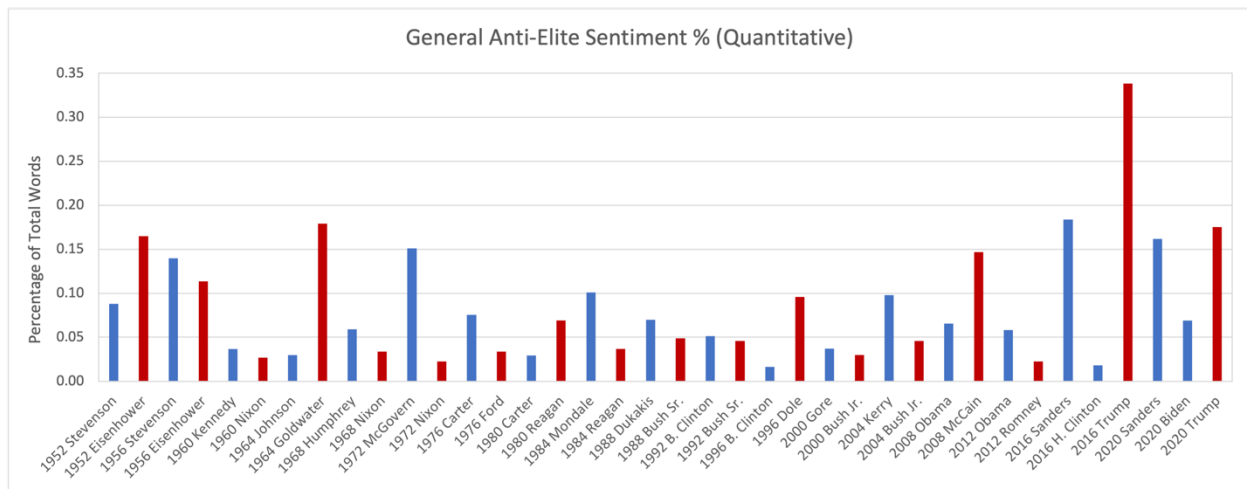


Figure 12. Use of words relating to general anti-elite sentiment as a percentage of total words.

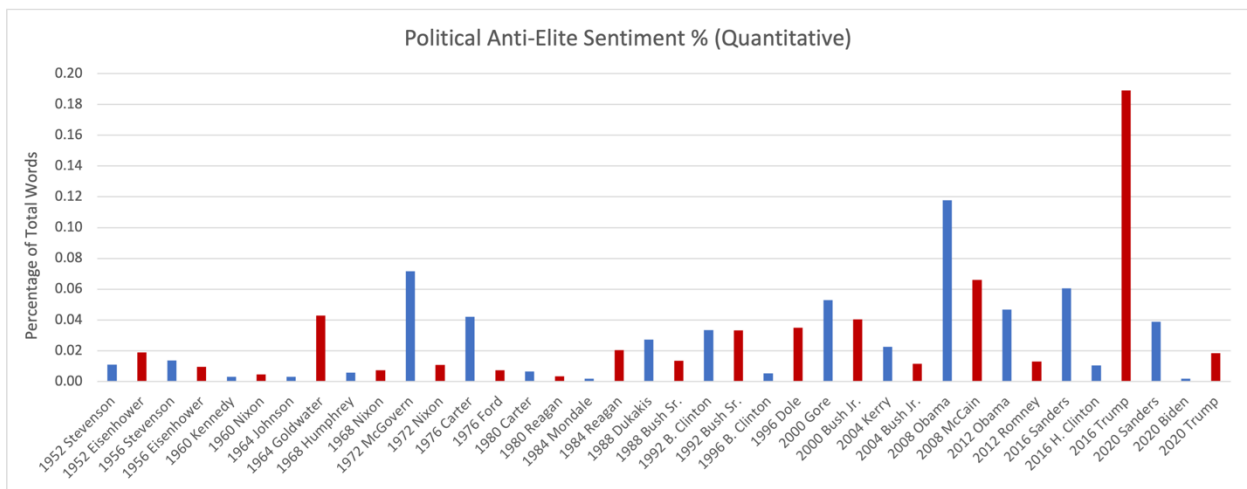


Figure 13. Use of words relating to political anti-elite sentiment as a percentage of total words.

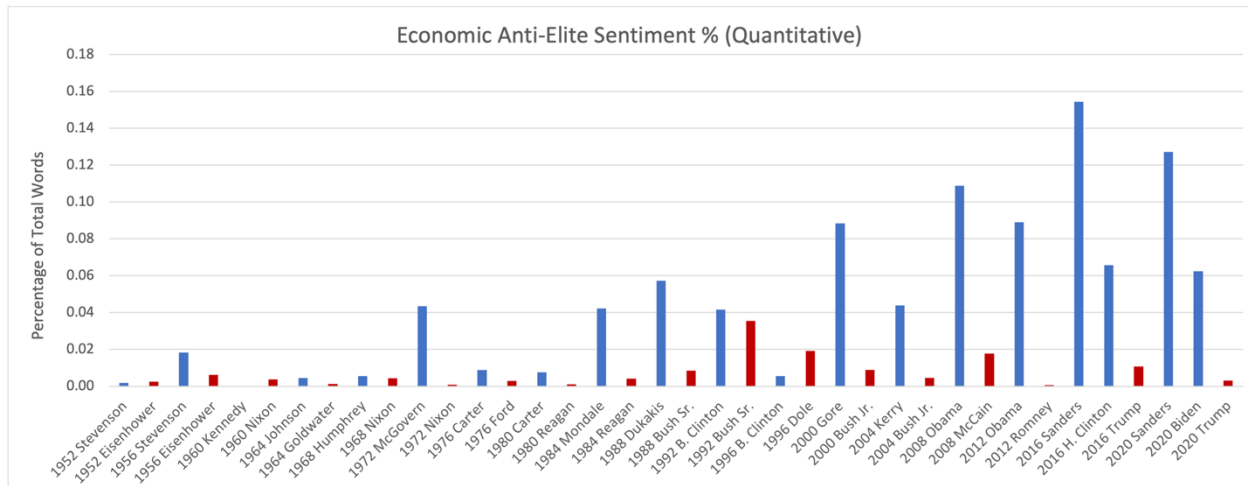


Figure 14. Use of words relating to economic anti-elite sentiment as a percentage of total words.

Qualitative Content Analysis

The qualitative method of data collection featured four readers scoring speeches for populism based on a rubric I adapted from the study by Hawkins and Kaltwasser (2018; Appendix B). Readers scored the speeches on a scale from 0-2; 0 being not populist, 1 somewhat populist, or 2 very populist. They scored every party nomination speech, as well as five campaign speeches randomly selected from each campaign, which totaled 226 speeches. Sanders is represented because although he did not receive his party's nomination and therefore never gave a party nomination speech, he remains an important figure in contemporary American populism as designated by the media. The 226 speeches were randomly assigned to four readers, and each speech was scored by two different readers who were blind to the candidate. While in some contemporary cases, the readers were presumably able to determine the speaker using context clues, I emphasized political neutrality in their training. The readers additionally had a diverse array of personal political stances.

This qualitative analysis is largely inspired by Hawkins' approach which used holistic grading, a technique borrowed from educational psychology. In holistic grading, readers interpret a text as a whole, then score it based on specified characteristics. This approach is very

applicable to political discourse because allows readers to find subtle meanings in texts that computer-based methods miss, further legitimizing the discourse definition.

Hawkins and Kaltwasser (2018) performed content analysis of campaign speeches and final debate language of all 2016 presidential candidates. While they compared United States populism averages to successful Greek and Venezuelan populist party leaders, I will only compare United States political rhetoric. As for their method, they gave several readers transcripts of speeches and a rubric with three categories to consider: “Manichaeon vision, populist vision of the people, evil elite” (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2018). These helped readers determine a holistic score for overall populism of each speech.

I borrowed Hawkins and Kaltwasser’s trifold structure, as these traits are key to populism. The categories of people-centrism and anti-elite sentiment are used in this method in addition to the quantitative content analysis method because they are important indicators of populism (fig. 15, fig. 16); using two methods for these indicators will yield a clearer picture of populism because each method has different strengths. The Manichaeon outlook category is represented here in the qualitative analysis section as opposed to the quantitative section because it is essentially an attitude in communication, so it would have been difficult to measure only using specific words (fig. 17). I also added other categories in addition to Hawkins and Kaltwasser’s big three. The readers measured the extent to which speeches were anti-intellectual, conspiratorial, nostalgic, used “bad manners” (Moffitt and Tormey 2013), and featured “everydayness” in language (Oliver and Rahn 2016). Readers considered their scores for the several specific categories and also gave each speech a score for populism in general (fig. 18). These specific categories were included in the qualitative analysis because they cover specific subjects that change over the course of time and political cycles, so it was unfeasible to attach

specific words to them for the dictionary-based analysis. The results of the qualitative method will be used in tandem with the results of the quantitative method to analyze populism in candidates' rhetoric.

I trained the readers using texts from Hawkins and Kaltwasser's original study, and I followed their method of training. This included going over with the readers speeches that were definitive examples of each score and example of in-between scores. A 2003 Evo Morales speech was a 2, a 2005 Stephen Harper speech was a 1, a 2004 Tony Blair speech was a 0. It did not matter that these examples were not of an American context because they were political speeches just as well. Some examples of in-between scores were a 2010 Sarah Palin speech that was a 1-1.5, and a 2001 George W. Bush speech that was a 0-0.5. These were also helpful in explaining that sometimes different speeches could be scored slightly different by different readers. In retrospect, however, I find it odd that Hawkins and Kaltwasser allowed for in-between scores on their three-point scale. I don't think populism really exists on so wide a spectrum. The fact that they allowed for in-between scores reinforces the fact that populism is elusive even to learned scholars and trained readers.

A problem I encountered was that the readers had a variety of individual average scores for the total of speeches they scored; two routinely scored low and two routinely scored high. This was concerning because it meant that the scores of the speeches may not as a whole reflect their populist scores necessarily, but rather the trend of the reader's scoring. The second round of grading sought to solve this problem. A high scorer and a low scorer who had the time to continue, scored the speeches previously scored by the low scorers and high scorers respectively. They were blind to this categorization. The outcome of the two rounds was that many speeches were scored similarly in each round, indicating that those matching scores were accurate. Some

speeches, however, had a larger difference. Some were graded oppositely with a difference of 2 points, or almost oppositely with a difference of 1.5 points. In such cases, I read the speeches myself and determined scores using the rubric, my own judgment, and the input of the two readers' comments. This was evidence that this method must be taken with a grain of salt, and that in future studies it may be necessary to have more readers grading the speeches and checking each others work. After all the speeches were graded twice and I had solved disagreements, I averaged the two scores to determine the populism score of each candidate per election. With the completion of both the qualitative and quantitative datasets, I will review the merits of my hypotheses.

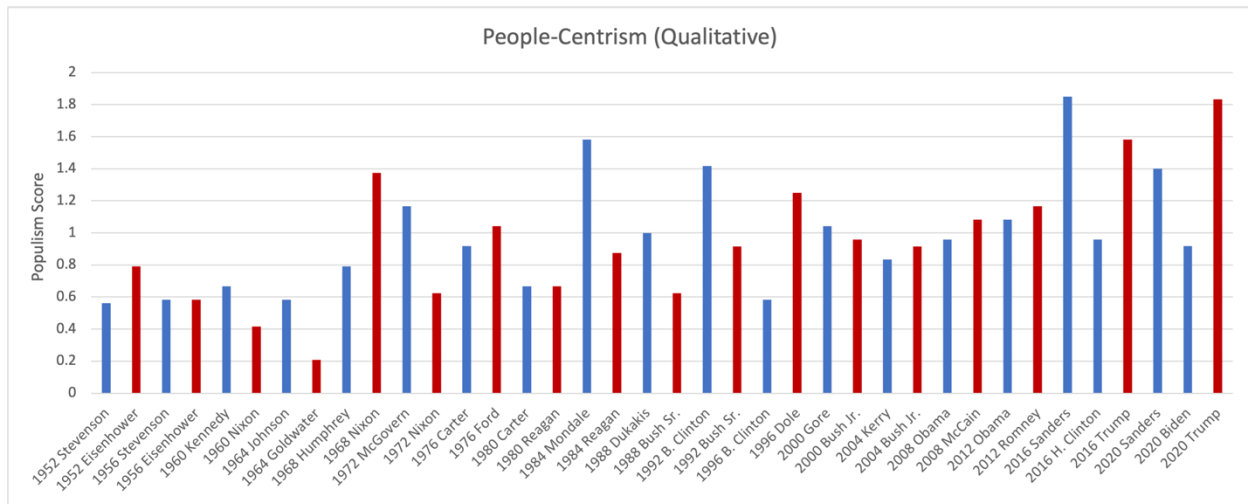


Figure 15. Average scores for people-centrism, as determined by readers based on the rubric, from a sample of six speeches per campaign.

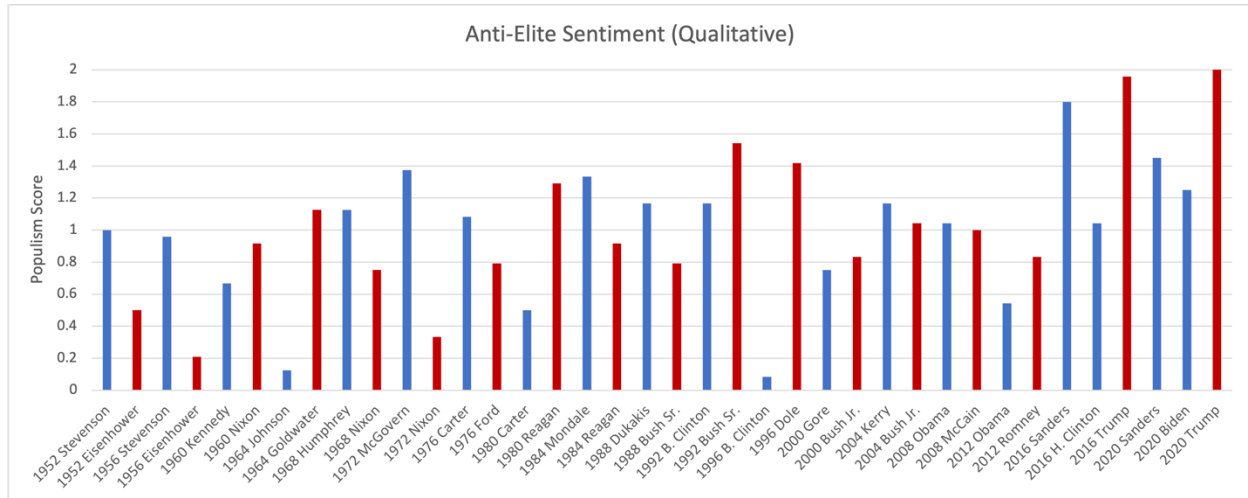


Figure 16. Average scores anti-elite sentiment, as determined by readers based on the rubric, from a sample of six speeches per campaign.

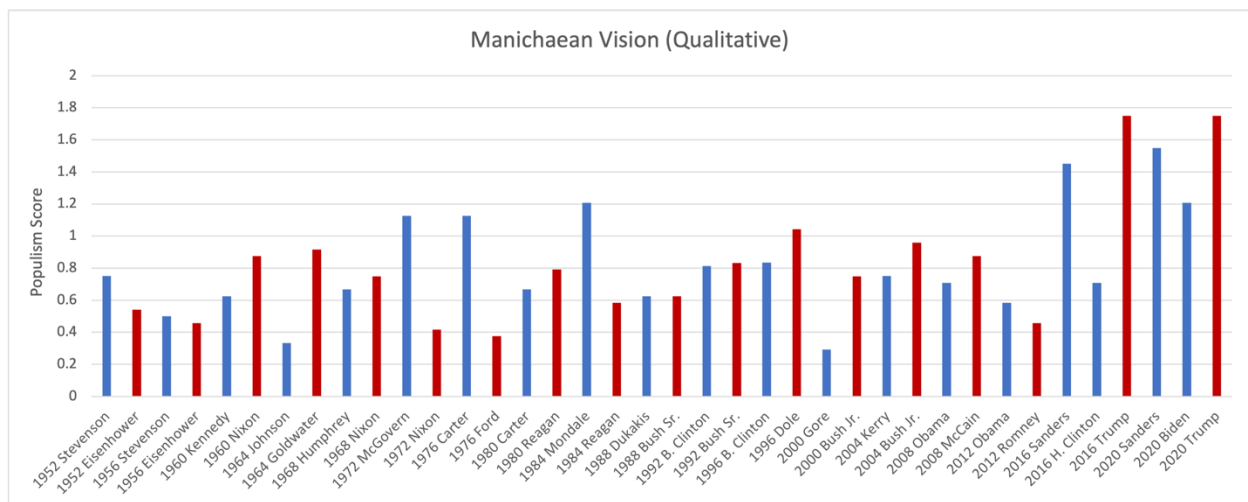


Figure 17. Average scores Manichaeian vision, as determined by readers based on the rubric, from a sample of six speeches per campaign.

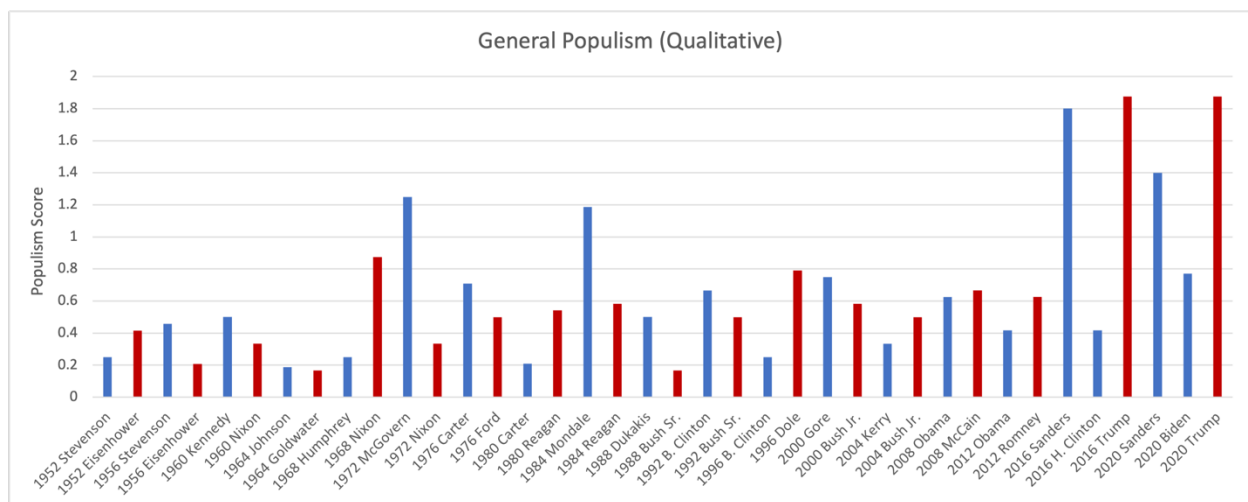


Figure 18. Average scores for populism in general, as determined by readers based on the rubric, from a sample of six speeches per campaign.

Results

H1: Donald Trump is more populist than any other major presidential candidate since 1952.

Both quantitative and qualitative measures found Donald Trump to be very populist. Trump's speeches ranked in the top five of every category except economic anti-elite sentiment, which is a category expected to be more dominated by Democrats. In the quantitative analysis, Trump's 2016 campaign scored the highest in general anti-elite sentiment with a score of 0.34% of total words; his 2020 campaign scored fourth highest with 0.18%, just behind Sanders 2016 and Goldwater 1964. Trump's 2016 campaign also scored the highest in political anti-elite sentiment with a score of 0.19%. Trump's 2020 campaign scored remarkably lower at 0.02%. This may be because Trump's tenure in office necessarily made him a member of the political elite—it would have been a tough strategy to discredit the political establishment of which he was the leader. He did nevertheless maintain that it was important to “drain the swamp” of bureaucrats in Washington. This paradoxical relationship to the establishment is one of the reasons it is difficult for populists to remain in power, which may have been the case with Trump's loss in 2020. In general, Trump's anti-elite sentiment was stronger and more regular throughout his two campaigns than his people-centrism.

In the “we-they” measurement, Trump's 2020 campaigns scored the highest with 5.60%. Trump's score here, however, may be confounded by the fact that he was found to use the least words per sentence (9.1) in 2020, so he used subjects more often than other candidates in speeches of comparable length. Though the “people-centrism” measure of the quantitative analysis was not found to be very accurate, there was an interesting discrepancy between Trump's two campaigns. They scored at the two extremes, 0.70% in 2016 and 0.27% in 2020.

The qualitative analysis of speeches also found Trump to be very populist. His 2016 and 2020 campaigns tied for most populist overall, each scoring 1.88 out of 2. For people-centrism, his 2020 campaign scored 1.85 (contrary to the results of the same measure in quantitative analysis), which was second-highest behind Sanders 2016 campaign. For anti-elite sentiment, the 2020 campaign led the group with a perfect score of 2, and the 2016 campaign came next with 1.96. As Trump's campaigns were frequently among the highest scorers for both quantitative and qualitative methods, it is safe to suggest that he was more populist than any candidate since 1952, supporting H1.

It is important to note, however, that Bernie Sanders' campaigns also scored very high on many indicators of populism. In the quantitative section, his 2016 campaign was the second highest score behind Trump in general anti-elite sentiment at 0.18% (though Trump's score was almost double that). Sanders secured the top two places for economic anti-elite sentiment with scores of 0.15% in 2016 and 0.13% in 2020. As for the qualitative analysis, Sanders' 2016 and 2020 were third and fourth respectively behinds Trump's campaigns, scoring 1.8 and 1.4 out of 2 in the total populism analysis. The Sanders 2016 campaign scored highest for people-centrism with 1.85, as well as third for anti-elite sentiment with 1.8. The Sanders 2020 campaign scored sixth for people-centrism with 1.4 and fifth for anti-elite sentiment with 1.45. Sanders was found to be quite firmly second to Trump for populism in speeches. Also, although populism seems to have morphed to encompass both sides of the political spectrum, Sanders' left-wing politics are more in line with the People's Party's original platform, perhaps making him more of a true populist than Trump in historical terms.

H2: Republicans are more populist than Democrats.

There is not support for this hypothesis in my study. The hypothesis was developed because it seemed to be the case that Republicans were more populist than Democrats because of the modern rise of right-wing populism in the United States and because Trump has been characterized as a populist Republican; however, candidates of both parties were identified as populist relatively comparably across measures. That being said, there were patterns regarding the characteristics of populism for each party. In quantitative and qualitative measures, Republicans were more likely to be anti-elite; although the top ten scorers of anti-elite sentiment on the quantitative text analysis was split evenly between Republicans and Democrats. Measures of people-centrism of both methods identified Democrats more often. In the overall scoring of populism in the qualitative content analysis, the second, third, and fourth most populist campaigns were for Democratic candidates (Sanders, McGovern, and Mondale).

While Trump was certainly identified to be very populist across measures, the other Republicans who were identified the most on any indicators were Goldwater, Nixon, Dole, and McCain, though they did not appear consistently populist across measures. As for Democrats, Sanders has been identified as a populist in the media, but he is accompanied by McGovern, Mondale, and less consistently Carter, B. Clinton, and Obama. As a whole, the data presents that populism is fairly well-distributed among the two parties and that H2 cannot be accepted.

H3: Populism is more prevalent in presidential campaigns between 1992-2020 than between 1952-1988.

There does not seem to be general support for this hypothesis. Populism seems to be on the rise chiefly because Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders have very recently lead campaigns

with populist values, which may have created a false sense of trend. Trump and Sanders are actually generally outliers of the post 1990s era.

The only measures that shows an increasing trend since the 1990s are political anti-elite sentiment, and to a great degree, economic anti-elite sentiment, as its highest seven points were from campaigns after 1990. This result suggests that the original Populist ideals of left-wing economic philosophies may be experiencing a renaissance. However, this hypothesis was based on the expected prevalence of right-wing populism, and Trump appears to be the only consistent case of that since 1990 except perhaps Dole, who less consistently scored highly on measures of populism.

All indicators actually feature a general upward trend since 1952, but it is not generally accurate to say that this trend strengthened significantly since the 1990s. The trend may even be explainable by changes to trends in political campaigning since the 1950s, or maybe candidates across the board have become more populist over time. The outliers Trump and Sanders also heavily affected the trend. For example, in the general score of populism provided by the qualitative analysis, there is an otherwise general downward trend of populism since the 1990s if Trump and Sanders are not included. In general, there is not support for the hypothesis that populism is more prevalent in campaigns since 1990 than before it. It may be true, however, that populism is more prevalent in the 2016 and 2020 elections than any other time in recent memory, of course facilitated by Trump and Sanders. The major Democratic nominees, however, were not devoid of populist tendencies too. Biden's 2020 campaign was found to be the ninth most populist campaign by the qualitative analysis, with a score of .77. Hillary Clinton in 2016, however, was not very populist. Both Biden and Clinton were extreme political insiders, but

Biden may have been slightly more populist in his campaign simply because he ran against the status quo.

H4: Challengers are more populist than incumbents (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016).

This hypothesis was adopted from Bonikowski and Gidron's (2016) article, which found that incumbents were indeed less likely to rely on populism than challengers. In my dataset, when comparing incumbent's campaigns with their campaigns that won them office, almost every incumbent's in-office campaign (Eisenhower 1960, Nixon 1972, Carter 1980, Clinton 1996, Bush 2004, Obama 2012, and Trump 2020) has been less populist than their initial campaign. There are, however, the possible exceptions of Reagan's 1984 campaign and Bush Sr.'s 1992 campaign which had varying levels of populism across indicators. As was previously mentioned, the incumbents' infrequent populism could be a result of becoming part of the political elite, which puts a candidate in a position where criticism of the political elite may seem hypocritical. For example, Donald Trump, who was one of the most anti-establishment candidates in recent history, scored a high of 0.2% in political anti-elite sentiment during his 2016 campaign, but his 2020 campaign only scored 0.02%.

It is largely true that challengers are more populist than incumbents when we compare the campaigns of separate candidates as well. The top five populist candidates determined by the qualitative content analysis were Trump, Sanders, McGovern, Mondale, and Nixon, all of whom were challengers who had their highest scores during their initial campaigns. This outsider status appears to be a condition for populism in candidates because populism is often very anti-status quo.

H5: “Democrats rely primarily on economic populism and Republicans rely primarily on anti-statist (political) populism” (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016).

This hypothesis was supported by the data of the quantitative analysis, and was not tested in the qualitative analysis. The twelve highest scorers in economic anti-elite sentiment were all Democrats, strongly suggesting that Democrats engage with economic populism more than Republicans. Sanders’ 2016 and 2020 campaigns had the highest values for this indicator at .15% and .13% respectively, though Obama 2008 was close at .11%. Contrary to my hypothesis, Democrats also outscored Republicans in political anti-elite sentiment, though Republicans were certainly more represented moderately across the board in this category. Of the seventeen campaigns that scored at or above 0.02%, ten were Democratic and seven were Republican. Trump 2016 scored the highest with .19%, followed by Obama 2008 with .12% and McGovern 1972 with .07%. Though Republicans would seem to be more concerned with political elites than Democrats, Democrats may be represented strongly in both categories because the economic establishment is closely related to politics, so being anti-political elite may sometimes be a pre-requisite for being anti-economic elite.

Evidence from my study mostly suggests support for this hypothesis. Democrats certainly rely primarily on economic populism, and Republicans do rely primarily on political populism, even if the Democrats do so more. Though the “political” and “economic” categories seem to oppose each other, several campaigns interestingly scored relatively high in both. Obama’s 2008 campaign scored .12% for political populism and .11% for economic populism, Gore’s 2000 campaign scored .05% and .09%, and McGovern’s 1972 campaign scored .07% and .04%. Expressing discontentment with both political and economic establishments indicates a populist message that the candidates are dissatisfied with the status quo in several ways, though they may

not have one specific enemy. This might also be a function of the fact that economic power has overlaps with political power.

The study sought to identify which candidates use the most populist rhetoric. While the quantitative results were quite reliable because of the computer-based method, and the qualitative results were helpful in their analysis of the context of language, further exploration of the rhetoric considered can only help better understand why candidates were, or were not, identified as populist.

Chapter 6: Literary Analysis of Select Speeches

The quantitative and qualitative measures have determined which candidates are most populist based on their rhetoric. The qualitative analysis effectively complemented the quantitative analysis because it allowed for the interpretation of tone and context in speeches that quantitative measures could not account for. The further analysis of rhetoric in this chapter essentially serves as a check on the qualitative method to ensure that it holds water in identifying candidates as populist. For each candidate, I was able to analyze one or two speeches. I selected speeches that scored close to the overall score the candidate received, by reviewing the grades and comments the readers gave to the speeches in each category. The rhetoric of the selected speeches is therefore representative of why candidates received certain scores. The deeper analysis of speeches serves to support the accuracy of other measures of the study and further explain why certain candidates were identified as populist.

I will begin with an analysis of William Jennings Bryan's Cross of Gold speech, which helped galvanize the late-nineteenth-century Populist movement. This is an example of a truly populist speech that gives a foundation on which to judge other speeches. I will then look at select speeches of those who were expected to be populist and were identified as populist (Trump and Sanders), those who were not expected to be populist and were identified as such (McGovern, Mondale, Nixon, and Dole), and those who were not expected to be populist and were indeed not found to be (Eisenhower and Johnson). Closer analysis and the interpretation of quotations in these speeches tends to confirm the findings of the previous chapter and allows us to see why these speeches were, or were not, considered populist.

William Jennings Bryan's Cross of Gold speech is the gold standard, if you will, of populist speeches with its Manichaean populist narrative of the ordinary people versus the

corrupt elite. The speech was delivered at the 1896 Democratic Convention and was instrumental in securing Bryan the presidential nominations of both the Democratic Party and the People's Party. His speech railed against the gold standard for coinage, instead supporting bimetallism, also known as free silver, which would allow for the free coinage of silver in addition to gold, inflating the economy, and greatly helping farmers pay their debts.

Bryan describes "the people" he represents in his demands for free silver as largely rural farmers who would benefit from bimetallism. He also explains that maintaining the gold standard would not only hurt farmers, but the damage done would also develop to damage the cities which inevitably rely on the farms for prosperity.

You come to us and tell us that the great cities are in favor of the gold standard; we reply that the great cities rest upon our broad and fertile prairies. Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms, and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country. (Bryan 1896)

Bryan's view of the people includes a highly favorable view of farmers, and he extols them as primary creators of wealth in the United States. Because of their important role, farmers are considered the "true" people of America, and Bryan thinks it necessary to defend their interests from the elite. Bryan supports bimetallism because the inflated currency would allow farmers to pay off their debts more easily, which he sees as necessary because farmers are the backbone of our society. Not only does Bryan use a lot of we-they language (in this case, we-you) in comparing "your cities" to "our broad and fertile prairies" and "our farms," he makes the case for the unmatched importance of the farms. He claims that farms, by creating the wealth and prosperity of our society, have the ability to rebuild cities almost miraculously; however, if farms were to be destroyed, like through maintaining the gold standard, cities would not be able to function with that loss. This perspective identifies farmers and generally rural laborers as "the people" who the establishment is working against by supporting the gold standard.

Bryan quotes Democratic Representative John G. Carlisle in describing that the debate over the gold standard is “a struggle between ‘the idle holders of idle capital’ and ‘the struggling masses, who produce the wealth and pay the taxes of the country’” (Bryan 1896). Part of the enemy in Bryan’s eyes is the elite class who benefit from the gold standard, as they make the loans that farmers struggle to pay off, and the other part is the political establishment that upholds it.

Demands for bimetallism were not embraced by the establishment, though Bryan does not specify who exactly is behind this neglect. He instead describes a monolithic evil “they” who have thwarted the efforts of Bryan’s party: “we have petitioned, and our petitions have been scorned; we have entreated, and are entreaties have been disregarded; we have begged, and they have mocked when our calamity came. We beg no longer; we entreat no more; we petition no more. We defy them” (Bryan 1896). This passage again outlines the struggle between “us and them” in Bryan’s populist understanding of the gold standard issue. Because the demands of Bryan and his party had previously been disregarded by the establishment, he decided it was time to act themselves. He seems no longer interested in working with the establishment to enact the bimetallism policy, even though he would inevitably need to do so under the system of American government and politics. This independent stance thus represents an important principle of populism—that it is outside the established political system. While such outsider populist platforms can be appealing in their promises of change, this status is also one of populism’s vices because the governmental system is designed to work best for those cooperating within it.

Regardless, working-class masses indeed supported Bryan’s mission to implement bimetallism, and he described this struggle in Manichaeian terms, presenting the issue on a grand moral scale.

Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests, and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: you shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold. (Bryan 1896)

Bryan's daring references to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ demonstrate his Manichaeism as he compares the plight of the rural working class to the ultimate battle of good and evil embodied in Christ's death. He likens the ordinary working masses to Christ, the fundamental image of goodness and sacrifice. Similarly, in invoking the "crown of thorns" and the "cross," Bryan determines those in favor of the gold standard to be the evil establishment, parallel to the Roman establishment which wrongfully and violently killed Christ.

The Cross of Gold was a landmark speech in the history of populism that helped strengthen the People's Party itself. In its focus on the narrow interests of ordinary farmers and counter to the wealthy elite, it exemplified populist ideals. The United States has not yet seen another self-identified major populist movement, though in my study, some presidential candidates were nevertheless found to use populist language. Keeping in mind the strength of rhetoric Bryan used to win support for the original People's Party, we can analyze other political speeches as well, looking for similar markers of populism.

Expected Populists

Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump ultimately are two sides of the same coin. Though from opposite political stances, both ran their campaigns on the idea that the establishment and the elite are corrupt and something needs to be done about it. That concept was evidently very appealing to voters, as Sanders came very close to securing the Democratic nominee (securing 1,893 out of 4763 possible delegates), and Trump won the presidential election. In fact, there is evidence that some of the support for Sanders' movement overlapped with that for Trump's.

According to data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 12% of those who voted for Sanders in the Democratic Primary also voted for Trump in the presidential election (Kurtzleben 2017).

In an April 2016 speech in Madison, Wisconsin, Sanders confronts what he views as the corrupt campaign finance systems, arguing that it is unacceptable for billionaires to buy elections, and that such spending makes for oligarchy. This speech scored a 2 overall from both readers. In it, Sanders points out that today, the United States has the largest wage gap since 1928, and he describes the top one percent as enemy for continuing to widen this gap. Sanders decidedly embodies left-wing economic populism, announcing that part of his campaign mission is “ending a rigged economy” (Sanders 2016, 3). Sanders also appeals to the value of grassroots mobilization, not only because he believes it more righteous than campaigns funded by the elite class, but because “real change in this country has never taken place from the top on down. It has always been from the bottom on up” (Sanders 2016, 3). In this appeal to the ordinary masses, Sanders also touches on some nostalgia, a characteristic of populism. He remembers the great social movements like the movement to form labor unions, the women’s suffrage movement, the civil rights movement, and the same-sex marriage movement as successful examples of popular rebellion against the status quo. Unlike some populists, however, Sanders does not have a very limited view of “the people,” on the contrary, Sanders explicitly states that his campaign is for people of all race, genders, sexualities, immigration-status, and the like. The only caveat to this inclusion is the elite who are working against the masses, which qualifies Sanders as populist. “[T]hese guys may have unlimited sums of money, they may control the media, they may control the economy, they may control the political system. But when millions of people stand up together united and demand change, we will not be stopped.” (Sanders 2016, 7). Sanders admits

that the elite has a fair amount of unjustified control over our institutions, but believes his populist movement may be able to change that.

Much of the Sanders message carries over to his 2020 campaign. Because Sanders' position to power did not change much between the two elections, he was able to argue for the same principles again. This selected speech was scored as 1 and 2 overall by different readers, although both gave it a 2 for people-centrism. In a speech in Virginia Beach on February 29, 2020, Sanders continued his campaign against the enemies he saw in economic elite and in President Trump. "We are a movement of millions of people who are sick and tired of the grotesque level of income and wealth inequality in America. Tired of a handful of billionaires controlling the economic and political life of this nation—and we will create an economy and the government that will work for all of us. Not just the 1%" (Sanders 2020, 1). This quotation demonstrates Sanders' conception of "the people" as people who are getting the short end of the stick on wealth inequality. He emphasizes their feelings of being "sick and tired" of the establishment and greedy one percent, the enemies of the people. Sanders takes the wrongful actions of these groups as his sign to take action for change. His suggestion to create a system anew that would work for everyone, the 99%, is populist in its disregard of the option to work within current institutions. Later in the speech, Sanders shares, "In case you haven't noticed, the political and economic establishment of this country, they are getting very nervous about our campaign ... [and] they should be worried ... because we are catching on to the reality that they are ripping off the American people in an unseemly way" (Sanders 2020, 2). This quotation exemplifies the strong anti-elite sentiment of Sanders campaign. Although he is usually mostly cited as an economic populist, he comments on the abuse of power by political elites as well because they are connected to economic policy. Sanders 2016 and 2020 campaigns were largely

similar in their populist rhetoric because Sanders, who never had the opportunity to implement the changes he campaigned for in 2016, supported the same arguments in 2020.

Donald Trump's rhetoric has often been characterized as populist, but it is also important to look at his communication style as a whole. Instead of making traditional stump speeches, Trump hosted rallies that often were longer than an hour. During these rallies, he would touch on his main talking points, but also talk to the crowds off-the-cuff. This casualness made him more relatable to average people who may not have had that same connection with a politician who read off their teleprompter and got back on the bus. In Trump's long and winding orations, he would often crack jokes, which made him more likeable to his supporters because it painted him as one of them, as opposed to a haughty Washington elite. Trump campaigned as an outsider to the political establishment, which gained him support on the right, but he was no doubt a member of the economic elite the whole time, making it harder for the left to support him. However, Trump addressed the economic elite at some points too. For example, he said "the Obama Administration never held Wall Street accountable" for the 2008 financial crisis (Trump 2016, 2).

Trump's rhetoric certainly highlighted the struggle of the ordinary people against the corrupt elite. In 2016, Trump ran quite a negative campaign, focusing on attacking the "evil" establishment more often than directly exalting the will of the people. In an October 26 speech he made in Charlotte, North Carolina, which was scored a 2 by qualitative measures, he insisted that the "failed elites in Washington [have] been wrong about virtually everything for decades." (Trump 2016, 3) and that they "represen[t] the rigged system and failed thinking of yesterday." (Trump 2016, 1). Trump's campaign against the political establishment met the markers of populism, as was recorded in both quantitative and qualitative measures of my study. As an

outsider, Trump was able to blame the establishment for the problems of the day, and portray himself as the one able to fix it. He sold the story of empowering the ordinary people to bring unprecedented reform to Washington in their interest and against that of the elites who have wronged them: “The fact that our corrupt Washington establishment has tried so hard to stop our movement is just more proof that we represent the kind of change that arrives only once in a lifetime.” (Trump 2016, 1). Not only does Trump use “we” to liken himself to the ordinary American and present himself as a representative for their cause, but this language strengthens the narrative of “us vs. them” in the people’s relationship to government. This divisive language serves to further galvanize the people against the establishment and to support Trump.

In 2020, after being in power for four years, Trump seemed to be more comfortable using even more overtly bellicose language. His casual attitude was also populist in its attempt to appeal to the people by portraying himself as average and on their side. Despite now being a political elite himself, Trump identified the establishment as one of his enemies; the paradox of this argument may have contributed to his loss of support by anti-establishment voters. Trump also identifies his opponent Biden and the “radical left” as his enemies in an October 16 speech which scored two 2s for populism on qualitative measures. In his speech in Macon, Georgia, Trump said, “Sleepy Joe Biden is the living embodiment of the corrupt political class that enriched himself while draining the economic life and soul from our country ... He’s a servant of the wealthy donors, globalists, and special interests who got rich bleeding America dry” (Trump 2020, 1). Not only did Trump use the graphic language of physical pain to explain his anti-elite sentiment here, but he also utilizes name-calling, an act common to populists. He also mentions a couple groups he identifies as also benefiting from elite power and hurting the American people. Further, Trump demonizes what he calls the “radical left,” which is essentially the left-wing

culture of political correctness. He claims, “The radical left is hell bent on destroying everything that we love and cherish, it’s that culture stuff. Cancel culture” (Trump 2020, 9). Here, Trump uses a Manichaeian tone to depict this group as evil and out to get the rest of us. This is populist in its description of an enemy group trying to subvert the will of the people to keep those things they “cherish.”

Trump apparently tries to solve the problem of his membership in the political elite by continuing to identify as an outsider. Talking directly to his supporters, who he sees as “the people,” he says, “In 2016, you voted to fire this corrupt and decrepit political establishment and you elected an outsider as president to finally put America first” (Trump 2020, 2). Trump essentially defines his vision of “the people” as everyday Americans who are not part of the “radical left.” While he does not spend much time discussing who specifically belongs to “the people,” he insists that they must have political power restored to them: “Proud citizens like you helped build this country, and together we are taking back our country. We are returning power to you, the American people” (Trump 2020, 19). His point about those who helped “build” the country contributes to narrowing Trump’s conception of “the people” as essentially working class families who have been in America for generations. The idea that Trump and these people are “taking back” the country relates to the populist struggle of the ordinary people against the elite and the establishment.

Unexpected Populists

Some candidates in the study were identified by several indicators as populist in some regards, though I found less evidence to suggest that they had been identified as such in scholarship or in the media before. Such candidates are McGovern, Mondale, Nixon, and Dole and I review the speeches from each to get a sense of why their rhetoric was considered populist.

While it may be the case that sometimes candidates may make a populist speech while not fully being a populist themselves, it is nevertheless helpful to review their rhetoric. A closer look at McGovern, Mondale, and Nixon makes a more convincing case for populist tendencies than Dole for the most part. Ultimately, as a discursive style, populism is something that can be used at certain times and not others.

I was surprised to find that George McGovern was identified as a populist in my study; upon further investigation, however, it seems that McGovern did indeed have populist leanings and his identification should not have been so unexpected. Both qualitative and quantitative indicators marked him as populist, which is a good sign for my indicators. He was the third highest scorer behind Trump 2016 and 2020 and Sanders 2016 and 2020 in the qualitative analysis of total populism. In the rest of the qualitative analysis, McGovern was tied for seventh with Romney 2008 for people-centrism, fifth for anti-elite sentiment, and tied for sixth with Carter 1976 for Manichaeism. Quantitative measures also identify McGovern as populist. He scored above the mean and median for people-centrism, fifth for general anti-elite sentiment, third in political anti-elite sentiment, and eighth for economic anti-elite sentiment. McGovern was the highest scorer across the study who had not been expected to be populist.

In an October speech in Des Moines, Iowa, which scored two 2s, McGovern argues that Americans need a president who will work for the people, not the elites. Using repetition as a rhetorical technique, McGovern lists several groups that “have a president”: the Lockheed Corporation, John Conolly and “his oil-company friends,” executives at International Telephone & Telegraph (ITT), big grain companies Continental and Cargill (McGovern 1972, 1). After each paragraph about the president catering to elite interests, McGovern repeated, “isn’t it time we had a president?” (McGovern 1972, 1). He is using we to refer to the people, a group which he

includes himself in. He tries to have the people identify with him by using “we,” as if he too is directly affected by these issues. McGovern clearly identifies rural Americans as the people he is working for. He even boasts about his support for the National Farmers’ Organization and the Farmers’ Union, echoing the loyalties of populism’s roots. McGovern further criticizes the Nixon administration’s ignorance of farmers’ issues and its preference for agribusiness executives “who couldn’t tell a chicken coop from a chain store” (McGovern 1972, 2). This comment helps McGovern appeal to the farmers by making a joke that paints McGovern as close to the reality of farmers’ lives, unlike these business executives that he rebukes in the name of the people. Being pro-farmer is not enough to make one a populist, but some of McGovern’s rhetoric takes further steps towards populism. He creeps away from conventional political politeness when discussing the Vietnam War, calling it “the stupidest war in our history” (McGovern 1972, 3). Also, McGovern maintains the conflict between the people and the elite, categorizing the “ordinary American taxpayers” as “victims” and backing them in the fight against the “favoritism toward big business” and the “stranglehold the special interests have on our government” (McGovern 1972, 3, 4). In a sweeping finish, McGovern calls to “reclaim our government” and “declare ... independence of government from the privileged few” (McGovern 1972, 4). McGovern’s speech includes classic populist appeals and narratives throughout all of its four pages. He criticizes the evil elite and establishment and ultimately proposes for the restoration of government power to the people.

Though this speech was quite populist, not all of McGovern’s rhetoric was about farmers. Another reason he may have been considered populist was because he was staunchly in favor of programs to support the working class against big business and the “corrupt” establishment which had previously given them the short end of the stick. Though McGovern is not as

demonizing towards the elite as a pure populist would be, he frequently invokes the need “to restore the true ideals of America,” a populist notion that indicts the current political establishment as unjust and immoral, needing to be replaced by the true Americans (McGovern 1972, 4).

Walter Mondale was another candidate identified as populist in the study, as of his 1984 campaign. In the qualitative analysis of overall populism, Mondale was the third-highest scoring Democrat behind Sanders 2016 and 2020 and McGovern 1972, and the fourth highest scoring candidates overall. He was third highest for people-centrism, sixth-highest for anti-elite sentiment, and tied for Biden 2020 for third highest Manichaeian vision. Mondale’s scores were more around the top-ten mark on quantitative measures.

He, too, was largely identified because of his strong support for the working class and the middle class against big corporations that do not pay their fair share of taxes. In one of the Mondale’s speeches which scored a 1 and 2 from two readers, which was made on October 9, 1984 in Detroit, Michigan, he glorified the people more than he really demonized the elite. He criticized Reagan and his favoritism towards big business, but it remained in the realm of normal political rhetoric. His vision of the people, however, leaned more towards populism. He exclaimed, “the people want a people's election, because the people want a people's president in the White House!” (Mondale 1984, 2). This major focus on the people indicates Mondale’s commitment to the common man and his argument that the current administration does not listen to the people, and that Mondale himself would, indeed, be that “people’s president.” Mondale also breeched the topic of conspiracy, a populism indicator, in his discussion of public opinion polls, declaring, “public opinion polls don't count at all. Public opinion polls don't vote. People vote” (Mondale 1984, 3). Here, Mondale values the pure will of the people over the actions of

the institutional structure around elections, therefore devaluing that institution. This is a commonly identified populist strategy—to convince the public that the true will of the people is being somehow concealed, and that they should continue to support the candidate in spite of information from the institutions. Whether Mondale truly believed the opinion polls were wrong or whether he was simply trying to save face before a confidently-predicted loss is besides the point. His rejection of the polls nonetheless implied that the people, the true source of power, actually do support him. The problem with this logic is that if most people did support him, that reality would probably have been reflected in opinion polls.

This trend of losing confidence in polling was also a theme in Donald Trump's campaigns. The circumstance was a little different because in Mondale's case, the polls were right and Mondale lost the election; in Trump's case, at least in 2016, the polls were wrong in predicting that he would lose the election. There were many other confounding factors that affected the polls ability to predict election results between the two elections, but the candidate's distrust for the polling system was similar.

One of the most common populist sentiments for American Democrats, it seems, it to demonize the corporate elite, which is an offshoot of the economic elite. Most Democrats (at least Stevenson, McGovern, Mondale, Kerry, Clinton, Obama, and Biden), have called for some kind of policy to ensure corporations pay their "fair share" of taxes and do not exploit "loopholes." This would mean that money could come from the corporations and not from the hard-working people. While this is somewhat of a populist idea in its pitting the ordinary people against the economic elite, I'm not sure we can call populist every speech which invokes this argument. This relates to the complexity of identifying someone as populist, that American politicians will always appeal to the ordinary people because they make up the masses of voters

and they want votes. This doesn't always make them populist. To do so, they must use rhetoric in a stronger way, or appeal to some kind of more extreme narrative about the restoration of the popular will, not simply that the ordinary people should be supported. No politician would deny the latter.

As for Republican candidates identified as populist, Richard Nixon, during his 1968 campaign, was identified in the qualitative analysis as the Republican candidate who used the second-most populist rhetoric behind Trump. He was the fifth most populist candidate in total by this measure considering both parties. Interestingly, Nixon scored relatively low across the board on quantitative indicators. Nixon's populism was measured in the qualitative study to mostly consist of people-centrism. He scored a 1.4 out of 2 in that category, being the fifth highest candidate behind Trump 2016 and 2020, Sanders 2016 and 2020, Mondale 1984, and B. Clinton 1992.

Nixon focuses much of his September speech in Santa Clara, California on the populist narrative of the "forgotten Americans" who are identified as members of the working class (Nixon). This speeches scored a 1.5 by both readers. In it, Nixon also emphasizes that this group has been "silent," in spite of their great size. Nixon's claim to the support of the majority, though they be silent, is populist because it empowers an imagined monolithic group who are supposedly against the status quo.

"These are the forgotten Americans ... They are the workers of America. They are white Americans and black Americans. They are Mexican Americans and Italian Americans. They are all Americans. They are not racists. They are not full of hate. They are decent people. They care. They pay their taxes. They work in America's factories. They work in the offices of America. They teach in America's schools. Their sons man the walls of freedom 'round this world." (Nixon 1968, 2)

Nixon's description of his "forgotten Americans"—his vision of "the people"—is centered around the working class. He focuses on factory workers, office workers, and teachers

as those whose voices need to be heard by Washington. In Nixon's focus on class, he emphasizes that race is not a factor in his categorization. Right-wing populism is sometimes characterized by racial bias, so Nixon's explicit rejection of this expectation strengthens his case for truly representing "the people." The racial bias aspect was identified mostly in right-wing populism in Europe, though people have also accused Trump of populism with such a bias as well.

Nixon continues to describe the attributes of these Americans: "These are the forgotten Americans and they have been silent[,] but now they are waking up, and now their voices are beginning to be heard[,] and now that voice is going to sweep across America[,] and it is going to drown out the voices of those that would destroy America[,] and it is going to build a new America, I can assure you." (Nixon 1968, 2). Nixon calls for change in politics, antagonizing the political elite and establishment who have been governing and causing problems for the "forgotten" working class. The notion that these people are "waking up" strengthened the message that they have heretofore been suppressed by the establishment, and supports the case for the "forgotten Americans" to take power.

Bob Dole, in his 1996 presidential campaign, was identified in qualitative measures as somewhat of a populist. He was the third highest-scoring Republican behind Trump and Nixon, and the sixth highest-scoring candidate in general behind Trump, Sanders, McGovern, Mondale, and Nixon. He was not as strongly identified on quantitative measures, however. On "people-centrism," he fell below the mean 0.45% and median 0.41% with a score of 0.34%. He scored a little higher "general anti-elite sentiment" being the fifth highest-scoring Republican and the ninth highest-scoring candidate.

While Dole's rhetoric does utilize some populist themes, it does not appear to be as populist as the data suggests, as this speech was scored a 1 and a 1.5. He does not have an

especially limited view of “the people;” rather he truly addresses all Americans. In a September speech in Montgomery, Alabama, Dole negatively discusses the political establishment of the Clinton administration, but he does not bash them for being corrupt and deceitful. Instead, he highlights the differences between himself and Clinton based on policy disagreements. The most populist part of his rhetoric, a paragraph that was part of his stump speech, was his appeal to the people in the form of rhetorical questions, pleading the people to realize their situation and enact change: “Is there no honor in this administration or in this White House? When will the American people have enough? When will the American people wake up? ... Don't inflict this on America for four more years. We can't take it.” (Dole 1996, 5). Dole begins by accusing the administration of being dishonorable, an accusation that goes further that critique of policy to critique of character, which begins to stray from the political norms of decorum into the realm of populism. Then, Dole suggests that the American people are dissatisfied with the current administration. Like Nixon, Dole calls for a “waking up” of the American people to the situation at hand, presumably to the situation of their bad treatment by the establishment. This message also implies that the American people are ignorant of some grand issue that Dole knows of, a rhetorical narrative used by populists. Finally, Dole depicts himself as part of the “we” being taken advantage of by the current administration in an attempt to relate himself to ordinary people.

Dole also touches on the anti-intellectual aspect of populist in his stump speech in his disdain for the media. He claims that “they don't print anything in the mainstream media except pro-Clinton pieces.” (Dole 1996, 2). This claim explains Dole's lack of positive media coverage as the fault of the media, suggesting the corruption of that institution. Part of the strategy of populism is to paint the establishment as corrupt in order to vindicate the mission of the populist.

Though this claim in Dole's speech is merely a sentence, this spark of distrust of institution is certainly a quality of populism.

Though Dole's speeches contain certain bouts of populist rhetoric, I'm not sure that it is enough to qualify Dole as a populist in total. Dole's rhetoric exemplifies the way populism can be used by politicians without them becoming a populist themselves; this also legitimizes the understanding of populism as a discursive style. Populism can be used in rhetoric to strengthen certain campaign messages without fully committing to a populist platform.

Non-Populists

It is also necessary to consider some candidates who had the least amount of populism in their rhetoric. From either side of the aisle, Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1956 campaign, and Lyndon B. Johnson's 1964 campaign each were decidedly not populist according to the qualitative measures, routinely scoring 0s. Each scored in the bottom five for every qualitative measure. However, quantitative measures were not as decisive. Eisenhower in fact fell in the top ten highest scores for general anti-elite sentiment. I think this may have been because the quantitative method, ignorant of context, picked up on language about the Cold War that presented an enemy against the people, but which was not a populist narrative, as confirmed by the qualitative method. Eisenhower was not identified as populist by the quantitative people-centrism measure, however; he was eighth lowest. Johnson was between mean and median for people-centrism and below mean and median for general anti-elite sentiment. Each of these candidates use political campaign rhetoric that is free of populism.

In a speech made in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on September 12 of his 1964 campaign, Eisenhower classifies himself as representing all American people, and mostly focuses on the sober principles of his party's platform. He even overtly mentions his aversion to populism in

that he will not be a demagogue: “I mean using every opportunity to tell the truth, to expose falsehood, to stimulate thinking, to overcome prejudice—dealing with fellow citizens as equals in their rights and responsibilities, not playing a demagogue or the boss or the ‘I know better than you’ big-brother role” (Eisenhower 1956, 3). This statement is very neutral and appeals to general and widely-accepted principles of good governance and behavior. Though Eisenhower emphasizes relates himself to ordinary Americans as “fellow citizens,” he does not do so in the populist manner of acting like he is a member of a group that been wronged. He simply appeals to equality. Eisenhower further emphasizes his dedication to all Americans in his encouragement to all to register to vote: “We want you to register. If you find it necessary to vote against us, all right. We would rather have you do that than not vote at all—because we want the decision of America, not the decision of a minority” (Eisenhower 1956, 4). A populist may not have wanted every citizen to vote because they believe that the true “people” exist in a limited group of those who have realized the corruption of the establishment. Eisenhower instead hopes to empower all Americans, even if he does not win as a result. This speech was made during Eisenhower’s 1956 campaign in which he was the incumbent, which likely contributes to his lack of populism, as was suggested by Hypotheses 4. Eisenhower, was not, however, very populist in his 1952 campaign either.

Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1964 presidential campaign was also not very populist. One of the least populist qualities of a speech Johnson made in Sacramento, California on September 7 is its positive outlook; it does not hold the view that the American people are being oppressed by a corrupt establishment, but rather that all Americans are blessed to live in such a prosperous country. Johnson explains that he sees the country as a united whole: “We are not a nation divided, or dividing, or divisible. Our will and our work today is that the meaning of our country

and our Constitution, and our destiny, shall be the same for all Americans, regardless of their creed or their color or their origins” (Johnson 1964, 3). He emphasizes the fact that the country is strongly united and works for Americans of all different backgrounds. Here, Johnson avoids the populist notion of an exclusive group that comprises “the people.” Johnson’s speech is also quite patriotic in its focus on American prosperity and the values that brings to its people. While patriotism can appear in populism in terms of the desire to reclaim the “true” version of America, it is usually in opposition to some administration or establishment that is preventing that goal. Johnson, on the other hand, speaks of no such negativity: “Our abundance will not produce arrogance, success will not turn us into suspicion of one another, we will never trade the pursuit of happiness for the persecutions of hate. If we have new prosperity in our pockets, we carry priceless values in our hearts” (Johnson 1964, 3). In fact, Johnson has somewhat of a Manichaeian outlook in this speech, but that alone does not constitute populism. Johnson exalts the ideal of American life and governance, praising principles and individual efforts, not specific groups as a populist would. I speculate that it is no coincidence that two candidates identified as least populist were from the mid-twentieth century; every chart features some kind of increasing trend. It may be the case that the qualities thought to be populist are simply becoming part of the norm of politics today.

Inspecting the rhetoric of speeches on a deeper level has been helpful in recognizing exactly why certain speeches and candidates were identified as populist. It seems that my indicators were mostly accurate in identifying populism, as they identified candidates who were correctly expected to be populist, as well as those who were not initially expected but turned out to use quite populist language. A value of my study was that it examined a wide number of candidates, many of whom were not expected to be populist; the fact that some were identified as

populist and some were rightly not identified as populist supports the idea that populism does in fact have a useful meaning as a kind of rhetoric that appeals to the people against the elite.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The contents of this thesis have put us in position to determine the usefulness of the term “populism,” as I have defined it. To give a simple answer, the fact that the study differentiated between populist and non-populist rhetoric in a way that met our expectations suggests that the term does in fact have meaning in describing political rhetoric. Trump and Sanders were identified as populists, as well as McGovern, Mondale, and Nixon; though these latter figures are not frequently discussed as populist today, as I reflected on the literature and on their speeches, it was clear that they used populist rhetoric. The fact that they scored high in my study suggests that the measures worked in identifying populism. These politicians have in common a specific discourse in which they defend the interests of “the people” against a “corrupt” elite, and it is important to have specific terminology to describe this radical democratic phenomenon.

Populism is indeed a powerful rhetorical tool intended to whip up the emotions of people and encourage them to see politics as a struggle between us and them; the “real” people versus the “evil” elite. This definition holds meaning as both quantitative and qualitative measures saw it utilized in campaign rhetoric to promote messages of people-centrism and anti-elite sentiment. Though people may continue to use “populist” as an insult to describe that politician who they do not like, it is clear that “populism” has meaning beyond mudslinging.

With the establishment of populism as a useful term, there is also an important distinction to make in the difference between left-wing and right-wing populism, which was also supported by the literature and by my study. Though both feature a conception of “the people” being wronged by a powerful elite or establishment, each views the identity of the elite differently. Left-wing populists like the leaders of the People’s Party and Bernie Sanders view the elite as the “greedy” wealthy class—the one percent—who prevent the economic interests of the people

from being met. Right-wing populists like Trump understand the elite to be the “corrupt” political establishment which is too swayed by special interests and is not accountable to the people. Both seek to remedy these imbalances by returning power to the hands of the people.

An interesting point is that not many politicians in recent memory have called *themselves* populist, which is perhaps understandable because of the negative connotations the term has developed. Politicians who have appropriated the term have tried to flip the pejorative understanding of the term into a positive descriptor. The only modern American official who has adopted this strategy is Steve Bannon, former White House Chief Strategist to Trump who is now attempting to incite a global populist movement (Horowitz 2018). Bannon said in an interview with Charlie Rose that, “what Donald Trump was able to galvanize is kind of what I call Jacksonian populism, which is always very very concerned about an elite in Washington D.C. ... We’re very anti-elite—and the reason is the elites are incompetent” (Rose 2017). Trump has never been reported to call himself a populist, however, and neither have any modern American politicians. Certain leaders and parties in other countries, and on both sides of the aisle, have in fact embraced the term. Alexander Gauland of Germany’s Alternative für Deutschland, Giuseppe Conte of Italy’s MoVimento 5 Stelle, and Spain’s Podemos Party have no problem calling themselves “populist” (Moffitt 2014, 2). Perhaps one day populism will lose its negative connotation and simply become a term to describe specific political rhetoric if its definition becomes standardized.

I hope scholars in the future continue the study of populism in the United States using diverse methods and large datasets. My study was wide in its analysis of populism in presidential candidates across nearly seventy years, but this scope came with costs. Because there were so many campaigns to cover, and I only had four readers, each candidate only had about six

speeches scored. Though each was scored twice by different readers, this does not show as clear a result as if someone would have been able to holistically grade every speech for a candidate, or even just a larger sample. The quantitative analysis portion sought to solve part of this issue by analyzing every speech for each candidate, but that method was less accurate as it was unable to parse out context. Maybe with more readers and more data, there would have been fewer anomalous results like Bob Dole's high scoring.

Additionally, I think it would be beneficial to the study of populism to analyze political actors other than presidential candidates. While studying presidential campaigns was accessible and important because of the strong influence of the president, the results certainly do not paint a full picture of populism. I did not find a single study that analyzed American populism at a local or state level, though I think the findings from such a study would advance the field. After all, Huey Long and George Wallace, two commonly identified populists of American history, were governors. There are undoubtedly populists in local governments that do not attract attention because they are not nationally known. We would be able to gain a more robust understanding of populism in government if future studies focused on levels of leadership below the presidency.

There is in fact use for the term "populism" to describe the specific political rhetoric and attitude which emphasizes the conflict between the "ordinary" people and the "evil" elite. Part of the problem of implementing the term with success, however, comes from the fact that most people do not have a clear understanding of populism's definition. This is probably because there isn't one. The fact that there is no general agreed-upon definition for what populism consists of only exacerbates the issue because it allows the term to be used in widely varying contexts. It is commonly understood as a pathology, which may be true insofar as populists try to undermine constitutional and pluralistic government to promote direct democracy which favors their vision

of the people's will; however, a populist movement can also serve as an important wake-up call if a democracy strays too close to oligarchy. In this sense, the often short-lived nature of populism may actually be an advantage to the stability of representative government. Populist advocacy can help steer political power from the elites back into the hands of the people if used in small doses. Is the sovereignty of the people not something worth defending?

Appendix A
Populist Words and Phrases used in Dictionary-Based Content Analysis

Category	Word/Phrase	Source
we-they	us	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	we	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	our*	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	they	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	their	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	them*	Oliver and Rahn 2016
People-centrism	the people	Jagers and Walgrave 2007
	the citizen	Jagers and Walgrave 2007
	the citizens	Jagers and Walgrave 2007
	the voter*	Jagers and Walgrave 2007
	the taxpayer*	Jagers and Walgrave 2007
	the population	Jagers and Walgrave 2007
	the constituent*	
	Americans	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	the American people	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	average American taxpayer*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	forgotten American*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	ordinary taxpayer*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	ordinary citizen*	
	ordinary American*	
	common man	
	common men	
	ordinary man	
	ordinary men	
	ordinary people	
	common people	
	our nation	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	our country	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	folk	
	folks	
	silent majority	
General anti-elite sentiment	elit*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	consensus*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	undemocratic*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	referend*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	corrupt*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	propagand*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	politici*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	deceit	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	deceiv	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	betray	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	shame*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011

	scandal*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	truth*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	dishonest*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	establishm*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	ruling*	Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011
	baron*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	venal	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	crooked*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	unresponsive*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	arrogan*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	underdog	
Political anti-elite sentiment	the system	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	special interest*	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	big interest*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	lobbyist*	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	donor*	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	campaign contribution*	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	bureaucrat	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	bureaucrats	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	power monger*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	power grabbing	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	government is too big	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	government that forgets the people	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	professional politician*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	career politician*	
	the government in Washington	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	Washington elite*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
Economic anti-elite sentiment	millionaire*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	the rich	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	the wealthy	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	CEO*	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	big bank*	Oliver and Rahn 2016
	big corporation*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	wealthy few	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	big money	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	rich friend*	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	privileged few	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	easy street	Bonikowski and Gidron 2016
	billionaire*	
	one percent	
	one-percent	
	1%	

Appendix B

Rubric for Speech Grading

Speech Number:

Grader:

Date of grading:

Instructions

1. Fill out the information at the top of the page.
2. Read the speech, keeping in mind the categories listed in the table. Reproduce some of the most representative quotes in the table.
3. Assign numerical scores for each category on a scale from 0-2.
4. Assign a score to the speech as whole on a scale from 0-2 (it should not be an average of the other scores).

Overall Grade (0,1,2):

2: The speech is very populist. It includes “a romanticized notion of the people and the idea of a unified popular will,” as well as language against a specific elite or establishment (Hawkins 2016). It also features a Manichaeian outlook, in which concepts are simplified into a moral binary. It includes a preponderance of other qualifiers.

1: The speech is somewhat populist. It includes “a romanticized notion of the people and the idea of a unified popular will,” and some clearly populist elements, but other qualifiers may be inconsistent (Hawkins 2016).

0: The speech is not populist. It does not include “a romanticized notion of the people and the idea of a unified popular will” (Hawkins 2016). Without this, even if it includes a specific enemy and Manichean worldview, or a few other qualifiers, it is not populist.

Overall Comments (just a few sentences):

	Score (0, 1, 2) Quote(s) (if applicable)	Populist (2) (If some, but not all, of the qualifications in this column are met, score 1)	Not Populist (0)
People-centric	Score: Quote(s):	Emphasizes that they represent and support “the people,” who are conceived to be monolithic and morally good, and who have a unified will. This is an exclusive vision of “the people” that does not encompass every citizen, but rather romanticizes the common man. Language “ascribes a kind of unchanging essentialism to [the people’s] will, rather than letting it be whatever fifty percent of the people want at any particular moment” (Hawkins 2016).	Uses “the people” in a purely democratic, pluralistic, or legal sense, if it is mentioned. “The common man is not romanticized, and the notion of citizenship is broad and legalistic ... Recognizes that the majority shifts and changes across issues” (Hawkins 2016).

Specific Enemy	Score: Quote(s):	Attacks or demonizes a specific political or economic elite, or establishment—the identity of the enemy will vary in context. “They also attack those they identify as clients of the elite and beneficiaries of taxes paid by ordinary, hard-working people: typically, asylum-seekers, immigrants, minorities who have been granted special treatment, welfare recipients and so on” (Canovan 2002, 32). “Crucially, the evil minority is or was recently in charge and subverted the system...against those of the good majority or the people. Thus, systemic change is/was required” (Hawkins 2016).	“Does not single out any evil ruling minority. It avoids labeling opponents as evil and may not even mention them” (Hawkins 2016). Respects the institutions as they are.
Manichaeian vision	Score: Quote(s):	“Conveys a Manichaeian vision of the world, that is, one that is moral (every issue has a strong moral dimension) and dualistic (everything is in one category or the other, “right” or “wrong,” “good” or “evil”) The implication—or even the stated idea—is that there can be nothing in between ... This leads to the use of highly charged, even bellicose language” (Hawkins 2016).	“Does not frame issues in moral terms or paint them in black-and-white ... The discourse will emphasize or at least not eliminate the possibility of natural, justifiable differences of opinion” (Hawkins 2016).
Anti-intellectual	Score: Quote(s):	Rejects or casts doubt upon experts, scientists, or academics or their beliefs and/or champions common sense.	Does not reject experts, scientists, or academics or their beliefs OR instead suggests respect or praise for them.
Conspiratorial	Score: Quote(s):	Promotes, suggests support for, or suggests validity to a non-mainstream explanation of some wrongdoing or problem.	Does not mention or allude to conspiracy theories OR instead rejects them.
Nostalgic	Score: Quote(s):	Fondly recalls a past where desires were once met OR “justif[ies] the moral significance of his or her ideas by tying them to ... leaders that are generally revered” (Hawkins 2016).	May recognize the merits of the past, but does not dwell on it.

“Bad Manners” (Moffitt and Tormey 2013)	Score: Quote(s):	Uses language which signals aversion to norms or political correctness. Lacks decorum in speaking about enemy or their opponents.	Speaks professionally and treats the opposition with courtesy.
“Everyday-ness” of Language (Oliver and Rahn 2016)	Score: Quote(s):	Includes relatively short words and sentences. Complex concepts are simplified. Main point and arguments are easy to understand and accessible.	Includes complex language or jargon. Complex concepts are presented as such. Main point and arguments may be intricate and require additional knowledge or effort to understand.

Rubric adapted from: Hawkins, Kirk A. 2016. United States 2016 Presidential Campaign Speeches Dataset. Available for download at populism.byu.edu

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