

Article

## Liberal Democracy in the United States: The Challenge of Trumpism

Gregory W. Streich

Department of Government, Law, and International Affairs

University of Central Missouri

[streich@ucmo.edu](mailto:streich@ucmo.edu)

### ***Abstract***

*Liberal democracy is increasingly challenged by the rise of populism in the twenty-first century. In the United States, the rise of President Donald Trump, a populist leader pursuing policies that differ from those of traditional Republican Presidents, is increasingly challenging the norms and institutions of liberal democracy. In this paper, I examine populism as an ideology, style, and strategy, and apply those criteria to Trumpism as a unique form of populism in the US. I also examine the economic, political, and cultural themes of Trumpism. And while Trumpism has a domestic orientation highlighted by the slogan “Make America Great Again,” it also has an international orientation highlighted by the slogan “America First.” In both orientations, it is transforming US liberal democracy from within and altering its position as a leading defender of liberal democracy and free trade on the international stage.*

**Keywords:** populism; democratic backsliding; liberal democracy; Trumpism; nativism; ethnonationalism; populist foreign policy

## Introduction

The twenty-first century has not been kind to liberal democracy: there are now fewer democratic nations in the world than at the dawn of the twenty-first century. In 2005, there were 27 democratizing regimes compared to 12 autocratizing regimes, but by 2025, the numbers flipped to 18 democratizing regimes compared to 44 autocratizing regimes (Nord et al., 2026). Researchers at V-Dem have found that liberal democracies declined from 22.03% of all nations in 2000 to 17.83% by 2023, while over the same period, electoral autocracies held steady, representing 32.2% of all nations in 2000 and 31.84% in 2023 (Nord et al., 2025). Additionally, V-Dem dedicated a section titled “*USA – A Democratic Breakdown in the Making?*” in their Democracy Report 2025, drawing attention to President Trump’s actions that purged military and civil servants as well as threatened independent media outlets, judges, universities, and more (Nord et al., 2025: 46-47). As a result, V-Dem’s 2026 report concluded that the United States has lost its status as a liberal democracy for the first time in fifty years, and instead joins the ranks of “electoral democracies” in which “liberal characteristics of established democracies – such as checks and balances on the executive, respect for civil liberties, and the rule of law – are eroding”(Nord et al., 2026: 10).

Similarly, a February 2025 report from Bright Line Watch found that the “overall performance of American democracy on a 0–100 scale has fallen to the lowest levels observed since they began tracking this measure in 2017: 53 among the public and 55 among experts” (Bright Line Watch, 2025). In their 2026 report, the public’s rating of democracy in the US dipped to 49 in April 2025 before rebounding back to 52 in early 2026, while expert ratings were relatively unchanged at 56 (Bright Line Watch, 2026). Additionally, the US has seen its Freedom House scores drop in recent years from 89/100 “free” to 84/100 in 2025 to 81/100 in 2026 (Freedom House, 2025, 2026). To be sure, the US is still a strong democracy. But when the world’s oldest, wealthiest, and, in many ways, most powerful democracy is identified as a case of democratic backsliding (Levitsky & Way, 2025), this is a significant development that has important ramifications for the health of liberal democracy both domestically and globally.

While liberal democracy is in retreat around the world for several reasons, one is the rise of populism. Both left- and right-wing populist leaders and political parties have emerged in various countries in reaction to the economic challenges of globalization and the rise of migration, both of which have sparked the anti-globalist and anti-immigration reactions that fuel populism (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Judis, 2016; Moffitt, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Scheiring et al., 2024). As such, populism is a symptom of those underlying causes but also exacerbates those anxieties and fears. While the US has seen the emergence of a left-leaning populism in the form of the Occupy Wall Street movement and the rise of Senator Bernie Sanders as a national political figure, in this paper, I focus on the rise of Trumpism as a right-leaning populism led by Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again (MAGA)” and “America First” movement. Indeed, political journalists have claimed that President Trump is undertaking the “Orbánization” (Beauchamp, 2024; Marantz, 2022, 2025) or even the “Putinization” of the US (Glasser, 2025; Kasparov, 2025).

Donald Trump is not alone in using populist appeals and styles to consolidate power and pursue his agenda. Populists of the left and right, such as Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Viktor Orbán in

Hungary, Narendra Modi in India, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, have all come to power through legitimate electoral mechanisms. However, once in office, “these populist leaders have skewed political competition by implementing discriminatory electoral rules, orchestrating partisan takeovers of the judiciary and of other independent institutions, and launching constant attacks on the media” (Rovira Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2025, p. 97). President Trump is following a similar playbook by using the power of the Presidency to reward friends and punish foes, all while consolidating more power in the Executive branch. For example, Trump has used Executive Orders, the Justice Department, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to purge civil servants and attack judges, independent journalists, and political opponents. He has also intimidated and threatened legal action and regulatory review of universities, media outlets, late-night talk show hosts, and law firms. And, he has asserted (and attempted to assert) Executive control over independent agencies such as the Federal Reserve, National Labor Relations Board, and the National Science Foundation (among others), usurped Congress’s power of the purse, and has gone to war in Iran without Congressional consultation or approval (Luttig, 2025).

To the extent that Trumpism appeals to social conservatives who openly admire Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin for their defense of traditional gender roles and opposition to what they see as decadent liberalism, immigration, and LGBTQ rights, it is little wonder that the domestic policies of Trump reflect some of the same policies pursued by Orbán as he has turned Hungary into an illiberal democracy (Beauchamp, 2024b; Field, 2025: 17; Marantz, 2022; Rudolph, 2024). Indeed, Orbán has attended and spoken at several CPAC events in the US as well as hosted CPAC events in Hungary, cementing the ideological convergence of Orbánism and Trumpism. Further, Snegovaya et al. (2023) highlight many socially conservative policies on traditional gender roles and opposition to LGBTQ rights of Putinism that overlap with Trumpism in the US. While there are important differences, these overlapping policy interests are why some social conservatives in the US view Putin and Russia as an ally of the US in the battle against what they see as decadent liberal Western values.

Given the populist turn in the US and elsewhere, we are witnessing the formation of a new ideological conflict that will shape the twenty-first century: the battle between liberal democracy on one side and various forms of populism, autocracy, and authoritarianism on the other. An open question is which side the US will take in this battle, especially when it is being transformed from within by Trumpism.

The remainder of this paper consists of four parts. In Part 2, I review the literature on populism to argue that Trumpism meets the criteria of populism in its ideology, style, and strategy. I then examine the economic (Part 3), political (Part 4), and cultural dimensions (Part 5) of Trumpism and, in so doing, draw out some of its domestic and international manifestations. I then conclude (Part 6) with some observations about future research questions for the study of populism in general and Trumpism in particular.

## **Literature Review: Populism as an Ideology, Style, and Strategy**

Although Donald Trump is now in his second term as a Republican President, he is far from a traditional Republican. Instead of Ronald Reagan’s “shining city on a hill,” he invokes

“American Carnage.” Instead of Reagan’s welcoming of immigrants and even issuing a blanket amnesty for undocumented immigrants, Trump seeks to build a wall on the US-Mexico border and uses Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) in a crackdown on undocumented immigrants to pursue mass deportations. And, instead of the traditional Republican pursuit of free trade, Trump has declared himself a “Tariff Man” (Boucher & Thies, 2019) and uses tariffs and other government powers to extract deals, personal favors, and acquire government ownership shares in major corporations (Surowiecki, 2026).

While Trump appears to be a conservative on some issues, such as *shrinking* the size of the federal government under the guise of Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and using the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to cut off funds to executive agencies, the way he pursues these goals bypasses the traditional policy-making process and further weakens the separation of powers. Simultaneously, Trump pursues policies historically not aligned with the Republican agenda in the post-Reagan era that *increase* the power and scope of the federal government, such as economic protectionism, centralizing data that is usually dispersed across several agencies, and expanding the size, scope, and mission of ICE. In short, he is not a typical conservative Republican President in substance or style.

But if Donald Trump is not a typical conservative Republican, what is the best way to categorize him? Some have argued that he is a demagogue (Mercieca, 2020), a strongman (Ben-Ghiat, 2021), an autocrat (A. Applebaum, 2024), or at least driven by autocratic envy (Stracqualursi, 2018). Others have suggested that his “us versus them” rhetorical and political style taps into fascist politics (Rauch, 2026; J. Stanley, 2018; Tourish, 2024). Still others argue that by engaging in a form of personalist politics (e.g., “my generals”), Trump is instead pursuing what Max Weber called patrimonialism (Rauch, 2025). A common thread uniting these analyses is to highlight both the style and substance of Trumpism, which is a populism that blends conservatism, nativism, xenophobia, libertarianism, ethnonationalism, national conservatism, and Christian Nationalism (J. O. Baker & Bader, 2022; Field, 2025; Pierson, 2017).

Scholars of populism have unpacked it into at least three dimensions (Barrios Suvelza, 2022). First, populism is an *ideology*, since it is “first and foremost a set of ideas” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 62). Second, populism is a *style* of politics that consists of “*repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life*” (Moffitt, 2016: 28, italics in original). And third, populism is a *strategy* of political leaders, which views “populism in political discourse as a claim-making or communication which can be used by diverse political actors to gain an electoral advantage during their campaigns” (Dai & Kustov, 2022, p. 385), which often manifests as a “discursive strategy selectively employed by political outsiders on both the left and right extremes of the political spectrum to challenge the political status quo” (Bonikowski, 2016: 10). I suggest below that each of these dimensions helps us analyze the rise and impact of Trumpism as a form of populism.

## *Populism as an Ideology*

There is an ongoing debate as to whether populism is a “thin” ideology that needs to attach itself to a host ideology, such as nationalism and socialism (Freeden, 2017; Neuner & Wratil, 2022; B. Stanley, 2008) or a substantive, distinct, “thick” ideology in its own right (Schroeder, 2020). Making the case for populism as a thin ideology, Stanley argues that the core of populism consists of four distinct but interrelated concepts: “The existence of two homogeneous units of analysis: ‘the people’ and ‘the elite.’ The antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite. The idea of popular sovereignty. The positive valorization of ‘the people’ and denigration of ‘the elite’” (2008: 102). However, because “the people” and “the elite” are amorphous, Stanley argues that while “populism should be regarded as a distinct ideology in that it conveys a particular way of construing the political in the specific interaction of its core concepts,” it is a *thin* ideology unable to “stand alone as a practical political ideology: it lacks the capacity to put forward a wide-ranging and coherent programme for the solution to crucial political questions” (2008: 95). As such, populism must attach itself to or blend with elements of “contextually hospitable ‘full’ ideologies” (2008: 96).

On the contrary, Schroeder argues that it is better to see populism as a substantive, unique ideology. For example, “Trump’s populism is beyond left and right, promoting a protectionist economic nationalism and an isolationist foreign policy that depart significantly from recent Republican orthodoxy and that have in the past (at least in the case of economic protectionism, but also of welfare chauvinism and a more isolationist foreign policy) been associated with the Democratic party” (2020: 16–17). While it is arguable whether Trump is indeed an isolationist in his second term, Schroeder is correct to highlight that Trump’s ideology blends issue positions that do not fit neatly into a single pre-existing ideological category.

While this “thin versus thick” debate is nuanced and important, there is an underlying baseline definition that describes the essence of populism. According to Mudde’s classic statement, populism is “*an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people*” (Mudde, 2004: 543, italics in the original; see also, Mudde, 2025). Here, it is important to distinguish between democracy and liberal democracy. If, following Mudde’s definition of populism, democracy rests on the view that the government reflects the will of the people, this translates into majoritarian politics. Populism assumes not only that the populist leader promotes the will of the people, but also that the leader personifies and embodies that will (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, 2024; Urbinati, 2019).

When this happens, the law is whatever the populist leader wants it to be, and any checks on the populist leader are seen as thwarting the will of the people. While the people who support the populist leader might be happy with the results in the present moment, they are, in reality, living under a law that reflects the leader’s arbitrary will rather than the people’s will. This, in turn, helps us identify how populism can easily transform into autocracy (A. Applebaum, 2024). It also helps us understand how some voters continue to support a populist leader even when they change positions on an issue (e.g., many voters supported Trump because he pledged not to start any wars, but they continued to support him after he initiated a war against Iran). And, to the

extent that populism represents a threat to liberal democracy, it should be noted that this threat comes from both the political right (Nandy, 2019) and the political left (Weyland, 2013). By contrast, liberal democracy as a set of institutions that ensure that the law is not reducible to a single leader's whims, but is instead the result of a process that ensures that while the government might promote policies that reflect the will of the people (i.e., the majority) it does so by respecting process of how laws and policies are made as well as respecting the rights of those who disagree with the majority.

In this manner, populist leaders such as Trump position themselves as the embodiment of the people's will, thereby allowing them to argue that liberal democratic checks on their power are thwarting that will. Not only is populism anti-elitist, but it is also anti-pluralist and defends an allegedly pure culture against all threats, both internal and external. As such, it deploys the politics of "us versus them." As Mudde states, "Populism presents a Manichean outlook, in which there are only friends and foes. Opponents are not just people with different priorities and values, they are *evil!* Consequently, compromise is impossible, as it 'corrupts' the purity" (2004: 544, italics in original). As a result, populism feeds off of, and exacerbates, political polarization (Schroeder, 2020: 17; Stefanelli, 2023). This us-versus-them approach is also reinforced by the MAGA movement's intellectual affinity for Carl Schmitt's friend/enemy dichotomy and his critique of liberal democracy (Field, 2025: 232–235).

Adding more detail to the "pure people versus the corrupt elites" definition, Freeden suggests the three core attributes of populism are "an insistent monism: that is, an inclination to conceive of society as a singular unitary body...; an appeal to the origination and integrity of a defining founding moment or natality...; and a visceral fear of imported change in law, customs and people" (2017: 4). Similarly, Castanho Silva et al. argue that the main components of populism are: "a) people-centrism: a romanticized view of common people and a belief that implementing the people's will is the only goal of democratic politics; b) anti-elitism: perceiving existing political or economic elites as an evil group keen on oppressing common people; and c) anti-pluralism: the belief that politics is a struggle between good (the people) and evil (the elites), in which there are no other meaningful cleavages" (2023: 439).

Given these analyses of populism as an ideology, I suggest that Trumpism blends these elements in its defense of the "forgotten man" (i.e., the pure people), opposition to what Trump calls globalist elites and the deep state who have pursued policies that have "ripped off" and harmed the forgotten man (i.e., the corrupt elites), reference to a mythical golden age invoked by the phrase Make America Great Again (i.e., the founding moment and golden era of the past from which the US has strayed, which is largely one that privileges the primary status of white, Christian Americans), and an anti-pluralist fear of socio-demographic change (i.e., pointing to "out-groups" as a threat to social unity and a common culture, whether they are immigrants and refugees or internal "enemies of the people" such as LGBTQ Americans). Additionally, Trumpism draws its power from the anxieties that many white working- and middle-class Americans feel as a result of rising economic inequality, changing cultural and racial demographics, and political institutions that are viewed as unresponsive, ineffective, or actively harming their well-being (Bronk & Jacoby, 2020; Dorn et al., 2024; Götzsche-Astrup & Hogg, 2024; Hogg, 2021; Mansfield et al., 2019; Mutz, 2018; Rodrik, 2021).

### *Populism as a Style*

While some scholars focus on populist movements, others focus on the leader who mobilizes and defends the people against the allegedly corrupt elite. As Moffitt writes, “it is the leader that should be our main focus when studying the phenomenon, given that they are the figures that ultimately ‘do’ populism” (2016: 51–52). Moreover, the rise of social media and other technologies allows populist leaders to cement a symbolic relationship between themselves as leaders and their followers (Engesser et al., 2017; Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, 2024). The use of social media to directly communicate with followers helps fuel the narrative that the mainstream media is biased against populist leaders and their followers and is itself part of the corrupt elite (recall Trump’s numerous claims that the news media are “enemies of the people”). Ultimately, this creates a symbiotic relationship between social media and populist leaders that reinforces the view that populist leaders are the only ones who can take on the corrupt establishment in the name of the people (Moffitt, 2016; Schaub & Morisi, 2020). Moreover, Trump’s social media posts visually represent the “pure” people he is fighting for through images that emphasize his core supporters as a homogeneous in-group comprised of older, whiter, more masculine, and more Christian Americans (Macaulay, 2022; Moffitt, 2024). And, his constant use of memes and other AI-generated images reinforces his position as a defender (and even savior) of the people against the corrupt elites (Bond, 2024; Joffe-Block & Bond, 2025; Wilson, 2026).

On this view, Trumpism is a *style* of populism. Trump is one of the most social-media-savvy political leaders in the US and can mobilize his MAGA followers with his posts on X and Truth Social to pressure Congress, threaten opponents, and even threaten to “primary” fellow Republicans who he sees as insufficiently loyal. Trump’s rhetoric positions him as the embodiment of the pure people against the corrupt elite. In his 2016 campaign, Trump claimed that “I alone can fix it” when referring to a host of what he argued were failed policies (Y. Applebaum, 2016). He built on that claim in his 2024 campaign, telling his supporters, “Today, I add: I am your warrior. I am your justice. And for those who have been wronged and betrayed: I am your retribution” (Blake, 2023). Further, he added, “To all Americans, I see you & I hear you. I am your voice” (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, 2024: 289). This rhetorically positions Trump as a populist leader who embodies the will of, and speaks for, the people against the corrupt establishment that thwarts their will and enriches itself at their expense (Macaulay, 2019, 2022). And, more recently, his rhetorical description of Democrats as evil, dangerous, “enemies from within” (Egwounwu & Coronell Uribe, 2024) and “The Party of Hate, Evil, and Satan” (Sommerlad, 2025) reinforces a Manichean “us versus them” conflict that positions Trump as the protector of “the people” against the various threats represented by the Democratic Party, their leaders, and supporters. As such, Trumpism taps into, and exacerbates, a pre-existing rise in affective polarization in the US in which partisans increasingly view each other negatively (Finkel et al., 2020), allowing Trump to appeal to his MAGA in-group by highlighting threats posed by various out-groups. This polarization is supercharged by online echo chambers and ideological sorting (Dawkins & Hanson, 2024; Törnberg, 2022).

### *Populism as a Strategy*

Scholars who study populism as a political and electoral strategy focus on candidates who deploy populist appeals, under what conditions, and whether they are successful (Bonikowski & Gidron,

2016; Casiraghi et al., 2024; Dai & Kustov, 2022, 2024; Neuner & Wratil, 2022). For this approach, scholars “study populism in political discourse as a claim-making or communication which can be used by diverse political actors to gain an electoral advantage during their campaigns” and rightly assume that “opportunistic politicians can strategically exploit stable and widespread popular anti-immigration and anti-elitist attitudes” (Dai & Kustov, 2022: 385). To be sure, Presidential candidates (especially Governors) often position themselves as an “outsider” who asks voters to send them to Washington to fix a broken system. This was central to Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign, in which he ran as the ultimate outsider who asked voters to send him to Washington, D.C., to “drain the swamp” and take on the entrenched interests of the “deep state.” Dai and Kustov’s study of presidential campaigns from 1952 through 2016 found that Donald Trump’s 2016 candidacy deployed populist appeals at a rate far higher than any previous presidential candidate (2022).

Moreover, when political elites are more liberal than the median voter on cultural issues such as immigration, this creates an electoral opening for right-wing populists to fill the “representation gap” by appealing to anti-immigrant sentiment (Guenther, 2022: 32). Trump filled that representation gap by fanning anti-immigrant sentiment, which has been a core element of his populism since he entered the presidential race in 2015 by claiming that Mexico was sending criminals and rapists to the US (Mercieca, 2020: 2). However, while such populist appeals can *attract* voters by appealing to voters who feel ignored by the political establishment due to the representation gap, such appeals simultaneously risk *repelling* other voters who reject the divisive rhetoric and harsh policy proposals deployed by populists (Dai & Kustov, 2022). However, if populists are viewed by disaffected voters as authentic truth-tellers, their claims might win the support of voters (rather than repel them) even if those voters do not fully agree with all of the populist leader’s claims (Tucker, Jr., 2025). This helps us understand a common observation from Trump’s first term: take him seriously but not literally. In short, many voters admitted they did not fully agree with Trump, but they liked his “style” and gave him credit for saying things no other politician had the temerity to say.

Moreover, Trumpism as a strategy appeals to voters who are increasingly skeptical that liberal democracy can address economic and social issues raised by globalization and migration. According to a 2026 NBC News survey, 59% of registered voters in the US agree that the economic and political systems “are stacked against people like them,” a record high in over forty years of tracking this question (Bowman, 2026). Under such conditions, more Americans are willing to support a “strong, rough, anti-democratic leader” (Williams et al., 2023) who gets results even if they have to subvert democratic norms and procedures in doing so (Bloeser et al., 2024). As such, Trumpism provides the ideological content, communicative style, and outsider strategy that mobilizes politically disaffected and anxious Americans to support his MAGA-inspired movement.

In this section, I have argued that Trumpism meets the criteria of populism in its ideological content, style, and strategy. The next step is to investigate its manifestations in greater detail. As Ferreira Dias notes, populism is three-dimensional, ranging from “*economic populism*, with its emphasis on wealth redistribution and anti-establishment sentiments, to *political populism*, which focuses on governance and anti-elite narratives, and *cultural populism*, which capitalizes on identity politics and nationalistic sentiments” (2024: 2, emphasis added). In what follows, I

highlight how these three substantive dimensions are evident in Trumpism in both domestic and international politics.

## **Trumpism and Economic Populism**

### *Domestic Politics*

It is common to view economic populism as more prevalent in left-leaning forms of populism because it focuses on wealth redistribution and defending the working class (the pure people) against large corporations, banks, and the investor class (the corrupt elite) that exploits workers in order to further enrich themselves (Staufer, 2021; Weyland, 2013). For example, Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are Social Democrats who toured the US in early 2025, drawing large crowds to their “Fighting Oligarchy” tour. While Sanders can be viewed as a left-wing populist by tapping into criticism of Wall Street and the economic elite, he eschews the rhetoric of the pure people, fear of diversity, and a longing for an idealized past, which are additional criteria of populism discussed above. (Cohen, 2026; Moffitt, 2024; Staufer, 2021).<sup>1</sup>

However, Trumpism also includes an economic populist component. On the face of it, this is contradictory: he is a billionaire who has nominated a Cabinet with more billionaires than any other President. Rather than emphasizing a populism of wealth redistribution grounded in a critique of Wall Street, Trump’s economic populism rests on an overarching anti-establishment sentiment that focuses its wrath on a “rigged” system. On one hand, he is decidedly not a populist, given that President Trump has passed major tax cuts for the wealthy individuals and corporations, and did so on traditional Republican trickle-down economics and the Laffer Curve (both popularized by Reagan), which justify tax cuts on the grounds that lower tax rates will spur economic growth and productivity, thereby increasing government revenue. In this case, Pierson is right to observe that while Trump campaigns as a populist, he governs as a plutocrat (Pierson, 2017). But on the other hand, in his three campaigns in 2016, 2020, and 2024, Trump positioned himself as the champion of American workers by arguing that he would bring American manufacturing back to the heartland, revive the coal mining industry, eliminate taxes on tips, and bring prices down for American families who felt the pinch of rising inflation. He also appealed not just to workers, but to native-born and implicitly white workers, by arguing that immigrant and migrant workers represented an economic threat to their jobs and to the larger American culture (Lamont et al., 2017; Mondon & Winter, 2019), thus conflating the economic and cultural dimensions of populism.

Indeed, Trump’s economic populism is evident in his embrace of tariffs. Upon returning to the White House in 2025, Trump declared a national economic emergency and levied tariffs on trading partners, in part by claiming it would force companies to build and expand manufacturing facilities in the US, thus creating jobs for American workers. However, on pure economic metrics, tariffs have not created the promised manufacturing revival in the US, but instead have resulted in higher costs for US businesses and consumers (Yale Budget Lab, 2026).

---

<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Sanders positions himself as fighting on behalf of, and with, the people rather than speaking for them as Trump does (Cohen, 2026; Macaulay, 2019). For a contrary view that both Sanders and Trump are examples of a new style of truth-telling, authentic populists, see Tucker, Jr. (2022).

Thus, working Americans are squeezed by slower economic growth and rising prices resulting from the tariffs, which are a tax on the very working class that Trump claims to defend. Indeed, many Republican officials in Congress admit (off the record) that many of Trump's policies lack any conservative economic philosophy and are instead a collection of politically strategic positions that allow Trump to position himself as a defender of working-class Americans (Messerly, 2025). Such admissions illustrate that while Trump deploys the rhetoric of economic populism, it is largely stylistic, performative, and strategic, helping him maintain the support of working-class voters in his MAGA coalition.

### *International Politics*

Trumpism's international economic populism focuses heavily on what it sees as an unfair world trade system in which the US is ripped off and taken advantage of. Thus, tariffs are a symbolic tool that allows President Trump to position himself as the protector of the working class against globalist elites and the institutional arrangements they created in the post-WWII era. As Chrysogelos et al. observe, "Trump's tariffs do have an internal logic, however perverse. They are a self-perpetuating political strategy whose goals are highly political, symbolic and emotive rather than economic and pragmatic. They aim to maintain Trump's image as defender of the people and foe of the elites, fighting for the sovereignty of the people at home (against the elites) and abroad (against foreign adversaries)" (Chrysogelos & Brusenbauch Meislová, 2025). But tariffs are not just symbolic; they serve two additional strategic purposes for Trump. First, they give him leverage over other countries during trade negotiations. And second, they steer negotiations away from multilateral treaties and towards bilateral agreements that Trump prefers, both because he prefers one-to-one negotiations (where the US "wins") and because he views multilateral treaties and institutions as infringing on US sovereignty. Indeed, Trump's view of international trade sees it not as a mutually beneficial arrangement, but an arena of "us versus them" competition in which the US, guided by him, wins the best deal for the country in a zero-sum contest (Mansfield et al., 2019; Mutz, 2021).

If tariffs have so far not been an effective economic tool to rebuild American manufacturing and the working class, why has Trump insisted on enacting them? As noted, Trump sees tariffs less as an effective economic strategy and more as a negotiating tool, giving him leverage over countries seeking to reduce US tariffs. For example, Vietnam was hit with a high tariff on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025 (i.e., what Trump declared as "Liberation Day"). And in an effort to have the tariffs reduced, Vietnam ignored its laws to fast-track a lucrative luxury hotel and golf course business deal with the Trump Organization in three months (instead of the normal two to four years), concluding the deal the day before Vietnamese negotiators met with their US counterparts to start negotiations to lower the tariffs (Cave, 2025). Similarly, the Qatari and Saudi Arabian governments have invested in Trump-owned businesses (Condon, 2025). This is where Trump's personalist and patrimonialist approach becomes increasingly clear: given that Trump envisions himself as representing the will of the people, it follows that from his perspective, whatever is good for Trump and Trump, Inc., is good for the United States, echoing the old cliché that whatever is good for General Motors is good for the United States (Terrell, 2016). And given that many of the deals he personally benefits from come from autocratic countries in which the personal and political interests of the leaders are fused, it is little surprise that Trump sees nothing wrong with mixing his personal interests with his role as President. While critics argue that this is self-

dealing and profiteering (Kirkpatrick, 2025), kleptocratic, (A. Applebaum, 2025; Beauchamp, 2026; Graham, 2026), or even “neo-royalist” (Goddard & Newman, 2025), Trump’s populism leads him to conclude that there is nothing wrong with blurring his public responsibilities as President and private interests as business tycoon (A. Applebaum, 2024). Such blurring of the lines between official US policy and private deals enriching the Trump Organization is no doubt troubling for the health of liberal democracy, but many countries have learned that the way to earn favorable policy results is to be open to cutting deals with the Trump Organization (P. Baker, 2025).

Indeed, the Trump administration has leveraged its power to gain favorable concessions not only for Trump-owned businesses but for other US-based companies. Under the policy goal of moving from “aid to trade,” the Trump administration has used aid and investment as leverage to extract policy concessions and contracts for US companies. Investigative reporting has revealed that the Trump administration has used threats of closing US embassies to leverage at least five African countries into signing contracts with Elon Musk’s Starlink company (Kaplan et al., 2025). As Toosi reports (based on off-the-record conversations with US officials), “If an African government wants strong relations with Washington, including future development assistance, it must pay up in other ways — ranging from giving access to minerals to accepting deportees” (2025). Toosi concludes, “[t]he overwhelming sense among African officials is that they need to pony up what they can to effectively buy Trump’s love — the transactionalism for which he’s well known” (2025).

Finally, tariffs are a good example of how populism is a “thin” ideology that latches onto diverse ideological justifications (Van Der Waal & De Koster, 2018). For example, even populists who are otherwise ideological allies have taken different positions on tariffs: “In two prominent such cases in recent years, right-wing populists in the US and the United Kingdom espoused opposing trade positions: protectionism for Trump and support for free trade for Brexiteers (those on all sides of the political spectrum who supported Brexit—the UK’s exit from the European Union), Conservatives and UK Independence Party (UKIP) supporters alike” (Meislová & Chrissyogelos, 2024: 1942).

## **Trumpism and Political Populism**

### *Domestic Politics*

Trumpism’s domestic political populism is evident in his constant critique of the “deep state.” This anti-elitist and anti-expertise strand is a key component of Trumpism’s ideological substance, personalist style, and political strategy, and draws strength from a longstanding distrust of experts and elites in American political culture (Broad, 2025; Nichols, 2024). For example, the appointment of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., as Secretary of Health and Human Services brought his “Make America Healthy Again” agenda into the MAGA movement. In doing so, this added a new dimension of anti-intellectualism and even conspiratorial thinking to Trump’s domestic politics. From climate change denialism to vaccine skepticism, COVID-19 revisionism, and Trump no longer taking credit for Operation Warp Speed (the public/private effort to develop safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines), the Trump administration is actively sowing confusion and distrust of scientists and experts (Broad, 2025; Nichols, 2024).

As Oliver and Rahn conclude, not only are Trump’s supporters more likely to be nativists, but they also scored high in anti-elitism and distrust of experts (2016, p. 200). Paradoxically, while Trumpism rejects scientific experts as an elite whose interests clash with the common sense of the people, it simultaneously embraces economic elites such as Elon Musk and other Silicon Valley tech CEO’s (who are experts and elites in their own right). A common thread is a quasi-libertarianism in which “the people” should be free from government regulations and mandates (e.g., masks, vaccines, etc.) and tech CEOs should be free from economic regulations and taxes. In both cases, Trump positions himself as the defender of the people against government regulations and the corrupt technical and bureaucratic elites that enforce them.

Additionally, since returning to the Presidency for his second term, Trump has been following through on his campaign promises to exact vengeance on those he sees as his enemies. He is usurping the powers of Congress (e.g., tariffs, going to war against Iran, impounding funds, closing Congressionally created departments and agencies, etc.) and using federal agencies to charge, or threaten to charge, institutions ranging from prestigious law firms, elite universities, museums, former advisors, as well as former and current government officials, with assorted crimes (Levitsky & Way, 2025; Luttig, 2025). In so doing, Trump is bringing those institutions and individuals to heel and sending a signal to others that might resist or oppose his agenda. Moreover, he has asked Republican-led states to engage in a rare round of mid-decade redistricting to gerrymander congressional districts in favor of Republicans in the 2026 mid-term elections, which will reverberate in the coming years as a result of the US Supreme Court’s decision in *Louisiana v. Callais*, which weakened Section II of the Voting Rights Act and opened the door to additional gerrymandering that will likely dilute Black and Latino voter influence (Morris, 2026).

Institutionally, Trumpism seeks to centralize power in the hands of the Presidency by ignoring or berating judges, declaring emergencies to invoke additional Presidential powers, and circumventing Congressional authority. By invoking national emergencies for trade and a host of other issues, Trump has acquired additional executive powers that allow him to skirt the traditional checks and balances of US liberal democracy. Indeed, Trump has an expansive view of Executive Power, reflected in his statement, “I have an Article II, where I have the right to do whatever I want as president” (Wofford, 2025). Trump’s view of Presidential power has been bolstered by recent Supreme Court decisions that have institutionalized the Unitary Executive Theory, allowing the President to exercise unchecked executive power to hire and fire employees of Congressionally created independent agencies in the Executive Branch. Moreover, in *Trump v. U.S.*, 2024, the Supreme Court significantly expanded Presidential immunity for any act that relates to the core powers of the Presidency.

Such decisions and view of executive power are clearly viewed by President Trump as a green light to exercise unchecked power, as he has claimed on social media that “He who saves his Country does not violate any Law” (Chiacu, 2025), echoing Napoleon Bonaparte before he declared himself emperor. This has led not only to concerns that the President will eventually simply ignore any court ruling that restrains his power, but also to increased threats against judges who may become fearful of ruling against Trump’s wishes. Indeed, Trump has lambasted federal judges as “radical, left-wing activists” and “communists” and called for their impeachment for ruling against his executive orders and mass deportation efforts (Gregory,

2025).<sup>2</sup> And, Deputy White House Chief of Staff Stephen Miller reacted to a Federal Judge’s temporary restraining order that blocked the President’s ability to deploy National Guard troops to Portland, Oregon, declaring it a “judicial insurrection” rather than an exercise of checks and balances (Chait, 2025).<sup>3</sup> By seeking to concentrate political power in the executive branch, Trumpism is following the pattern of how populists govern once in power (Diamond, 2026; Munro & Pfeiffer, 2022; Pappas, 2019; Rovira Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2025).

### *International Politics*

Trumpism’s international political populism is evident in his admiration for, and perhaps envy of, strong leaders. Over his first and second terms, he has praised Xi, Putin, and Orbán as strong leaders, and his view of executive power, combined with his personalist style, leads him to be more comfortable with autocratic rulers rather than leaders of traditional US allies (A. Applebaum, 2024; Ben-Ghiat, 2021). The populist turn in Trump’s foreign policy was made plain in February of 2025, when Vice President Vance attended the Munich Security Conference and had a side meeting with Alternative für Deutschland (*AfD*) leaders, but did not meet with the German Chancellor (in advance of the upcoming German elections). Significantly, in his Munich speech, Vance did not highlight Russia as a common threat to Europe and the trans-Atlantic alliance, but instead argued that European governments were the problem, as they sought to exclude right-wing nationalist parties from governing coalitions. Further, he implied that the US would bypass elected governments to establish direct relationships with these political parties.

Indeed, Vance criticized Germany’s long-standing “firewall” that excludes far-right nationalist parties from entering governing coalitions. While Germany’s firewall is there to protect democracy from those who would dismantle it, Vance, speaking on behalf of the US, took the side of the right-wing nationalist parties (Atkinson, 2025). This led Alice Weidel, *AfD*’s candidate for chancellor, to share parts of Vance’s speech on X, praising it as “excellent” (Atkinson, 2025). German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius responded, noting that Vance’s “speech speaks of the annihilation of democracy. And if I have understood him correctly, he is comparing conditions in parts of Europe with those in authoritarian regimes... that is not acceptable” (Atkinson, 2025). As one journalist covering the Munich Conference wrote, “Perhaps the most candid response came from the European Union’s foreign-policy chief, Kaja Kallas, who said that ‘the free world needs a new leader’” (Azizi, 2025). Indeed, Kallas concluded that Vance was “trying to pick a fight” with Europe (Atkinson, 2025).

Vance’s speech not only signaled that the US was no longer a steadfast member of NATO that would ensure security for its liberal democratic EU allies, he was signaling the populist turn of the Trump administration away from multilateral alliances and towards unilateralism, away from liberal democratic allies and towards like-minded populist parties, and away from confronting Russian aggression in the Ukraine towards confronting the “enemies within.” Thus, Trump sees

---

<sup>2</sup> By 2024, the United States Marshall’s Service reported that “serious threats to federal judges have doubled since 2021,” and over half of the federal judges surveyed said they faced increasing threats (Over Half of Judges Report Threats, Environment Affecting Mental Health, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that district and appeals courts have frequently blocked Trump’s executive actions (even if the Supreme Court eventually overrules them), which should not be discounted as a sign that the judiciary is serving as an important check on Trumpism.

himself as having more in common with right-wing populist leaders such as Orbán than with leaders of longstanding democratic allies in Europe.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Vance traveled to Hungary to campaign with Viktor Orbán days before the national election that saw Orbán's Fidesz party defeated by Péter Magyar's Tisza party (Spike, 2026).

Much like other populist leaders, Trump views national security not just through the lens of external threats but also through that of internal ones. As Freeden observes, "nationalism is predominantly defined vis-à-vis external political entities. Populisms seek the enemies in their midst or those who, they believe, are about to be in their midst" (2017: 3). If this is true, then Trumpism contains both nationalist and populist elements, given its double-edged critique of globalist elites and the political and international alliances that threaten US sovereignty from without and the "deep state" and other domestic threats that block the people's will and undermine their security from within.

As Wojczewski notes, "Populist discourses render 'the people' insecure by constructing the establishment and thus the very entity that is, at least in a democracy, supposed to represent and protect the people as enemy of the people... When a populist discourse employs a logic of securitisation, a populist actor draws on a politics of fear, urgency, and exceptionality in order to mobilise 'the people' and unite them in a common front against the establishment" (2020: 14). Over the course of his first and second terms, President Trump has issued more executive orders than any President since Dwight Eisenhower. As of May 1, 2026, President Trump has issued 478 Executive Orders (220 in his first term and 258 so far in his second term), which is the most since President Eisenhower issued 484 in his eight years in office (Peters & Woolley, 2026). In declaring such a high number of national emergencies and Executive Orders in the first year and a half of his second term, Trump is following the populist pattern of consolidating power in the Executive Branch and bypassing established policy-making procedures (Bolleyer & Salát, 2021; Munro & Pfeiffer, 2022).

This helps us understand Trump's focus on the "enemies within" as an ontological threat to the US on par with any external threat. Wojczewski has argued that "this populist securitisation move has three main elements: (1) dramatisation and fearmongering; (2) simplification and scapegoating by designating a particular actor as the single cause of a security problem and 'the people' as collective victim; and (3) propagation of a state of emergency, requiring a suspension of normal politics and the endorsement of the populist actor as the only one who can secure 'the people'" (2020: 7). In deploying the National Guard to cities such as Los Angeles, Portland, Minneapolis, and Chicago as part of a mass deportation effort, describing these and other cities as dangerous war zones, telling the top echelon of US military leaders that they should use cities like this as training grounds, and circulating memes and AI-generated images highlighting the domestic side of homeland security, Donald Trump is enacting these three steps (Greene, 2025).

While this turn towards domestic securitization can be seen as isolationist, it is more accurately understood as a new form of unilateralism that reflects an anti-elite suspicion of multilateralism

---

<sup>4</sup> For example, the number of right-wing populists invited to Trump's 2025 inauguration, "Italy's Meloni, Argentina's Milei, Belgium's Tom Van Grieken, Hungary's Orbán, France's Eric Zemmour, El Salvador's Nayib Bukele, and more — indicates Trump takes seriously his connections to like-minded Western populists" (Constantini, 2025).

and alliances. Indeed, Trump has a long history of criticizing NATO allies, partly because he sees Europe as free riding off the US and not spending enough on their defense budgets.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, he has long resented free trade arrangements that, in his mind, allow other countries to “rip off” the US. By extension, “America First” is often interpreted as Trump’s effort to turn the US inward as an isolationist country disengaged from global alliances. After all, that seemed to be the direction Trump was aiming for in his First Inaugural address in 2017 when he stated, “From this moment on, it’s going to be America first. Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families” (Kupchan, 2024). Kupchan argues that Trump is seeking “strategic detachment” rather than isolationism, since Trump’s nationalism leads him to view international entities and agreements as a threat to US sovereignty (Kupchan, 2024). Rudolph goes further, arguing that “Quite the opposite of isolationism, Trump’s instincts betray a perverse form of internationalism: eagerly picking and choosing the other side in the ongoing global struggle between democracy and autocracy” (2024).

Isolationists do not openly invoke Manifest Destiny in their Second Inaugural Address. Nor do they muse about re-taking the Panama Canal, turning Canada into the 51st state, annexing Greenland, taking over Cuba, invoking a “Trump Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine, and owning the Gaza Strip to turn it into the Riviera on the Mediterranean. But empire-builders and interventionists do. If “America First” has a coherent foreign policy goal in the second Trump administration, it is not isolationism but the rejection of the alliances of the post-WWII era, now being reframed as restraints on US interests and drains on US funds. Consequently, Trumpism is refashioning US foreign policy not just through its economic emphasis on transactional deal-making to promote US interests and Trump-owned businesses, but through its political emphasis on disengaging from traditional alliances (Abrahamian, 2025; Azizi, 2025; P. Baker, 2025; Brands, 2018, 2025; Chotiner, 2025; Keohane & Nye, Jr., 2025; Kimmage, 2025).

## **Trumpism and Cultural Populism**

### *Domestic Politics*

President Trump has long deployed campaign rhetoric that has appealed to the forgotten man, middle America, and common-sense values that place important demographic “others” outside the boundaries of “the people” (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, 2024; Lamont et al., 2017; Moffitt, 2024). Before his first Presidential campaign in 2016, Trump emerged as a national leader of the “birtherism” conspiracy that alleged that President Obama was illegitimate because he was thought to have been born in Kenya rather than Hawaii (Jardina & Traugott, 2019). Indeed, people of color, women, LGBTQ Americans, and immigrants are rhetorically positioned as out-groups that threaten the status of white, middle-class, Christian Americans as real Americans (Dawkins & Hanson, 2024; Moffitt, 2024).

President Trump’s political speeches are laced with political, cultural, and economic themes that target the insecurities of white working-class men who feel their social positions are threatened

---

<sup>5</sup> As Keohane and Nye, Jr., recently wrote, Trump’s focus on free-riding is ultimately short-sighted: “Trump has focused so much on the costs of what he sees as free-riding by allies that he neglects the fact that the United States gets to drive the bus—and thus pick the destination and the route” (Keohane & Nye, Jr., 2025).

due to economic shifts and demographic changes as a result of immigration (Lamont et al., 2017; Mercieca, 2020). For instance, in the 2024 campaign, then-candidate Trump often described migrants from mainly non-white countries as “poisoning the blood” of the country (Astor, 2024), which taps into fear of socio-demographically different “others” and a nativist nostalgia for a golden age that viewed real Americans as white, Protestant, and European (J. O. Baker & Bader, 2022; H. Betz, 2017; H.-G. Betz, 2019; Ferreira Dias, 2025). While Betz highlights the parallels between populism and nativism in that both have a preference for native-born populations over immigrants as well as a backward-looking nostalgia for an idealized past, he nevertheless concludes that populism and nativism are distinct (2017: 337). By contrast, I suggest that nativism is a core part of Trumpism as an ideology and political strategy, as it allows him to position himself as protecting native-born workers, and American culture, from the perceived threats posed by immigration and cultural pluralism.

Nativist and xenophobic rhetoric has resulted in greater racial polarization (Jardina & Ollerenshaw, 2025) and has helped to mainstream the “great replacement” conspiracy that posits that the Democratic Party is intentionally importing people of color to “replace” white Americans as the dominant social group (DiMaggio et al., 2024; Ekman, 2022). Further, most Trump supporters watch FOX News, a channel on which Trump historically has appeared and receives favorable coverage. And recent studies have shown that FOX News watchers are more likely to have negative attitudes about immigrants and refugees, and are more likely to believe the “great replacement” conspiracy compared to those who watch other news channels (Hoewe et al., 2020; Rhodes et al., 2026). Additionally, when presented with census data about the US becoming a majority-minority country, white respondents adopt more socially conservative political positions (Brown et al., 2022; Craig & Richeson, 2014). As a result, racial resentment, fear of demographic change, and status threat help fuel Trump’s appeal for white voters who are increasingly opposed to both illegal and legal immigration (J. O. Baker & Bader, 2022; Enders & Thornton, 2022; Hogg, 2021; Jardina, 2019, 2021; Mutz, 2018).

While the US has long had a tension between the ethnocultural (or “blood and soil”) and civic (or “Civic Creed”) versions of national identity (Gerstle, 2001; R. Smith, 1997; R. M. Smith, 2020; Streich, 2009), Trumpism privileges the former while denigrating the latter. For example, while welcoming King Charles III to the White House in May of 2026, President Trump argued against the claim that American identity was “merely an idea,” instead asserting that it rested on an Anglo-Saxon heritage that served as the common ethnocultural bond between the US and the United Kingdom. In response, it was King Charles III, when speaking to Congress, who made the case that the US-UK bond rested not on shared cultural heritage but instead on shared principles that trace back to the Magna Carta (Chait, 2026). In short, while King Charles III highlighted the civic bonds of national identity, it was the populist Trump focused on culture, heritage, and the blood-and-soil approach to national identity.

### *International Politics*

Donald Trump’s foreign policy also includes the cultural populist themes that drive his domestic agenda. Flowing from the ideological affinities and political ties to right-wing populists in Europe (Beauchamp, 2024a, 2024b), the Trump administration has tapped into a fear of immigration, migration, and demographic change as a main focus of its foreign policy. While

domestically the Trump administration is pursuing a mass deportation of undocumented migrants, the foreign policy dimension of cultural populism focuses on reducing immigration from non-white, non-Christian, and non-Western countries. In doing so, it is not only in an alliance with right-wing populists in Europe who also mobilize their followers against migrants from the Middle East and Africa, but they are now borrowing from each other.

First, the “great replacement” conspiracy theory has taken root in the US and in many European countries as right-wing populists claim that the native-born population and its culture are being overwhelmed and diluted as a result of immigration and migration (DiMaggio et al., 2024; Ekman, 2022; European Commission. Joint Research Centre., 2025). On both sides of the Atlantic, fears of racially and culturally “other” migrants are fanned by false stories and rumors. For example, in the US and Great Britain, rumors of immigrants eating ducks, geese, and cats originated on far-right social media platforms and then circulated in the wider public debate (and, in the US, even repeated in a Presidential debate). In both the US and Great Britain, news reports and fact-checkers found these claims to be false.<sup>6</sup> Trumpism sees demographic change as a cultural threat, which is evident in the National Security Statement, released in the fall of 2025, which warned Europe of “civilizational erasure” as a result of migration and refugees from non-European and non-Christian countries. Instead, it calls on patriotic parties in European nations to unapologetically celebrate their “individual character and history” while promoting their “revival of spirit” (Trump, 2025: 25–26). In so doing, Trumpism is signaling its alliance with populist parties that resist European Union regulations as infringing on their political sovereignty as well as resisting migration as a threat to their cultural identity.

Second, Trumpism feeds the narrative that non-white and non-Christian immigrants and migrants are unassimilable and are economic and social threats to American workers (Lamont et al., 2017). Similar narratives are evident in many European countries (European Commission. Joint Research Centre., 2025; Kaya, 2025; Kešić & Duyvendak, 2019). Correlated with this is the Trump administration’s efforts to reorient US immigration and asylum policies to give preference to white immigrants on the rationale that they are more likely to assimilate into American cultural and political values (Kanno-Youngs & Aleazis, 2025). This is a major shift that not only reduces the number of immigrants the US will accept but also reorients *who* it accepts. This policy stance has strong echoes of the restrictive immigration laws of the 1920s, which were justified on similar grounds (Gerstle, 2001; Streich, 2009). In the 1920s, the fear of Southern and Eastern European immigrants led to the 1924 immigration law that adopted a discriminatory national quota for certain immigrants in order to favor immigrants from Northern and Western Europe. In the 2020s, the fear of immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Asia is similarly driving the Trump administration’s efforts to rewrite immigration law to give preference to white, Christian immigrants such as Afrikaners from South Africa (Graham, 2025; Kanno-Youngs & Aleazis, 2025). Additionally, Trump administration officials (including the Department of Homeland Security) have taken up the term “remigration” when describing their efforts to coerce or incentivize migrants to “self-deport,” an idea that is rooted in

---

<sup>6</sup> For example, Donald Trump’s claim that Haitian refugees are “eating the cats” originated with a social media post accusing Haitians of eating geese and ducks in Springfield, Ohio. This claim was widely debunked (Reuters Fact Check, 2024). And, a similar claim in the UK that immigrants were “eating the swans,” which was repeated by Trump’s ally Nigel Farage, was also debunked (Full Fact Team, 2025).

far-right populist parties in Europe (European Commission. Joint Research Centre., 2025; Greene, 2025).

Third, these rhetorical and policy shifts reveal a deeper shift in Trump's cultural populism; namely, a reorientation of who is considered an American (Dawkins & Hanson, 2024). As noted above, Trump increasingly rejects a civic definition in favor of an ethnonational, or "blood and soil," view of citizenship and national identity. Moreover, the Trump administration has increasingly deployed blood and soil rhetoric that leans into national origin (rather than shared civic ideals) to suggest that native-born white Americans are "real" or "heritage" Americans (Breland, 2025), while socio-demographically different immigrants and even native-born people of color cannot be. This is a major shift away from the view of American identity as a "civic creed" that allows immigrants from any country and background to become American by pledging allegiance to the core principles of liberty and democracy (Breland, 2025; Gerstle, 2001; Restad, 2020; R. Smith, 1997; Streich, 2009).

Finally, in the post-WWII era, US foreign policy was largely based on the defense of liberal democratic principles that encompassed a civic view of national identity and citizenship, enabling the US to build alliances with other liberal democracies worldwide. However, the populist turn in US foreign policy under Trump has de-emphasized shared civic identity and ideals in favor of ethno-religious heritage, civilization, and nationalism. This is also evident in the rhetorical shift from civic ideals and principles uniting the US with its European allies to the language of "Western civilization" that is under threat both from excessive liberalism from within and from culturally different immigrants and migrants from without (Constantini, 2025; Trump, 2025).

In February 2026, Secretary of State Marco Rubio delivered a speech at the Munich Security Conference. In a speech that was more warmly received by European leaders than Vice President Vance's in 2025, he nevertheless emphasized similar themes of reclaiming national sovereignty, closing borders, and defending Western Civilization. As Rubio stated, "We are part of one civilization – Western civilization. We are bound to one another by the deepest bonds that nations could share, forged by centuries of shared history, Christian faith, culture, heritage, language, ancestry, and the sacrifices our forefathers made together for the common civilization to which we have fallen heir" (Rubio, 2026).

In short, when the Trump administration deploys the language of Western civilization and identity, it minimizes the importance of shared democratic principles and ideals that transcend cultural, religious, and ethnocultural differences. Instead, it views Western civilization and identity as united by a specific cultural, religious, and ethnocultural heritage that excludes – and sees as threats – cultural, religious, and ethnocultural "others" (Gawthorpe, 2025). And noting that US national identity historically contains a tension between a civic-ideals strand and an ethnonational strand, Restad concludes that Trump undermines the former while legitimizing the latter, ultimately undermining "US liberal values-based leadership abroad" (2020: 10).

## Conclusion

While highlighting the various dimensions of populism, I have argued that Trumpism is indeed a unique form of populism, as evident in its ideological content, communicative style, and political strategy, as well as its economic, political, and cultural substance. While the slogan “Make America Great Again” provides an angle on Trump’s domestic populism, “America First” offers a similar angle on his foreign policy. In both its domestic and international orientations, I have highlighted areas where Trumpism has posed challenges to the health of liberal democracy in the US and around the world. In short, as a domestic-facing populism, Trumpism places serious strains on the democratic norms and constitutional principles of US liberal democracy (Levitsky & Way, 2025; Luttig, 2025). And as an internationally-facing populism, Trumpism pursues policies that risk dismantling the very rules-based international order the US helped build to promote human rights and liberal democracy in the post-WWII era (Abrahamian, 2025; Ashford, 2025; Brands, 2018; Restad, 2020).

From here, further research can help us develop a greater understanding of the many layers and dimensions of populism. Will Trumpism institutionalize itself, given Trump’s effort to reshape the federal government and accumulate power in the Executive Branch? Once Donald Trump leaves office, can Trumpism survive without Trump? Will Trumpism establish a new economic and social order that reverses many of the civil and political rights gained by social movements in the mid- to late-twentieth century? How will Trumpism coordinate with other right-wing populists to reshape not only domestic politics but international affairs? If the US sides with populists against liberal democracy, will populist foreign policy usher in a new Cold War or a multipolar order that revives a Great Power politics based on spheres of influence defined not by shared principles but by political power and civilizational fault lines? Will Trumpism result in such extreme corruption and self-dealing that, like Orbán, there will be an anti-populist revolt in favor of the rule of law? Other questions merit examination, of course, but it is clear that the populist turn of the US will have significant and long-lasting consequences for the status of liberal democracy in the US and around the world.

---

## References

Abrahamian, A. A. (2025, February 18). “The New Globalism: How MAGA is reimagining foreign policy.” *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/02/national-globalism-trump/681718/ 1/>

Applebaum, A. (2024). *Autocracy, Inc.* Doubleday.

Applebaum, A. (2025, April 14). “Kleptocracy, Inc.” *The Atlantic*. [https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/04/trump-kleptocracy-autocracy-inc/682281/?gift=hVZeG3M9DnxL4CekrWGK3\\_kV8gt\\_H4Yo7PHPPrw%E2%80%A6](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/04/trump-kleptocracy-autocracy-inc/682281/?gift=hVZeG3M9DnxL4CekrWGK3_kV8gt_H4Yo7PHPPrw%E2%80%A6)

- Applebaum, Y. (2016, July 21). 'I Alone Can Fix It.' *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/trump-rnc-speech-alone-fix-it/492557/>
- Ashford, E. (2025). *First Among Equals: U.S. Foreign Policy in a Multipolar World*. Yale University Press.
- Astor, M. (2024, March 17). "Trump Doubles Down on Migrants 'Poisoning' the Country." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/17/us/politics/trump-fox-interview-migrants.html>
- Atkinson, E. (2025, February 15). "JD Vance attacks Europe over free speech and migration." *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ceve3w121x1o>
- Azizi, A. (2025, March 19). "A Battle for the Soul of the West." *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2025/03/enlightenment-trump-far-right-europe/682086/>
- Baker, J. O. & Bader, C. D. (2022). "Xenophobia, Partisanship, and Support for Donald Trump and the Republican Party." *Race and Social Problems*, 14(1), 69–83. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-021-09337-0>
- Baker, P. (2025, May 25). "As Trumps Monetize Presidency, Profits Outstrip Protests." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/25/us/politics/trump-money-plane-crypto.html>
- Barrios Suvelza, F. (2022). "Is populism a kind of ideology, or is ideology only a part of populism's definition?" *Journal of Populism Studies*, 1–19.
- Beauchamp, Z. (2024a). "The Reactionary Spirit: How America's Most Insidious Political Tradition Swept the World." *PublicAffairs*.
- Beauchamp, Z. (2024b, July 17). "Make America Hungary Again." *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2024/07/why-special-republican-relationship-hungary-so-worrying/679035/>
- Beauchamp, Z. (2026, May 21). "There's more to Trump's corruption than stealing money." *VOX*. <https://www.vox.com/politics/489241/trump-corruption-weaponization-irs-violence-public-order>
- Ben-Ghiat, R. (2021). *Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present*. W.W. Norton.
- Betz, H. (2017). "Nativism Across Time and Space." *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4), 335–353. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12260>
- Betz, H.-G. (2019). "Facets of nativism: A heuristic exploration." *Patterns of Prejudice*, 53(2), 111–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2019.1572276>
- Blake, A. (2023, March 6). "Trump's dark 'I am your retribution' pledge—And how GOP enabled it." *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/03/06/trumps-dark-i-am-your-retribution-pledge-how-gop-enabled-it/>

Bloeser, A. J.; Williams, T.; Crawford, C. & Harward, B. M. (2024). “Are Stealth Democrats Really Committed to Democracy? Process Preferences Revisited.” *Perspectives on Politics*, 22(1), 116–130. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592722003206>

Bolleyer, N. & Salát, O. (2021). “Parliaments in times of crisis: COVID-19, populism and executive dominance.” *West European Politics*, 44(5–6), 1103–1128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1930733>

Bond, S. (2024). “How AI-generated memes are changing the 2024 election.” *National Public Radio*. <https://www.npr.org/2024/08/30/nx-s1-5087913/donald-trump-artificial-intelligence-memes-deepfakes-taylor-swift>

Bonikowski, B. (2016). “Three Lessons of Contemporary Populism in Europe and the United States.” *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 23(1), 9–24.

Bonikowski, B. & Gidron, N. (2016). “The Populist Style in American Politics: Presidential Campaign Discourse, 1952–1996.” *Social Forces*, 94(4), 1593–1621. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sov120>

Boucher, J.-C. & Thies, C. (2019). “‘I Am a Tariff Man’: The Power of Populist Foreign Policy Rhetoric under President Trump.” *The Journal of Politics*, 81(2), 712–722.

Bowman, B. (2026, March 12). Poll: Voters who say economic and political systems are stacked against them tie a record high. NBC News. Nearly 6 in 10 voters say the economic and political systems are stacked against people like them, tying a record high over roughly 40 years

Brands, H. (2018). *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump*. Brookings Institution Press.

Brands, H. (2025, April). “The Renegade Order: How Trump Wields American Power.” *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/renegade-order-trump-hal-brands>

Breland, A. (2025, October 7). “Are You a ‘Heritage American’?” *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/2025/10/heritage-americans-nativist-right/684472/>

Bright Line Watch. (2025). “Accelerated transgressions in the second Trump presidency.” <https://brightlinewatch.org/accelerated-transgressions-in-the-second-trump-presidency/>

Bright Line Watch. (2026). “The Persistence of Diminished Democracy in a Second Trump Presidency.” <https://brightlinewatch.org/the-persistence-of-diminished-democracy-in-a-second-trump-presidency/>

Broad, W. J. (2025, August 31). “Historians See Autocratic Playbook in Trump’s Attacks on Science.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/31/science/trump-science-autocrats.html#:~:text=via>

Bronk, R. & Jacoby, W. (2020). “The Epistemics of Populism and the Politics of Uncertainty.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3539587>

Brown, X.; Rucker, J. M. & Richeson, J. A. (2022). “Political ideology moderates White Americans’ reactions to racial demographic change.” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 25(3), 642–660. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684302211052516>

Casiraghi, M. C. M.; Curini, L. & Nai, A. (2024). “Populism in the eye of the beholder? A conjoint experiment on citizens’ identification of populists.” *European Journal of Political Research*, 63(1), 214–235. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12589>

Castanho Silva, B.; Neuner, F. G. & Wratil, C. (2023). “Populism and Candidate Support in the US: The Effects of “Thin” and “Host” Ideology.” *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 10(3), 438–447. <https://doi.org/10.1017/xps.2022.9>

Cave, D. (2025, May 25). “Why Vietnam Ignored Its Own Laws to Fast-Track a Trump Family Golf Complex.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/25/world/asia/trump-vietnam-golf-project.html>

Chait, J. (2025, October 6). “Stephen Miller Is Going for Broke.” *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/10/miller-insurrection/684463/>

Chait, J. (2026, April 29). “Donald Trump’s Disturbing Welcome for King Charles.” *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2026/04/trump-king-charles-speech-white-house/686996/>

Chiacu, D. (2025, February 16). “Trump: If it saves the country, it’s not illegal.” *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-if-it-saves-country-its-not-illegal-2025-02-16/>

Chotiner, I. (2025, January 28). “The Historical Roots of Donald Trump’s Aggressive Nationalism.” *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-historical-roots-of-donald-trumps-aggressive-nationalism>

Chrysosgelos, A. & Brusenbauch Meislová, M. (2025, April 2). “The populist logic behind Trump’s tariffs.” *London School of Economics: Politics and Policy*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-populist-logic-behind-trumps-tariffs/>

Cohen, O. (2026). “Practices of Transformative Populism: An Illustrative Study of the Bernie Sanders Presidential Runs.” *Political Studies Review*, 24(1), 63–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299251326781>

Condon, B. (2025, April 30). “Trump company strikes Qatari golf resort deal in a sign it’s not holding back from foreign business.” *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/trump-qatar-deal-conflicts-saudi-arabia-emoluments-7379bee2e307d39bd43b534a05ae3207>

Constantini, A. J. (2025, April 13). “Populists Are Gaining Power and Keeping It. What Comes Next?” *POLITICO*. <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2025/04/13/trump-populism-europe-us-00287198>

Craig, M. A. & Richeson, J. A. (2014). “On the Precipice of a “Majority-Minority” America: Perceived Status Threat from the Racial Demographic Shift Affects White Americans’ Political Ideology.” *Psychological Science*, 25(6), 1189–1197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614527113>

Dai, Y. & Kustov, A. (2022). “When Do Politicians Use Populist Rhetoric? Populism as a Campaign Gamble.” *Political Communication*, 39(3), 383–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2022.2025505>

Dai, Y. & Kustov, A. (2024). “The (in)effectiveness of populist rhetoric: A conjoint experiment of campaign messaging.” *Political Science Research and Methods*, 12(4), 849–856. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2023.55>

Dawkins, R. & Hanson, A. (2024). “‘American’ is the Eye of the Beholder: American Identity, Racial Sorting, and Affective Polarization among White Americans.” *Political Behavior*, 46(1), 501–521. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09834-x>

Diamond, B. (2026, April 14). “One Emergency After Another.” *Lawfare*. <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/one-emergency-after-another>

DiMaggio, A.; Wahrab, A. & Ochs, H. (2024). “White Supremacy and the January 6 Insurrection: Mass Opinion and the Mainstreaming of “Great Replacement” Theory.” *Populism*, 7(1), 99–126. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25888072-bja10055>

Dorn, F.; Gstrein, D. & Neumeier, F. (2024). “Economic causes for the rise of populist and nationalist movements.” *EconPol Forum*, 25(2), 9–13.

Eatwell, R. & Goodwin, M. (2018). *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*. Penguin.

Egwounwu, N. & Coronell Uribe, R. (2024, October 15). “‘So evil’ and ‘dangerous’: Trump doubles down on calling Democrats ‘enemies from within’.” *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/trump-democrats-enemies-within-rcna175628>

Ekman, M. (2022). “The great replacement: Strategic mainstreaming of far-right conspiracy claims.” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 28(4), 1127–1143. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565221091983>

Enders, A. M. & Thornton, J. R. (2022). “Racial Resentment, Electoral Loss, and Satisfaction with Democracy Among Whites in the United States: 2004–2016.” *Political Behavior*, 44(1), 389–410. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09708-8>

Engesser, S.; Ernst, N.; Esser, F. & Büchel, F. (2017). “Populism and social media: How politicians spread a fragmented ideology.” *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(8), 1109–1126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1207697>

European Commission. Joint Research Centre. (2025). *Navigating migration narratives: Research insights and strategies for effective communication*. Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/7999210>

Ferreira Dias, J. (2024). “How Populism and Culture Wars Affect Fundamental Rights.” *European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS)*. <https://doi.org/10.55271/JPS000112>

Ferreira Dias, J. (2025). “From the Tea Party to MAGA – How White Christian Nationalism Is Taking Control of the US.” *European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS)*. <https://www.populismstudies.org/from-the-tea-party-to-maga-how-white-christian-nationalism-is-taking-control-of-the-us/>

Field, L. K. (2025). *Furious Minds: The Making of the MAGA New Right*. Princeton University Press.

Finkel, E.; Bail, C.; Cikara, M.; Ditto, P.; Iyengar, S.; Klar, S.; Mason, L.; McGrath, M.; Nyhan, B.; Rand, D.; Skitka, L.; Tucker, J.; Van Bavel, J.; Wang, C. & Druckman, J. (2020). “Political Sectarianism in America.” *Science*, 370(6516), 533–536.

Freedden, M. (2017). “After the Brexit referendum: Revisiting populism as an ideology.” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 22(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2016.1260813>

Freedom House. (2025). *Freedom in the World 2025: United States*. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-states/freedom-world/2025>

Freedom House. (2026). *Freedom in the World 2026: United States*. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-states/freedom-world/2026>

Full Fact Team. (2025, September 29). “Police have said there’s ‘no evidence’ images show migrants stealing a swan to eat.” <https://fullfact.org/immigration/winsford-marina-swan/>

Gawthorpe, A. (2025). “Civilizational Wilsonianism from Woodrow Wilson to Donald Trump.” *International Affairs*, 101(1), 177–194. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiae280>

Gerstle, G. (2001). *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton University Press.

Glasser, S. (2025, February 20). “Trump’s Putinization of America.” *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-trumps-washington/trumps-putinization-of-america>

Goddard, S. E. & Newman, A. (2025). “Further Back to the Future: Neo-Royalism, the Trump Administration, and the Emerging International System.” *International Organization*, 79(S1), S12–S25. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818325101057>

Gøtzsche-Astrup, O. & Hogg, M. A. (2024). “Let the people’s will prevail: Self-uncertainty and authoritarianism predict support for populism.” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 27(6), 1211–1232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684302231211291>

Graham, D. (2025, October 16). It's Not a Dog Whistle If Everyone Can Hear It." *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2025/10/week-of-bigotry-american-politics/684584/>

Graham, D. (2026, April 28). "The Evolution of Trump's Corruption." *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/2026/04/evolution-of-trump-corruption-g7-summit/686983/>

Greene, C. (2025, October 16). "Trump's Department of Homeland Security Embraces a Word With Ties to White Nationalism." *TIME*. <https://time.com/7326233/trump-remigrate-homeland-security/>

Gregory, M. (2025, May 23). "Like many populist leaders, Trump accuses judges of being illegitimate obstacles to safety and democracy." *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/like-many-populist-leaders-trump-accuses-judges-of-being-illegitimate-obstacles-to-safety-and-democracy-255472>

Guenther, L. (2022). "Political Representation Gaps in Europe: Causes and Consequences." *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4230288>

Herre, B.; Rodés-Guirao, L. & Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2013). *Democracy. Our World in Data*. <https://ourworldindata.org/democracy>

Hoewe, J.; Peacock, C.; Kim, B. & Barnidge, M. (2020). "The Relationship Between Fox News Use and Americans' Policy Preferences Regarding Refugees and Immigrants." *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 203602056.

Hogg, M. A. (2021). "Uncertain Self in a Changing World: A Foundation for Radicalisation, Populism, and Autocratic Leadership." *European Review of Social Psychology*, 32(2), 235–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2020.1827628>

Jardina, A. (2019). *White Identity Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Jardina, A. (2021). "In-Group Love and Out-Group Hate: White Racial Attitudes in Contemporary U.S. Elections." *Political Behavior*, 43(4), 1535–1559. <https://doi.org/doi/10.1007/s11109-020-09600-x>

Jardina, A. & Ollerenshaw, T. (2025). "White Racial Polarization Before and After the Election of Donald Trump. In: J. D. Aberbach, B. E. Cain, D. King, & G. Peele (Eds.), *The Changing Character of the American Right*, Volume I (pp. 191–221). Springer Nature Switzerland. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73168-6\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73168-6_8)

Jardina, A. & Traugott, M. (2019). "The Genesis of the Birther Rumor: Partisanship, Racial Attitudes, and Political Knowledge." *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*, 4(1), 60–80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rep.2018.25>

Joffe-Block, J. & Bond, S. (2025, August 18). "What's behind the Trump administration's immigration memes?" *National Public Radio*. <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/18/nx-s1-5482921/memes-white-house-dhs-social-media-trump>

Judis, J. B. (2016). *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*. Columbia Global Reports.

Kanno-Youngs, Z. & Aleazis, H. (2025, October 15). “Trump Considers Overhaul of Refugee System That Would Favor White People.” *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/15/us/politics/trump-refugee-white-people.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

Kaplan, J.; Murphy, B.; Elliott, J. & Mierjeski, A. (2025, May 15). “The Trump Administration Leaned on African Countries. The Goal: Get Business for Elon Musk.” *ProPublica*.  
<https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-musk-starlink-state-department-gambia-africa-pressure>

Kasparov, G. (2025, February 28). “The Putinization of America.” *The Atlantic*.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2025/02/putinization-america/681837/>

Kaya, A. (2025, May 2). “The instrumentalisation of migration in the populist era.” *Mixed Migration Centre*. <https://mixedmigration.org/the-instrumentalisation-of-migration-in-the-populist-era/>

Keohane, R. O. & Nye, Jr., J. S. (2025, August). “The End of the Long American Century: Trump and the Sources of U.S. Power.” *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/end-long-american-century-trump-keohane-nye>

Kešić, J. & Duyvendak, J. W. (2019). “The nation under threat: Secularist, racial and populist nativism in the Netherlands.” *Patterns of Prejudice*, 53(5), 441–463.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2019.1656886>

Kimmage, M. (2025, April). “The World Trump Wants: American Power in the New Age of Nationalism.” *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/world-trump-wants-michael-kimmage>

Kirkpatrick, D. D. (2025, August 11). “The Number: How much is Trump pocketing off the Presidency?” *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/08/18/the-number>

Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, J. (2024). “The Voice of the People: Populism and Donald Trump’s Use of Informal Voice.” *Society*, 61(3), 289–302. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-024-00969-7>

Kupchan, C. (2024, September 9). “The Deep Roots of Trump’s Isolationism.” *Foreign Affairs*.  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/deep-roots-trump-isolationism-america-first>

Lamont, M.; Park, B. Y. & Ayala-Hurtado, E. (2017). “Trump’s electoral speeches and his appeal to the American white working class.” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 68(S1).  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12315>

Levitsky, S. & Way, L. A. (2025). “The Path to American Authoritarianism: What Comes After Democratic Breakdown.” *Foreign Affairs*, 36–51.

- Luttig, J. M. (2025, May 14). “The End of Rule of Law in America.” *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/05/law-america-trump-constitution/682793/>
- Macaulay, M. (2019). “Bernie and the Donald: A Comparison of Left- and Right-Wing Populist Discourse.” In: M. Macaulay (Ed.), *Populist Discourse* (pp. 165–195). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97388-3\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97388-3_6)
- Macaulay, M. (2022). “Modern American Populism: Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders.” In: M. Macaulay, *Populism and Populist Discourse in North America* (pp. 117–171). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08522-2\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08522-2_5)
- Mansfield, E. D.; Mutz, D. C. & Brackbill, D. (2019). “Effects of the Great Recession on American Attitudes Toward Trade.” *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(1), 37–58. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123416000405>
- Marantz, A. (2022, June 27). “Does Hungary Offer a Glimpse of Our Authoritarian Future?” *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/07/04/does-hungary-offer-a-glimpse-of-our-authoritarian-future>
- Marantz, A. (2025, April 28). “Is it Happening Here?” *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/05/05/is-the-us-becoming-an-autocracy>
- Meislová, M. B. & Chryssogelos, A. (2024). “The ambiguous impact of populist trade discourses on the international economic order.” *International Affairs*, 100(5), 1941–1957. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iad296>
- Mercieca, J. (2020). *Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump*. Texas A & M University Press.
- Messerly, M. (2025, May 21). “Megabill push reveals GOP’s reluctant embrace of economic populism.” *POLITICO*. <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/21/trump-gop-populism-megabill-00364187>
- Moffitt, B. (2016). *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. Stanford University Press.
- Moffitt, B. (2024). “How Do Populists Visually Represent ‘The People’? A Systematic Comparative Visual Content Analysis of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders’ Instagram Accounts.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 29(1), 74–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221100418>
- Mondon, A. & Winter, A. (2019). “Whiteness, populism and the racialisation of the working class in the United Kingdom and the United States.” *Identities*, 26(5), 510–528. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2018.1552440>
- Morris, K. (2026, May 4). “After Louisiana v. Callais: Here’s Proof of Just How Bad Voting Rights in America Are About to Get.” *The Brennan Center*. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our->

[work/analysis-opinion/after-louisiana-v-callais-heres-proof-just-how-bad-voting-rights-america?ms=gad\\_voting%20rights%20case\\_807933094470\\_8628877148\\_196472032459&gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=8628877148&gbraid=0AAAAAC8kUVI7inJl3jMXjFLKK7rSg8WyO&gclid=CjwKC\\_Ajwq6DQBhBVEiwA4ZD5XPXMaGqvGcZdD0uWhEwOXZMFOtNBQunbFi1rPI6Y8osCy0ehwOl7dh\\_oCN7EQAvD\\_BwE](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x)

Mudde, C. (2004). “The Populist Zeitgeist.” *Government and Opposition*, 39(4), 541–563. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>

Mudde, C. & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press New York. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780190234874.001.0001>

Muno, W. & Pfeiffer, C. (2022). “Populism in power—A comparative analysis of populist governance.” *International Area Studies Review*, 25(4), 261–279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/22338659221120067>

Mutz, D. C. (2018). “Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote.” *PNAS*, 115(19). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1718155115>

Mutz, D. C. (2021). *Winners and Losers: The Psychology of Foreign Trade*. Princeton University Press.

Nandy, L. (2019). “What the Age of Populism Means for Our Liberal Democracy.” *The Political Quarterly*, 90(3), 462–469.

Neuner, F. G. & Wratil, C. (2022). “The Populist Marketplace: Unpacking the Role of ‘Thin’ and ‘Thick’ Ideology.” *Political Behavior*, 44(2), 551–574. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09629-y>

Nichols, T. M. (2024). *The death of expertise: The campaign against established knowledge and why it matters* (Second edition, Updated and expanded edition). Oxford University Press.

Nord, M.; Altman, D.; Angiolillo, F.; Fernandes, T.; Good God, A. & Lindberg, S. (2025). *DEMOCRACY REPORT 2025: 25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?* (pp. 1–64). V-Dem Institute. <https://www.v-dem.net/>

Nord, M.; Altman, D.; Fernandes, T.; Good God, A. & Lindberg, S. I. (2026). *Democracy Report 2026: Unraveling The Democratic Era?* (pp. 1–52). V-Dem Institute. <https://v-dem.net>

Norris, P. & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108595841>

Oliver, J. E. & Rahn, W. M. (2016). “Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 667(1), 189–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716216662639>

The National Judicial College. (2024). “Over half of judges report threats, environment affecting mental health.” <https://www.judges.org/news-and-info/over-half-of-judges-report-threats-environment-affecting-mental-health/>

Pappas, T. S. (2019). “Populists in Power.” *Journal of Democracy*, 30(2), 70–84. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0026>

Peters, G. & Woolley, J. T. (2026, May 1). “Executive Orders. University of California - Santa Barbara.” *The American Presidency Project*. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/executive-orders>

Pierson, P. (2017). “American hybrid: Donald Trump and the strange merger of populism and plutocracy.” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 68(S1).

Rauch, J. (2025, February 24). “One Word Describes Trump.” *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/02/corruption-trump-administration/681794/>

Rauch, J. (2026, January 25). “Yes, It’s Fascism.” *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2026/01/america-fascism-trump-maga-ice/685751/>

Restad, H. E. (2020). “What makes America great? Donald Trump, national identity, and U.S. foreign policy.” *Global Affairs*, 6(1), 21–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2020.1734955>

Reuters Fact Check. (2024, September 11). “Fact Check: No evidence of Haitian immigrants stealing and eating pets in Ohio.” *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/no-evidence-haitian-immigrants-stealing-eating-pets-ohio-2024-09-10/>

Rhodes, J.; Goldman, S.; Nteta, T. M.; Eichen, A.; Lapcheske, S.; Tropp, L.; Pérez, E. & Huo, Y. (2026). “Follow the Fox? Elite Influence and White Support for the Great Replacement Theory.” *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 59(2), 267–276. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096525101856>

Rodrik, D. (2021). “Why Does Globalization Fuel Populism? Economics, Culture, and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism.” *Annual Review of Economics*, 13(1), 133–170. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-070220-032416>

Rovira Kaltwasser, C. & Taggart, P. (2025). “Populism and democracy: The road ahead.” *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 58(1), 96–100. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096524000842>

Rubio, M. (2026, February 14). *Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Munich Security Conference [Speech]*. Munich Security Conference, Munich, Germany. <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/02/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-at-the-munich-security-conference>

Rudolph, J. (2024). “Stop Calling Trump an ‘Isolationist’.” *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/10/22/trump-foreign-policy-dictators-authoritarian-isolationism-america-first/>

- Schaub, M. & Morisi, D. (2020). "Voter mobilisation in the echo chamber: Broadband internet and the rise of populism in Europe." *European Journal of Political Research*, 59(4), 752–773. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12373>
- Scheiring, G.; Serrano-Alarcón, M.; Moise, A.; McNamara, C. & Stuckler, D. (2024). "The Populist Backlash Against Globalization: A Meta-Analysis of the Causal Evidence." *British Journal of Political Science*, 54(3), 892–916. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123424000024>
- Schroeder, R. (2020). "The Dangerous Myth of Populism as a Thin Ideology." *Populism*, 3(1), 13–28. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25888072-02021042>
- Smith, R. (1997). *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History*. Yale University Press.
- Smith, R. M. (2020). *This is Not Who We Are: Populism and Peoplehood*. Yale University Press.
- Sommerlad, J. (2025, October 3). "Trump calls Democrats 'the party of hate, evil, and Satan' in late-night Truth Social rant." *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-democrats-hate-evil-satan-b2838568.html>
- Spike, J. (2026, April 7). "On Hungary visit, Vance urges voters to support Orbán days before pivotal election." *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/jd-vance-hungary-orban-election-campaign-08e0929e9c8b3ae4302ae4e8c0393d5e>
- Stanley, B. (2008). "The thin ideology of populism." *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13(1), 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310701822289>
- Stanley, J. (2018). *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*. Random House.
- Stauffer, S. J. (2021). "Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders and the question of populism." *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 26(2), 220–238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2020.1855777>
- Stefanelli, A. (2023). "The Conditional Association Between Populism, Ideological Extremity, and Affective Polarization." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 35(2), edad014. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edad014>
- Stracqualursi, V. (2018, March 2). "Ex-CIA director: Trump has 'autocratic envy' toward Putin." *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/02/politics/michael-hayden-donald-trump-vladimir-putin-cnntv/index.html>
- Streich, G. W. (2009). "Discourses of American national identity: Echoes and lessons from the 1910s–1920s." *Citizenship Studies*, 13(3), 267–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020902850668>
- Surowiecki, J. (2026, May 29). "Trump Takes His Cut." *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2026/05/trump-stakes-business-effect/687346/>

Terrell, E. (2016, April 22). “When a quote is not (exactly) a quote: General Motors.” Library of Congress Blogs: Inside Adams. [https://blogs.loc.gov/inside\\_adams/2016/04/when-a-quote-is-not-exactly-a-quote-general-motors/](https://blogs.loc.gov/inside_adams/2016/04/when-a-quote-is-not-exactly-a-quote-general-motors/)

Toosi, N. (2025, April 17). “Trump Looks Willing to Write Off an Entire Continent.” *Politico*. <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2025/04/17/trump-us-africa-relationship-column-00293046?cid=apn>

Törnberg, P. (2022). “How digital media drive affective polarization through partisan sorting.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(42), e2207159119. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2207159119>

Tourish, D. (2024). “It is time to use the F word about Trump: Fascism, populism and the rebirth of history.” *Leadership*, 20(1), 9–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427150231210732>

Trump, D. (2025). *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. The White House.

Tucker, Jr., K. H. (2025). “A new kind of personal politics: On the populism of Trump and Sanders.” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 30(1), 220–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2022.2158726>

Urbinati, N. (2019). “Political Theory of Populism.” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22(1), 111–127. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050317-070753>

Van Der Waal, J. & De Koster, W. (2018). “Populism and Support for Protectionism: The Relevance of Opposition to Trade Openness for Leftist and Rightist Populist Voting in The Netherlands.” *Political Studies*, 66(3), 560–576. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717723505>

Weyland, K. (2013). “The Threat from the Populist Left.” *Journal of Democracy*, 24(3), 18–32.

Williams, T.; Bloeser, A. & Harward, B. (2023, February 7). “Large numbers of Americans want a strong, rough, anti-democratic leader.” *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/large-numbers-of-americans-want-a-strong-rough-anti-democratic-leader-198578>

Wilson, M. (2026, April 13). “Trump faces backlash over AI image of him as Jesus.” *The Hill*. <https://thehill.com/homenews/5828705-trump-conservative-jesus-image/>

Wofford, C. B. (2025, February 25). “Trump’s claims of vast presidential powers run up against Article 2 of the Constitution and exceed previous presidents’ power grabs.” *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/trumps-claims-of-vast-presidential-powers-run-up-against-article-2-of-the-constitution-and-exceed-previous-presidents-power-grabs-249662>

Wojczewski, T. (2020). “‘Enemies of the people’: Populism and the politics of (in)security.” *European Journal of International Security*, 5(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2019.23>

Yale Budget Lab. (2026, April 1). “Tracking the Economic Effects of Tariffs.” *The Budget Lab*. <https://budgetlab.yale.edu/research/tracking-economic-effects-tariffs>