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Department of Public Policy & Comparative Politics

The Rise of Trumpism and Its Implications for the American Liberal Democracy.

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*The more knowledge is inherent in a
thing, the greater the love.*

— Paracelsus.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my beloved ones.

I dedicate this work to the field of political science as my inaugural contribution to its corpus.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to God, whose grace guided me through uncertainty to discover both my field and the clarity of my purpose.

My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisor, **Dr. Hichem Daoud El Ghandja**, for his support.

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Abstract

This study examines the rise of "Trumpism" and its implications for American liberal democracy by situating it within broader structural transformations in the United States, rather than treating it as a purely political personality-driven phenomenon.

The analysis shows that Trumpism emerged at the intersection of different factors including political, economic and sociocultural ones. In this context, it has functioned as a powerful populist response that reshaped political discourse and patterns of mobilization, while also challenging established democratic norms.

However, it has not led to the final collapse of American liberal democracy; rather, it has exposed its internal tensions and institutional vulnerabilities.

Key words: Donald Trump, Trumpism, United States, Populism, Liberal Democracy, Democratic Backsliding.

Résumé

Cette étude traite de la montée du « trumpisme » et de ses répercussions sur la démocratie libérale américaine, en le situant dans le cadre des transformations structurelles plus larges aux États-Unis, plutôt que de le considérer comme un phénomène lié uniquement à la personnalité politique.

L'analyse montre que le trumpisme est apparu à l'intersection de plusieurs facteurs politiques, économiques et socioculturels et, dans ce contexte, a agi comme une réponse populiste forte ayant reconfiguré le discours politique et les modes de mobilisation, tout en remettant en question les normes démocratiques établies.

Toutefois, il n'a pas conduit à un effondrement final de la démocratie libérale américaine, mais a révélé ses tensions internes et sa fragilité institutionnelle.

Mots-clés: Donald Trump, Trumpisme, États-Unis, Populisme, Démocratie Libérale, Recul Démocratique.

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Introduction

Introduction

- **General background:**

The United States has long been viewed as a cornerstone of liberal democracy, sustained by institutionalized principles that promote both stability and adaptability. These foundations have historically enabled the political system to endure periods of social change and economic crisis.

However, the rise of Trumpism following Donald Trump's election in 2016, reinforced by his 2024 reelection, has challenged conventional assumptions about the resilience of American liberal democracy, prompting renewed attention to the norms and structures underpinning the system rather than a transient political episode.

Trumpism is interpreted as a part of broader dynamics associated with democratic backsliding, including the erosion of institutional norms and intensified polarization. Such developments raise important questions about whether Trumpism reflects temporary political turbulence, exposes pre-existing tensions within liberal democracy, or constitutes a deeper structural challenge to its foundational principles.

Addressing this uncertainty requires moving beyond personality-driven and event-centered explanations toward a multidisciplinary approach that integrates insights from comparative politics, political theory and sociology, situating Trumpism within the broader debate on democratic resilience and backsliding. This approach allows for a clearer assessment of its significance and its potential implications for the liberal democracy in the United States.

Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the implications of Trumpism for American liberal democracy. It aims to assess how this phenomenon has reshaped democratic norms, institutional functioning, and political dynamics within the United States.

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- **Literature review:**

Given that this study addresses a topic widely examined across sociology and political science, the existing body of literature is substantial. For analytical clarity, it is classified into two categories to provide a structured foundation for the present research.

- * Exploratory & explanatory studies

- * Studies Closely Aligned with the Research Focus

1. Exploratory and explanatory studies

Liberal institutionalists: William A. Galston, Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt.

Within the institutionalist tradition, William A. Galston and Steven Levitsky alongside Daniel Ziblatt conceptualize populism and authoritarianism primarily as a threat to liberal democratic norms. While Galston focuses on populism as a challenge to constitutionalism and pluralism, Levitsky and Ziblatt emphasize the gradual erosion of democratic institutions and norms. Taken together, this strand prioritizes institutional stability and normative order as the central explanatory framework of democratic resilience.

The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy by William A. Galston (2018):

The professor conceptualizes populism primarily as a threat to liberal democratic norms, particularly constitutional constraints, minority rights, and pluralism. While Galston attributes the rise of populism to structural factors such as inequality and declining trust, his analysis tends to normatively privilege stability over democratic contestation. This raises a key tension in the literature between viewing populism as a pathology of democracy versus a response to its unresolved contradictions. Based on that the study analyzes the interaction between populism and democracy.

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How Democracies Die by Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt (2019):

As Donald Trump's presidency raised concerns about whether American democracy is at risk and based on more than twenty years of research on democratic collapse. Harvard Professors Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt argue in their book that modern democracies usually do not end through violent coups or revolutions, but rather through the gradual weakening of key institutions like the judiciary and the press, along with the erosion of political norms. Drawing on historical and global examples from 1930s, they explain how democracies can slowly deteriorate from within. They suggest that understanding these warning signs is essential to protecting and saving democracy. However, their framework tends to underemphasize the socio-economic and representational grievances that drive support for populist actors, focusing instead on institutional consequences rather than some concealed causes.

Realists: John J. Mearsheimer.

In contrast, John J. Mearsheimer shifts the focus from institutional decline to ideological conflict, arguing that the contemporary crisis stems from the structural tension between liberalism and nationalism.

Liberalism and Nationalism in Contemporary America by John J. Mearsheimer (2020):

In his article, John Mearsheimer analyzes the contemporary political crisis in the United States, emphasizing the tension between liberalism and nationalism.

According to him, the post-Cold War era marked a "golden age" of unbounded liberalism, which weakened national identity and state cohesion. This erosion of nationalism eventually provoked a powerful backlash, exemplified by Donald Trump's 2016 election, Brexit, and other nationalist movements, demonstrating

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that although nationalism and liberalism can co-exist, nationalism is a more resilient and emotionally compelling force than liberalism.

However, his framework focuses primarily on ideological conflict, offering limited engagement with the institutional mechanisms through which this tension translates into democratic erosion unlike Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt.

Accordingly, this research focuses on both institutional and ideological factors.

2. Studies Closely Aligned with the Research Focus:

Core focus: Democratic backsliding.

The literature closely aligned with this research seeks to move beyond purely descriptive accounts of Trumpism by situating it within broader historical continuities and contemporary institutional and ideological dynamics shaping democratic backsliding in the United States.

Looking at the roots of "Trumpism": American illiberalism by Isabelle Vagnoux & Jean-Marie Ruiz (2022):

Vagnoux and Ruiz show that Trumpism is not really a clear ideology but a form of illiberal politics rooted in U.S. history. They link it to long-standing populist, nationalist, and authoritarian trends, from McCarthyism to the Tea Party and argue that it thrives by exploiting social, economic, and racial anxieties to centralize power and weaken opposition, challenging the core principles of American liberal democracy. However, this analysis underestimates the extent to which Trumpism also relies on organized intellectual support through conservative think tanks. This research gives particular importance to this dimension because recent developments, especially the emergence of policy frameworks such as Project 2025 highlight the role of structured think tank networks in shaping political agendas.

U.S. Democracy in Danger: The American Political System under Assault, an edited scholarly volume (2023):

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The book brings together balanced practical, theoretical, and empirical investigation, examining democracy and both Donald Trump's missteps, political experience and the existing literature, identifies and exemplifies research trends, and highlights important influence of the Internet, Social Media, News Media and hate crimes in the U.S. electoral politics. However, the study provides a foundation for understanding Trumpism focusing on the first mandate, yet Trump's return to the political scene in 2024 makes a longitudinal reassessment necessary. Accordingly, this research extends the temporal scope from 2016 to the post-2024.

- **Core Problematic:**

To what extent does Trumpism constitute a structural challenge to the foundational principles of American liberal democracy?

- **Sub-questions:**

1. What are the core principles and challenges of American liberal democracy?
2. How does populism interact with democracy?
3. How does Trumpism reflect broader political, social, and economic dynamics in the United States?
4. In what ways has, Trumpism challenged or reshaped the institutions, norms, and practices of American democracy?
5. What are the potential implications of Trumpism for the future stability and international role of the United States as a liberal democracy?

- **Hypothesis:**

I suggest the following hypothesis:

“The rise of Trumpism, though structurally challenging to the core principles of liberal democracy, it remains resilient.”

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"The resilience expected, regarding the historical depth of American liberal democracy, a system that has repeatedly confronted political, social, and economic crises over more than two centuries".

- **Methodology:**

In order to examine the hypothesis, the study adopts mixed-methods, where the researcher used more qualitative depth to examine the complex relationship between Trumpism as populist model and its implications for American liberal democracy.

In moving from the abstract concept of Trumpism to observable empirical indicators and to examine its impact on liberal democracy in the United States the study adopts the following operationalizing framework:

The independent variable “Trumpism” is defined as a paleoconservative populist political model characterized by populist discourses. It is operationalized through observable indicators such as populist rhetoric, delegitimization of institutional actors (media, judiciary, and electoral bodies), nationalist framing (e.g., “America First”), and claims of executive authority. Populism as a linking variable is conceptualized as the discursive and ideological mechanism through which Trumpism is articulated, expressed through normative oppositions and specific narratives.

The dependent variable, liberal democracy in examining its backsliding and resilience, it is operationalized through indicators reflecting the weakening of liberal democratic principles, including declining trust in institutions, challenges to electoral legitimacy and media, normalization of executive overreach and shift from norms of global interdependence from a side and institutional responsiveness from another side.

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Quantitative tools:

Used to assess "the rise" of Trumpism by analyzing selected data and indicators, in order to provide a statistical basis for understanding its socio-economic and cultural drivers and supporting the qualitative analysis. Corroborated by findings from scholarly studies and institutional reports (Brookings, Statista, the economist...etc).

The study in part one depended on the Litmus Test developed qualitatively by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt and gave it a quantitative interpretation to examine President Trump's political behavior.

Qualitative tools:

Mainly used to explore meanings, interpretations, and contextual factors that shape the phenomenon under study. For illustration: the study ended with a qualitative evaluation to President Donald Trump's behavior based on Joseph Nye's work according to what has been found in part two.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis serves as the primary methodological tool for assessing the implications of Trumpism. The study analyzes key speeches from both presidential mandates (inaugural addresses, campaign speeches, and other official public statements). In order to identify how political language is used to challenge the legitimacy of democratic norms, to capture the evolution and continuity of discursive strategies across different political contexts and to clarifying the gap between the political figure and its promises and what has truly been done.

Main approaches:

Institutional Approach: examines changes in formal and informal democratic norms and institutions, (Congress, Republican Party, the courts, independent agencies, media and elections).

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Critical Analysis Approach: explores how Trumpism reconfigures political power and responses to both President Trump's policies, actions and words.

- **Significance of the study:**

The significance of this study stems from its academic contribution to the expanding debate on the resilience and future of liberal democracy. Studying democratic backsliding is crucial for understanding how even long-established democracies can experience gradual institutional and normative erosion.

While populism is not a new phenomenon and Trump is not the first populist political figure, the American case has generated exceptional scholarly interest due to the United States' historical status as a consolidated democracy.

Moreover, the future of democracy has become a central concern in both comparative politics and political theory. By situating Trumpism within this broader debate, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the contemporary challenges confronting liberal democracies and the factors that may accelerate democracy decay.

- **Objective of the study:**

This study seeks to examine the implications of the rise of Trumpism since 2016 for American liberal democracy, with particular focus on whether it constitutes a trajectory toward severe democratic backsliding.

- **Motivation:**

Fascinated by the ideological conflicts that shape political authority, this intellectual orientation motivated me to pursue studies in political sciences and to select this topic out of academic curiosity.

I challenged myself analytically to move beyond personality-centered narratives and study systemic and structural challenges.

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- **Limitation of the study:**

This study is limited in both temporal and geographical scope, it focuses on the period from 2016 to 2026, capturing the emergence and evolution of Trumpism over this decade.

Geographically, the analysis is confined to the United States, examining the phenomenon within the context of its different dynamics. These limitations allow for a focused and in-depth exploration of the topic, while acknowledging that broader comparative or global perspectives fall outside the scope of this research.

- **Outline of the study**

This study is divided into two parts each covering a part of the subject's puzzle as follows:

Part One: a theoretical framework in which the researcher clarified the core variables of the study: the dependent variable “American liberal democracy”, the independent variable “Trumpism”, and, importantly, “populism” as a linking variable, as Trumpism is a populist model challenging liberal democracy. This part aims to be the foundation that explains the implications and their legitimacy.

Part Two: The researcher assessed the implications of Trumpism at different levels and dimensions, including democratic institutions and norms, as well as public policy, given that Trump presents himself as a representative of “the people”. In addition, part two sought to clarify the gap between his promises and actions and what has actually been implemented. Finally, the researcher devoted a specific section to foreign policy, as the United States is a central actor in international relations, and it therefore appeared analytically important to examine Trump's view of the world and how he acts towards it.

Part One: Theoretical Framework

Part One: Theoretical Framework

The post-Cold War era has revealed a series of challenges facing liberal democracy, contrary to earlier claims that it represents the best universalistic and messianic model of political regime. Among these challenges is the ascent of populism, which became increasingly visible from the 1990s onward.

Accordingly, part one is divided into three main sections. The first section provides an overview of American liberal democracy, examining its philosophical foundations, main principles and challenges. The second section addresses populism as a major challenge, engaging in a deeper analysis of its relationship with democracy and the tensions it generates within it. The final section focuses on Trumpism, following Donald Trump's electoral success in 2016 and his return in the 2024 elections, in order to explain Trumpism as a populist model, highlighting its underlying logic, as well as its main tools and strategies.

1.1 Liberal Democracy in the United States: An Overview.

“I confess that in America I saw more than America, I sought there the image of democracy itself”

Alexis de Tocqueville

1.1.1 The Philosophical Foundations of American Democracy

The philosophical foundations of American democracy are rooted in the intellectual currents of the American Revolution, particularly in the writings of thinkers such as John Locke, Adam Smith, Richard Price, James Burgh, and Joseph Priestley, who emphasized natural rights, individual liberty, and limited government. The American Founders absorbed these ideas and incorporated their underlying political philosophy into the foundations of the new nation.¹

As a result, the United States emerged as an ideologically grounded republic, "conceived in liberty" and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. The affirmation of "certain unalienable rights," including life, liberty, and property, reflects a distinctly Lockean moral framework based on natural rights and the equal moral status of individuals.²

The cohorts of the American Revolution openly acknowledged the influence of Enlightenment thought. Thomas Jefferson recognized his intellectual debt to Locke and admitted to reading *Two Treatises of Government* carefully. Similarly, John Adams, in his *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* (1787), credited English political writers for shaping the principles that guided the American founding.³

¹ Ralph Ketcham, *the United States and First Modernity Democracy*, n.d., 41.

² Ketcham, *the United States and First Modernity Democracy*, 42.

³ AHEF, "The Influence of Locke and Sidney on the American Revolution," *American Heritage Education Foundation, Inc.*, August 29, 2019, <https://americanheritage.org/the-influence-of-locke-and-sidney-on-the-american-revolution/>.

Part One: Theoretical Framework

These philosophical influences are reflected in the Declaration of Independence, where Jefferson articulated foundational principles as "self-evident truths." Although the Declaration invokes "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" as the source of its moral claims, it does not elaborate a detailed theoretical justification. As a political document intended to unify the colonies and justify independence, it presents its principles as universally accepted rather than philosophically argued.¹

By declaring these truths "self-evident," the Declaration shifts attention from abstract theory to widely shared beliefs in human equality and individual freedom. While it does not explicitly use the term democracy, it affirms the core democratic principle that governments derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed." Political authority is therefore legitimate only when grounded in popular consent. At the same time, the Declaration leaves the institutional design of government to the people themselves. Citizens need not to participate directly in every decision, but all governmental power must ultimately be traceable to their consent. In this way, the principle of popular sovereignty converges with the liberal conviction that free and equal individuals are obligated to obey only those laws to which they have consented.²

Building upon this philosophical legacy, Jefferson and his contemporaries envisioned a political order that protected individual rights and imposed clear limits on governmental authority. As Carl Russell Fish observed, American democracy developed not merely as an abstract theory but as a dynamic system an "*equipoise*" sustained through continuous civic effort.³

¹ "Peter Berkowitz, Democracy, Freedom, and the Declaration of Independence," *American Enterprise Institute: America at 250*, n.d., 69, accessed February 25, 2026, <https://america250.aei.org/volume/democracy-and-the-american-revolution/democracy-freedom-and-the-declaration-of-independence/>.

² "Peter Berkowitz, Democracy, Freedom, and the Declaration of Independence," 69.

³ Carl Russell Fish, *American Democracy*, n.d., 217.

1.1.2 The Liberal Aspect in American Democracy

In the United States, democracy is representative*, grounded in popular sovereignty, and exercised through elected officials. Although democracy in its Greek etymology “*democracy stands for the rule of people*” authority is indirect, and it is referred to as liberal democracy because of its concern for individual liberty.¹

The "liberal" in liberal democracy, which derives from the Latin *liber*, meaning **free** does not refer to the political left but rather the modern tradition of freedom. This tradition existed before the modern ideas of left and right, and it has shaped the main issues that the left and right in America argue about. This tradition, reflected in the writings of John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, Friedrich Hayek, and Raymond Aron, asserts that the primary purpose of politics is to secure equal basic rights.²

While "liberal" defines the moral purpose and limits of government, "democracy" designates the source of political authority. "The people" refers to the body of citizens, not every resident. Historically, citizenship and voting rights were restricted-universal male suffrage emerged in the late nineteenth century, women gained the vote in 1920, and many ethnic minorities were excluded until the 1960s.³

The Constitution of the United States established a liberal democracy, or representative republic, balancing liberal constitutionalism and democratic procedure. Liberal constitutionalism protects fundamental rights and limits

¹ Jon R. Bond et al., *Analyzing American Democracy: Politics and Political Science*, Fifth edition (Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2024), 14.

*{As Democracy takes two forms "representative" and "direct", the latest stands for ordinary citizens rather than representatives collectively make government decisions}

² "Peter Berkowitz, *Democracy, Freedom, and the Declaration of Independence*," 66.

³ Bond et al., *Analyzing American Democracy*, 14; "Peter Berkowitz, *Democracy, Freedom, and the Declaration of Independence*," 67.

Part One: Theoretical Framework

government power, while democracy determines who governs and ensures accountability through elections and majority rule.¹

Thus, the United States was designed as a representative republic in which democratic mechanisms serve the broader liberal goal of securing justice and protecting individual freedom.

1.1.3 Principles of the American Liberal Democracy

Procedurally, American liberal democracy stands for a representative democracy that has a particular concern for individual liberty. The rule of law and a constitution constrain elected representatives and the will of the majority from using their power to take away the rights of minorities. The following principles underpin this system:

Popular Sovereignty: Ultimate authority rests with the people, exercised indirectly through elected representatives.

Rule of Law: Laws apply equally to all, including government officials, ensuring that no one is above the law.

Separation of Powers: The U.S. Constitution divides federal powers among three branches legislative, executive, and judicial to prevent concentration of authority

Checks and Balances: Each branch has mechanisms to limit the other's power, preventing tyranny. As James Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers: "You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself".²

Protection of Minority Rights: Even when the majority favors a policy, minority rights are safeguarded. Although, historically, citizenship and voting rights were

¹ Linda C. Raeder, *Freedom and Political Order*, n.d., 131.

² HISTORY.com Editors, "Checks and Balances - Definition, Examples & Constitution," HISTORY, November 17, 2017, <https://www.history.com/articles/checks-and-balances>.

Part One: Theoretical Framework

restricted, universal male suffrage emerged in the late nineteenth century, women gained the vote in 1920, and many ethnic minorities were excluded until the 1960s.¹

Elections: Competitive elections allow citizens to choose representatives and ensure accountability. The process includes party nominations and general elections, enabling participation while structuring political choice.

Pluralism and Participation: The U.S. political system is pluralistic, reflecting its federal structure and diverse population. Multiple perspectives shape legislation, preventing any single group from monopolizing power. Political parties and interest groups evolve dynamically to represent the nation's diversity.²

Freedom of Speech: Guaranteed by the 1st and 14th Amendments, citizens can express ideas and opinions freely through speech, press, media, parties, and interest groups, forming the foundation of public debate and civic engagement.³

Together, these principles ensure that American liberal democracy balances individual liberty, majority rule, and institutional accountability, adapting over time to a diverse and changing society.

1.1.4 Tensions within the American Liberal Democracy

In ideological terms, liberal democracy has historically faced challenges from competing doctrines, particularly fascism and communism. While liberalism is a universalistic ideology that prioritizes the individual, nationalist ideologies, emphasize the social group as a particularistic unit, often subordinating individual rights to collective identity.⁴

¹ Bond et al., *Analyzing American Democracy*, 191-192.

² "Exploring American Pluralism: A Historical Journey through Diversity," accessed April 27, 2026, <https://socialstudieshelp.com/ap-government-and-politics/pluralism/>.

³ "Freedom of Speech: An Overview," legislation, accessed April 27, 2026, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47986>.

⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, "Liberalism and Nationalism in Contemporary America," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54, no. 1 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096520001808>.

Part One: Theoretical Framework

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, liberal democracy appeared to be expanding worldwide, with new democratic regimes emerging and political transitions beginning in several regions. At that moment, it seemed to represent the only legitimate form of government, with no viable ideological alternative.

In "*The End of History and the Last Man*" (1992), Francis Fukuyama argued that the ideological evolution of the modern world had culminated in the victory of Western liberal democracy. According to him, the decline of competing ideologies, particularly communism, signaled the apparent triumph of political and economic liberalism. The absence of credible systemic alternatives seemed to confirm the dominance of the Western liberal model, especially as reform movements began to emerge within the world's largest communist states.¹

However, subsequent developments have demonstrated that liberal democracy is not free from internal tensions. Rather than marking a definitive "end of ideology," the post-Cold War period has revealed more challenges within liberal democracy itself. Today, the global scene is very different. Liberal democracy faces multiple external challenges from ethnonational autocracies, from regimes claiming to be based on God's word rather than the will of the people, from the success of strong-handed meritocracy in places such as Singapore, and, not least, from the economic accomplishments of China's market-Leninist system.²

At the same time, liberal democracies face significant internal challenges. One of the most notable is the rise of populism, which attempts to create a divide between democracy and liberalism.³ As stated, American liberal democracy rests on a philosophy that prioritizes the individual. The Preamble to the United States

¹ Francis Fukuyama, *the End of History?* 1989, 1.

² William Arthur Galston et al., *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy*, Politics and Culture (Yale university press, 2018), 15.

³ Galston et al., *Anti-Pluralism*, 15.

Part One: Theoretical Framework

Constitution refers to the "Blessings of Liberty," yet freedom can also create psychological burdens.

In "*Escape from Freedom*", Erich Fromm argues that the anxiety produced by freedom may push individuals to seek security through submission to authority. When individuals feel a loss of control over their lives, they may turn to strong leaders who promise order, certainty, and protection, a dynamic that can nurture authoritarian tendencies within democratic societies.¹

In this context, political scientists increasingly point to the phenomenon of *democratic backsliding**. This process is associated with certain changes in public attitudes, including vilification of members of the opposing party and widespread misinformation. There tends to be a decline in non-governmental institutions critical to a healthy public sphere!² and a rise of authoritarian figures. Democracies in decline usually experience a slow but steady erosion. The process is often incremental and episodic, in the words of political scientists Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky:

"...The electoral road to breakdown is dangerously deceptive... People still vote. Elected autocrats maintain a veneer of democracy while eviscerating its substance. Many government efforts to subvert democracy are legal,¹ in the sense that they are approved by the legislature or accepted by the courts..."¹³

The United States has periodically faced similar challenges from extremist demagogues. Figures such as Henry Ford, Huey Long, Joseph McCarthy, George Wallace and Donald Trump in 2016, illustrate how charismatic leaders can exploit societal divisions to promote extreme agendas.

¹ "William A. Galston, the Enduring Vulnerability of Liberal Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, 12, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-enduring-vulnerability-of-liberal-democracy/>.

*"A variety of terms to describe this phenomenon, including "democratic erosion," "democratic backsliding," "democratic regression," and "autocratization."

² "Understanding Democratic Decline in the United States | Brookings," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/understanding-democratic-decline-in-the-united-states/>.

³ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, First mass market export edition (Broadway Books, 2019), 5.

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Another major challenge is political polarization. During periods of intense division, party representatives often hold sharply opposing views on issues such as taxes, health care, immigration, and welfare spending. Because the American system relies on multiple veto points and supermajority requirements to pass legislation, such polarization can severely hinder effective governance, weakening the capacity of liberal democracy to function smoothly.¹

The tensions in American liberal democracy, from susceptibility to populist movements to growing political polarization, demonstrate challenges that extend beyond abstract theory. In this study, we will focus on populism due to its significant influence on political dynamics.

¹ Bertrall L. Ross, "Bertrall L. Ross II, Polarization, Populism, and the Crisis of American Democracy," *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 20, no. 1 (2024): 295, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-041922-035113>.

1.2 The Populist Challenge

“Populism seems to become stronger the more intellectuals criticize it”

Pierre-André Taguieff

1.2.1 Defining Populism

Populism is a concept widely studied in political sciences and scholarly literature. Etymologically speaking, the term "populism" originates from the Latin word "populus," meaning "people." Historically, the term referred to the political body or the general population in classical Roman republican history. However, from its inception, the invocation of "the people" has been a rhetorical device wielded by those in positions of authority.¹

Popul(ism), unlike the major "isms" of the 20th century, populism lacks a fully elaborated theory but has a coherent structure.² According to many researchers, populism is an elusive term, often referred to as a thin- centered ideology appending itself to other ideologies to gain substance, including Paul Taggart, Benjamin Moffitt...etc.

While, Cas Mudde defines populism as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus the elite and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people. John Judis sees that populism "is not an ideology", but a political logic, a way of thinking about politics.³

¹ "From Etymology to Comparative History: Populism as a Product of the Elites," Student Papers, *Reset DOC*, July 28, 2025, <https://www.resetdoc.org/populism-product-elites/>.

² Galston et al., *Anti-Pluralism*, 38.

³ Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 543, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>; Adebowale Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger: The American Political System under Assault*, 1st ed, Springer Studies on Populism, Identity Politics and Social Justice Series (Springer, 2023), 472.

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In historical context, populism often expresses a narrative that pits unequal and opposite powers against each other between two segments "the people" and "the elite", the notion of "people" does not have one accepted definition but they are unified by one common goal, being anti-establishment and anti-elite. Some scholars argued that the term "people" is nothing more than a rhetorical tool that does not truly refer to any existing group of people. Others have given a class interpretation to it, arguing that populists mean not all the people but only a certain class segment.

Paul Taggart rejects this interpretation; he tried to clarify the use of the term "the people" by introducing an alternative term, 'the heartland' According to him, the heartland is a place in which, in the populist imagination, a virtuous and unified population resides, in other words for Taggart, the people of the populists are "an imagined community".¹ Whereas the "elite" typically include the ruling government, lobbying, formal institutions and dominant companies that are seen to be harmful to ordinary citizens.²

Consequently, populism is understood in the social sciences as a contested concept, resistant to any definitive definition, however it can be broadly described as an appeal to anti-pluralism, based on the logic of "us" vs "them" where "us" represents the virtuous people and "them" the corrupted elite.

1.2.2 Typology of Populism

Populism is commonly divided into left wing and right wing forms, reflecting the broader ideological distinction between the left and the right. According to Norberto Bobbio, this distinction is fundamentally based on attitudes toward equality: the left seeks to promote social and economic equality as a socialist model, while the right views inequality as natural and, at times, desirable, and may

¹ Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 545.

² Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 54-55.

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tolerate illiberal or authoritarian measures to preserve existing hierarchies as a conservative model.¹

To establish the difference between right and left populism is at the same time an easy task and a seemingly impossible one. It seems intuitively self-evident that movements like Venezuelan Chavismo, Argentine Kirchnerismo, the Bolivian Movemento al Socialismo or the Spanish Podemos are different from cases like Viktor Orbán or Syriza party in Greece, Donald Trump or Giorgia Meloni. However, none of these movements was or is trying to follow a pre-set socialist or conservative model.²

Within this framework, populism has to be approached as a form of political discourse, performance, or strategic tool. As a result, we cannot compare or differentiate between the left and right wing populism through their programme or their model of organization. Valerio Fabbrizi offers an analytical distinction between left wing and right wing populism:³

Table 1 Distinction between left and right wing populism

Left wing populism	Right wing populism
They define the 'people' socially and politically, framing their fight against enemies' primarily financial and economic elites around social inequalities and wealth redistribution.	A nationalist background, right-wing populists aim to defend the 'people' and their ethnic, conservative, and traditional values, exemplified by slogans such as Make America Great
They do not target weaker or minoritarian groups; rather, they	Again promoted by Donald Trump in his 2016 presidential campaign. They

¹ Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis, eds., *Research Handbook on Populism*, Research Handbooks in Political Thought (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), 349, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800379695>.

² Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, *Research Handbook on Populism*, 352.

³ Valerio Fabbrizi, "What Does Populism Mean for Democracy? Populist Practice, Democracy and Constitutionalism," *Ethics & Global Politics* 16, no. 4 (2023): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/16544951.2023.2273568>.

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defend them against concentrations of power and wealth. Emphasizing fundamental human rights, they articulate the 'us' versus 'they' conflict, in Carl Schmitt's terms, in terms of social and economic inequality. They protest austerity, lack of solidarity, imperialism, and lobby power, exemplified by Bernie Sanders 2016 U.S. primary campaign.	advance a nationalist and anti-globalist narrative, seeking to restore the nation-state in politics, arguing that global and international organizations fail to represent the political community. This radically anti-liberal version rejects multiculturalism and pluralism, promoting differentiation, discrimination, and exclusion. Its main foes are minorities, migrants and "special" categories, while the state, its leader, and the "people" are seen as one, a nation whose traditions and laws must be respected and protected.
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“Made by the researcher based on Valerio Fabbrizi distinction”¹

Left populisms can and do pursue policies which look "right" and Right populisms have learnt to articulate some elements of traditional 'left' discourse, like claiming to defend the economic rights of the industrial working class against a predatory financial elite. This makes populism a form of politics that can adapt to and advance diverse ideological contents.

1.2.3 Populism and its Relation to Democracy

In liberal democracies, considering populism a governing system capable of translating popular preferences into public policy without the impediments that have prevented liberal democracies from responding effectively to urgent problems. From this perspective, populism may not be a threat to democracy per se but rather to the dominant liberal variant of democracy. Indeed, some observers contend that populism, so understood, is not without merit: It represents "an

¹ Fabbrizi, "What Does Populism Mean for Democracy?," 7.

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illiberal democratic* response to undemocratic liberalism," and thus is less an attack on democracy than a corrective to a deficit thereof.¹ The central question then is whether populism acts as a corrective or as a threat to liberal democracy. The answer is in its interaction with democracy itself; populism performs a dual role², as clarified below:

Table 2 the Dual Role of Populism in its Interaction with Democracy

Destructive role	Constructive role
When it appeals to societal division by framing a conflict between "the people" and "the elite". Polarizes society and obstructs political dialogue. Undermines representative institutions by claiming, "the people themselves are legitimate representatives". Manipulates democratic rhetoric to gain support, justifies the suspension of legal and constitutional procedures. Spreads misinformation and empty promises through direct communication and mediatization	Few scholars argue that populism can be constructive when leaders unite people for pro-democracy change, acting as a redemptive political style that challenges modern democratic structures and the pragmatism of representatives who fail to address all constituencies. Such populism complements democracy by enabling public reaction to disapproved policies and enriching democratic processes by giving voice to sidelined or unrepresented groups.

“Made by the researcher”

¹ “William A. Galston, the Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy*, 11, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-populist-challenge-to-liberal-democracy/>.

* Illiberal democracy, a term widely associated with Fareed Zakaria in *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and abroad*, refers to a form of democracy in the absence of constitutional liberalism.

² Akande, U. S. *Democracy in Danger*, 56–57.

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Given its destructive tendencies, particularly in its illiberal form, populism renders liberal democracy vulnerable to institutional erosion and political antagonism.

1.2.4 Populist Movements in the United States

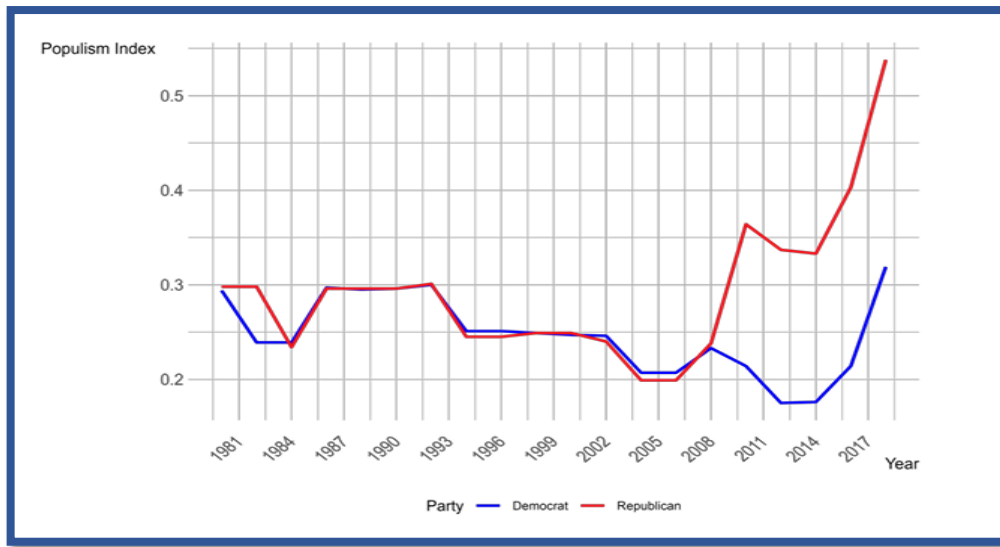
The word "Populism" has been around since 1890, to describe members of a new political party that arose, after decades of organizing, in the heartland of the United States, called "the People's Party". The People's Party was an agrarian party opposed to the economic policies and corporate monopolies that dominated their lives.

Populism in the United States emerged during a period of economic hardship marked by corporate monopolies, corruption, and deflation under the gold standard in a largely rural society, struggling farmers faced debt, low crop prices, and exploitation by banks, railroads, and speculators. Despite overall economic growth, both rural and urban poverty increased.¹ For many years, ideology, party loyalty, social issues and sophisticated propaganda techniques, have been used to divide the public. Polling on certain issues reflected extreme differences, often much as 30-40%, between Democrats, Republicans and Independents.

¹ HISTORY com Editors, "Populism in the United States: Timeline," HISTORY, December 7, 2018, <https://www.history.com/articles/populism-united-states-timeline>.

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Figure 1 Populism Index of Two Major Parties in the U.S. “1981-2017”



Source: The Deep Roots of American Populism¹

Below is a timeline of notable populist movements throughout U.S. history:²

Table 3 Populist Movements in the United States from “1849-1999”

Movement	Timeframe	Developments
The Know Nothings	1849-1860	One of the earliest populist political parties in America was Opposed to immigrants and Catholics. They used the beliefs of white Christian supremacy to seize political power.
The Greenback Party	1874-1884	A confluence of farming communities that organized through local Granges who wanted to initiate inflation to help with debt and supported an eight-hour workday as part of a wider pro-labor platform.
The Populist Party	1892 -1908	Populism found an official name with the Populist Party, or People's Party, in 1892, adopting much of the Greenback Party's platform, supporting a ban on

¹ Ze Han et al., *Ze Han, Helen V. Milner, and Kris James Mitchener, The Deep Roots of American Populism*, n.d., 16.

² Editors, “Populism in the United States.”

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		foreign land ownership, state control of the railroads and shortened workdays.
William Jennings Bryan	1860-1925	The self-proclaimed defender of the common man and working classes, he was elected to Congress in Nebraska as a Democrat in 1890, and his oratory gifts won him wider attention.
Father Coughlin	1891-1979	He was an early prototype for media populist figures. In the 1930s, 30 million people listened to his weekly radio show, which originally supported President Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, though it became well-known for its attacks on socialism and communism.
George Wallace	1919-1998	Governor of Alabama was nationally known for his pro-segregation stance, especially after trying to block Black students from entering the University of Alabama in 1963. Presenting himself as a champion of the common man through economic populism, he ran for president four times, first in 1964 as a Democrat against Lyndon B. Johnson.

“Made by the researcher”

Building on these historical roots, populism in the United States has evolved in response to contemporary economic, social, and technological changes, giving rise to new movements in the twenty-first century. These changes have altered political communication and mobilization through network-based forms of collective and connective action, leading to an intensified mediatization of politics.¹

¹ “Varieties of Populism in the US: Exceptional, Mainstream, or Model? | Polarization and Deep Contestations: The Liberal Script in the United States | Oxford Academic,” accessed April 27, 2026, <https://academic.oup.com/book/58012/chapter/480372795>.

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As a result, there has been a notable shift toward elements of populism increasingly challenging and contrasting with the norms of liberal democracy. On the right, the Tea Party emerged in 2009 after Barack Obama's election, promoting libertarian ideas and influencing the Republican Party, including the Freedom Caucus. On the left, Occupy Wall Street arose in 2011 in response to the financial crisis, calling for economic reform and challenging corporate and banking power, attracting diverse supporters despite its progressive roots.¹

The 2016 presidential election further reflected populist dynamics, with Bernie Sanders gaining widespread support for his platform against economic inequality, though he ultimately lost the Democratic nomination. In the same year, a significant turning point in twenty-first-century American populism took place with the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States.²

Trump ran on a highly populist platform that built on elements of the Tea Party and his personal brand, under the slogan "Make America Great Again." His return for a non-consecutive second term in January 2025 demonstrates his continued influence on American populist politics. These developments will be analyzed in detail in the following sections.

¹ Editors, "Populism in the United States."

² Editors, "Populism in the United States."

1.3 Trumpism: Populism in the United States

“Ever since he began his longshot campaign for president, Donald Trump has been portrayed as an opportunist bent on nothing but power and glory but rarely as a man with an intelligible ideology”

Tony Schwartz

1.3.1 The Concept of “Trumpism”

"Trumpism" is a term used in political analysis linked to Donald J. Trump*, particularly following his rise to the presidency of the United States in 2016." It is not considered as an ideology or a doctrine, but more as positions and ideas lent in the American history from time to time. The fact that "Trumpism" is promoted by a personality as atypical as Trump, in the age of media and social network has helped give it substance.¹

In referring to "Trumpism", scholars adopt different approaches. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt see that Trumpism is characterized by authoritarianism, Pierre Rosanvallon argues that its excesses is typical populism,² while others prefer to use the term "illiberalism".

A synthesis of these perspectives indicates that Trumpism simultaneously embodies elements of all the precedent "isms", and even so called paleoconservatism. Thereby reconciling the insights of divergent scholarly interpretations.

* Born on June 14, 1946, in New York, Donald J. Trump is an American businessman, media personality, and politician. Politically affiliated with the Republican Party, he served as the 45th president of the United States (2016–2020) and returned to office as the 47th president in 2024.

¹ Jean-Marie Ruiz and Isabelle Vagnoux, "Aux Racines Du « trumpisme » : Un Illibéralisme Américain: " 20 & 21. *Revue d'histoire* N° 153, no. 1 (2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.3917/vin.153.0003>.

² Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 179; "El Siglo Del Populismo," n.d., 190, accessed March 31, 2026, https://inep.org/images/_Biblio/Rosanvallon-Populismo.pdf.

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Trumpism is associated with right-wing populism and considered as a sort of populist paleoconservatism due to pulling together ideas and policies that are both old and new:¹

Table 4 Trump's Key Paleoconservatist Policies and Ideas

On race and immigration	Speaking mainly for older and white constituencies who hold to an older conception of the United States as white and Christian in its character.
On a few economic issues	Such as infrastructure and entitlement spending, Trump has at least rhetorically, rejected the small-government conservatism that has dominated the Republican Party for decades.
On trade and foreign policy	Trump has broken most starkly with Republican Party orthodoxy. He has generally come out against the international trade agreements that presidents of both parties have supported more or less since Franklin Roosevelt.

“Made by the researcher”

Many aspects of "Trumpism" are incompatible with liberal mold: its personalization of power, its opposition to anything remotely constituting checks and balances, and its populism, which rejects the pluralism central to the liberal view of society this makes it illiberal. Understanding the drivers of its rise explains why this model gained political legitimacy.

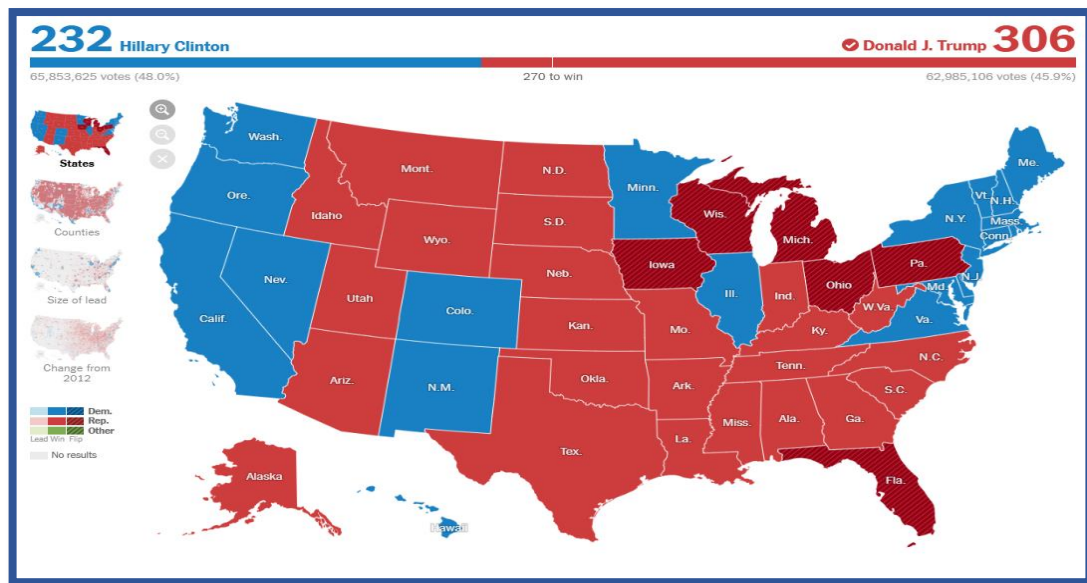
1.3.2 Factors behind the Rise of Trumpism

The ascent of Trumpism has multiple sources. Some people consistently back Republicans, and this support stems from a coalition of diverse factors.

¹ David Greenberg, *An Intellectual History of Trumpism*; n.d., 9.

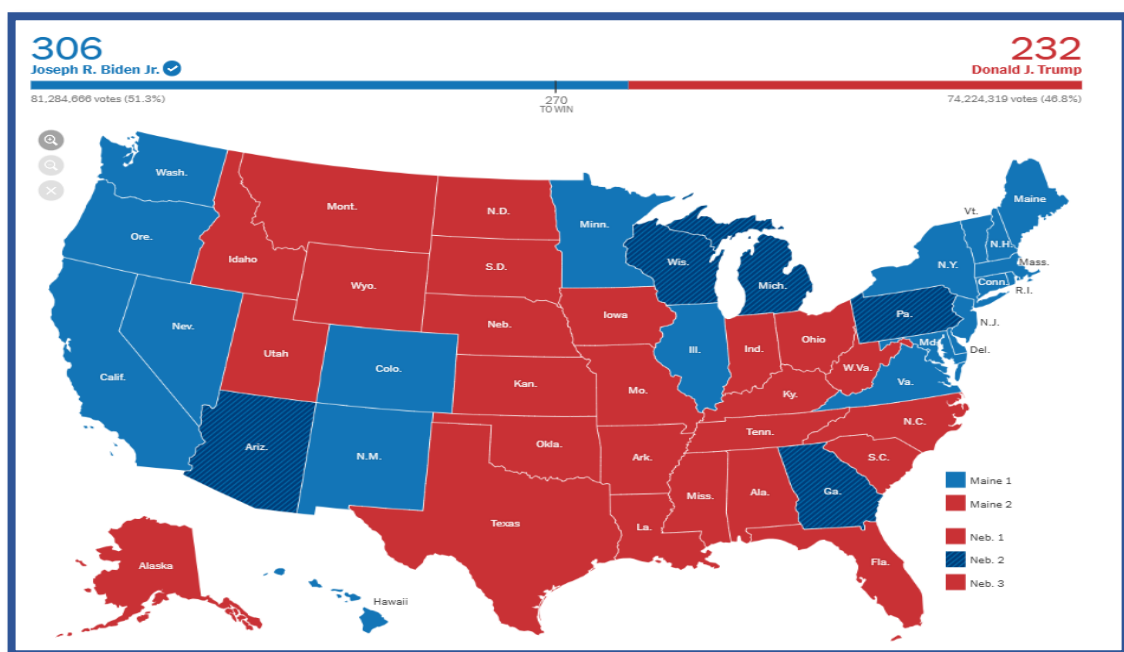
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Figure 2 2016 Presidential Election Results in the United States



Source: New York Times¹

Figure 3 2020 Presidential Election Results in the United States



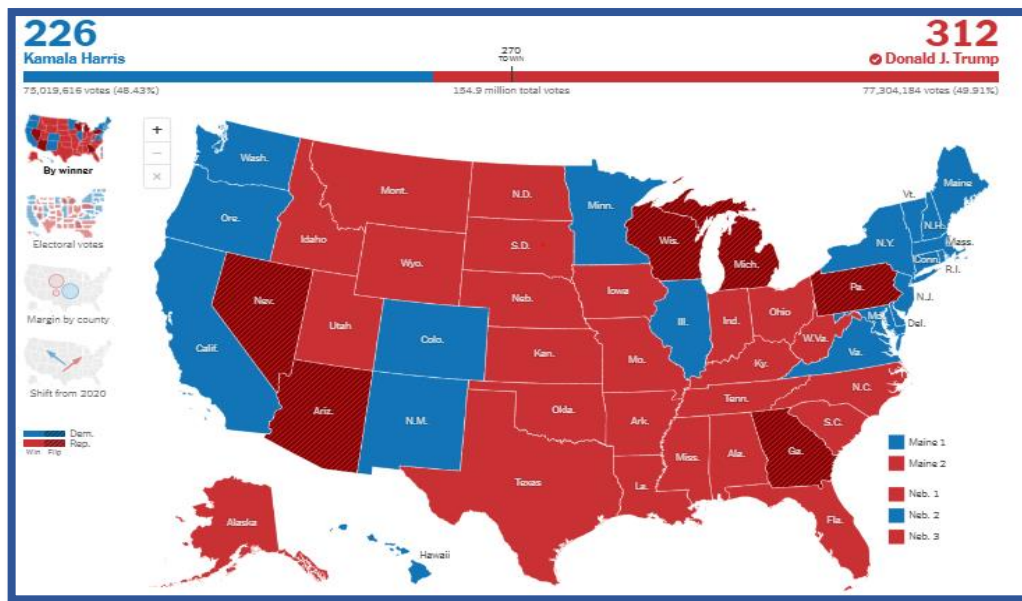
Source: New York Times²

¹ "2016 Presidential Election Results – Election Results 2016 – The New York Times," accessed April 28, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/president>.

² "2020 Presidential Election Results - The New York Times," accessed April 28, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/03/us/elections/results-president.html>.

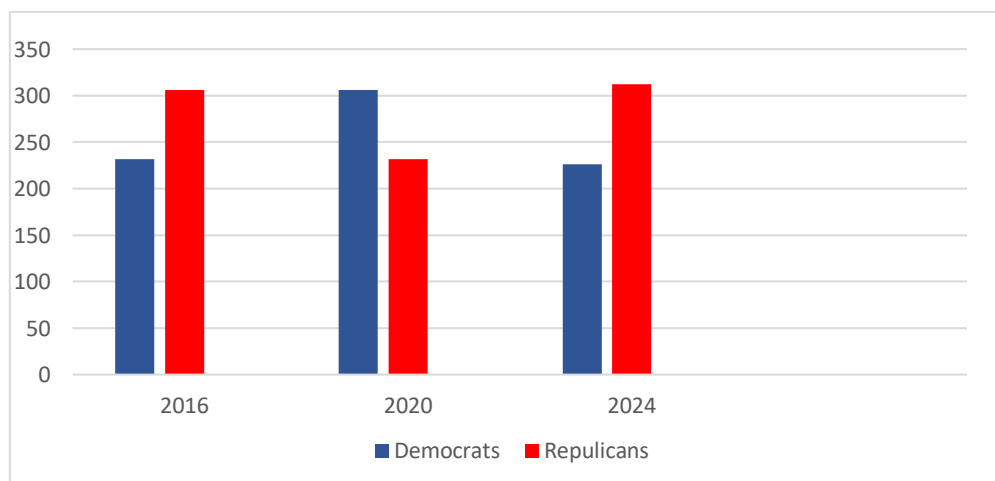
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Figure 4 2024 Presidential Election Results in the United States



Source: New York Times¹

Figure 5 Electoral Support for Republicans and Democrats in American Presidential Elections “2016-2020-2024”



“Made by the researcher”

1.3.2.1 Economic Factors

Beginning with Reagan, successive administrations implemented tax policies that heavily favored the wealthy and super-rich, which failed to "trickle down" to the working classes. These tax windfalls allowed the wealthy to fund think tanks

¹“Presidential Election Results: Trump Wins,” U.S., *The New York Times*, November 5, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/11/05/us/elections/results-president.html>.

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and politicians, creating a "vicious circle" in which economic power was used to secure further favorable legislation and deregulation. Also, the suppression of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) strike under Reagan signaled a sharp decline in union influence. This loss of bargaining power resulted in a productivity-compensation gap, where productivity grew 2.3 times faster than worker wages.¹

In addition, globalization, marked by the signing of trade agreements such as NAFTA and China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), devastated the American manufacturing sector. The resulting "China Shock," characterized by the rapid penetration of Chinese imports, led to significant job losses and industrial decline, particularly in the Rust Belt states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Ohio.²

Since the 1980s, the United States has also accumulated a trade deficit of roughly \$13 trillion; further disadvantaging millions of domestic workers. In 2008, decades of financial deregulation culminated in a financial meltdown after which the government bailed out "too-big-to-fail" banks while neglecting "Main Street." This dynamic reflected a system of ***"socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor,"*** in which bank executives and shareholders were protected, while millions of average citizens faced foreclosure, unemployment, and eviction.³

Real median household incomes in several Rust Belt states remained thousands of dollars below their late-20th-century levels by 2016, reflecting persistent wage stagnation. Between 1979 and 2011, the top 1% were the primary beneficiaries of economic growth, while the middle class saw negligible income increases, in some cases as little as \$32 per year, contributing to the hollowing out of the middle class.⁴

These factors contributed to fostering public trust in Donald Trump, whose messianic populist discourse portrayed him as a savior figure capable of addressing

¹ John Komlos, "The Economic Roots of the Rise of Trumpism," *CESifo Working Paper No. 6868*, n.d., 10–11.

² John Komlos, "The Economic Roots of the Rise of Trumpism," 4.

³ John Komlos, "The Economic Roots of the Rise of Trumpism," 19.

⁴ John Komlos, "The Economic Roots of the Rise of Trumpism," 21.

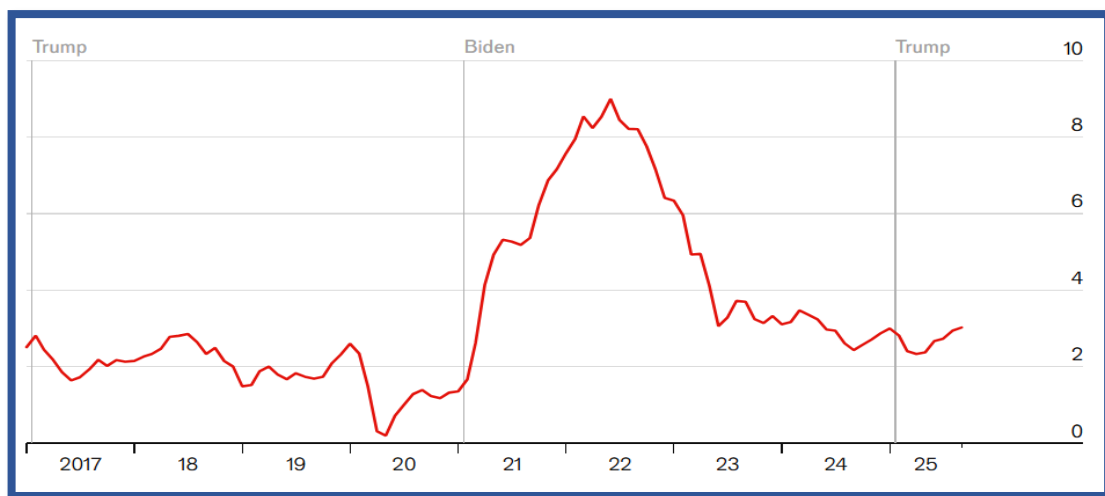
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their grievances. In his campaign for 2016 elections, while speaking at the Economic Club of New York he said:

“...it's time to start thinking big once again. That is why I believe it is time to establish a national goal of reaching 4% economic growth. And my great Economist do not want me to say that, but I think we can do better than that... in working with my economic team, we put together a plan that puts us on track to achieve that goal over the next 10 years our economic team estimates that under our plan. The economy will average 3.5% growth and create a total of 25 million new job...”¹

Although the American economy showed improvements in unemployment rates and inflation declined after COVID-19, exit polls from the 2024 election indicated that 2/3 of voters believed the American economy was in poor or mediocre condition, and 69% of them voted for Trump. While 31% said the economy was the most important factor in determining their vote, 79% of this group stated that they voted for Trump. Pre-election polls also revealed that Americans had more positive memories of the economy during Trump's four years in the White House, which made them more willing to overlook his extreme rhetoric.

Figure 6 Inflation in United States from “2017 to 2025”



Source: The Economist²

¹ CNN, *Donald Trump's Full Economic Speech*, 2016, 39:19, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_EGeoUdTnA.

²“The US Economy under Donald Trump,” The Economist, accessed April 28, 2026, <https://www.economist.com/interactive/trump-approval-tracker/economy>.

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The COVID-19 pandemic led to rising prices due to inflation, and every voter felt this increase, even as wages gradually rose over time. Many blamed the economic policies of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. They expressed their dissatisfaction through their votes, prioritizing their personal financial concerns over issues such as personal virtues or democratic values.¹

Trump worked to capitalize on Americans' frustration with the economy, taxes, and inflation. He promised to strengthen the economy, reduce taxes and inflation, and impose additional tariffs on imported goods.² In his speech on economy from Georgia 2024 Trump said:

"...Under my plan, American workers will no longer be worried about losing your jobs to foreign nations. Instead, foreign nations will be worried about losing their jobs to America... And you know, I took in from China, hundreds of billions of dollars in taxes and tariffs and I had no inflation... We will put a 100% tariff on every single car coming across the Mexican border..."³

In short, these frustrations underscore the economic conditions that fueled the rise of Trumpism.

1.3.2.2 Socio-Cultural Factors

The rise of Trumpism is rooted in a complex interplay of historical nativism, racial hierarchies, and a reactionary response to modern social shifts, revealing how deeply embedded socio-cultural dynamics have shaped contemporary political behavior of voters in the United States.

¹ "6 أسباب قادت إلى فوز ترامب في انتخابات الرئاسة الأمريكية – مركز الروابط للدراسات الاستراتيجية والسياسية, Bing, accessed April 28, 2026, <https://www.bing.com/search?pglt=395&q=6+أسباب+قادت+إلى+فوز+ترامب+في+انتخابات+الرئاسة+الأمريكية+مركز+الروابط+للدراسات+الاستراتيجية+السياسية&FORM=ANNTA1&ucpdpc=UCPD&PC=U531.EEUUYOTIHCAEQ6wcYQNIIBBzQ5NmowajeoAgiwAgE&FORM=ANNTA1&ucpdpc=UCPD&PC=U531>.

² "Implications-of-Us-Election-Results-and-Second-Trump-Administration.," n.d., 4, accessed March 31, 2026, <https://www.dohainstitute.org/ar/Lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/implications-of-us-election-results-and-second-trump-administration.pdf>.

³ WFAA, *Donald Trump Full Speech on Economy from Georgia*, 2024, 01:21:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PufpRDcXrk>.

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Trumpism is grounded in nativism, a long-standing cultural tradition that defines "Americanism" exclusively through the lens of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) experience, historically construing those who differ in skin color, religion, or language as "less American" or even as unassimilable outsiders. In this sense, Trumpism incarnates an exclusionist and isolationist worldview. Trumpism operates by constructing symbolic and cultural boundaries that distinguish a privileged in-group typically imagined as white, Christian "patriots" from an out-group composed of immigrants, Muslims, and people of color...ect¹

Globalization and demographic change heightened status anxieties among segments of the white middle class who felt increasingly displaced, while the presidency of Barack Obama marked a watershed moment symbolizing the advancement of historically excluded groups. Trump sought to raise public concerns about the southern border and undocumented immigrants, accusing them of "occupying American cities and towns, taking American jobs, and increasing crime". While promising to deport millions in what he described as the largest deportation campaign in the American history and to enforce the law.²

American conservatives, and anti-immigrants, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and anti-LGBTQ individuals rely behind Trump's "***Make America Great Again***" and "***America First***" slogans. In 2020, when Trump was asked about why African-Americans are being killed, he simply responded:

"...What a terrible question, so are white people..."³

In 2023, Trump amplified his attack on immigrants at a rally in New Hampshire:

¹ Yang Mimi, "Trumpism: A Disfigured Americanism," *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 1 (2018): 3–7, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0170-0>.

² "Implications-of-Us-Election-Results-and-Second-Trump-Administration.," 5.

³ "Asked Why Black Americans Are Killed by Police, Trump Responds, 'So Are White People' - YouTube," accessed April 29, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5sSj4ihXUw>.

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"...You know when I think the real number is 15 16 million people into our country when they do that we got a lot of work to do they're poisoning the blood of our country..."¹

In 2025, Donald Trump said in his inaugural address as 47th president:

"...Today it will henceforth be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders male and female..."²

1.3.2.3 Donald Trump's Personality and his Media Presence

Donald Trump's personality played a decisive role in the success of the Republican Party. Despite continuous attacks on his image, he presented himself as a targeted president who faced ongoing attempts to remove him from office.

This narrative, which Trump skillfully promoted, made him a symbol of victimhood in the face of the "deep state," eliciting the sympathy of a broad segment of the population. Trump was not merely a candidate; he was a symbol of defiance and resistance, which brought him close to the hearts of many who felt that they, too, were victims of the system. Through social media, particularly on his platform TruthSocial, he connects directly with citizens. This approach made him feel close to the people and made them feel part of his campaign.³

His media background has been central to shaping his political facade and public appeal. His experience in reality television contributed to a persona of resilience, portraying him as a leader who "does not yield to adversity" and framing his interactions and conflicts within a narrative of constant struggle and survival. This media-savvy approach also allowed him to construct an identity-based narrative, presenting society through a lens that emphasizes group identities and cultural belonging. Moreover, his understanding of media dynamics enabled him

¹ POLITICO, *Trump Says Immigrants Are "Poisoning the Blood of Our Country,"* 2023, 00:39, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKPFjAhd3KQ>.

² "U.S. President Donald Trump Says 'There Are Only Two Genders, Male and Female' - YouTube," accessed April 29, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mdk_jqNdbAk.

³ "Implications-of-Us-Election-Results-and-Second-Trump-Administration.," 5.

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to manipulate coverage effectively, creating a situation in which the professional press oscillated between fascination and apprehension, thereby keeping attention focused on his chosen narratives.¹

Table 5 the number of followers of Donald Trump on different social media platforms.

Instagram	Facebook	Truth social	YouTube	Twitter
39,4 million	41 million	11.2 million	3.97million	108.6 million

“Made by the researcher”

Through his direct engagement with citizens, he criticizes immigrants, refugees, and elites in a populist manner, portraying them as privileged or out of touch. By using slogans such as "Make America Great Again," he frames himself as the ideal candidate, a strategy that strengthens his political presence and gives his persona substance.

1.3.2.4 Intellectual Support

Even among intellectuals, some support Donald Trump because he embodies certain ideas and values that align with their own beliefs. “Trumpism” benefited from intellectual support, mainly conservative thought. Clermont institute associated with the "**West Coast Straussians**" provided the intellectual framework and personnel that significantly influenced Donald Trump's presidency.

While Trump himself was not a consumer of academic conservative literature, the Institute's scholars saw in him a vehicle for their philosophical goals particularly the dismantling of the "administrative state" and a return to "natural law".² Michael Anton a Claremont graduate wrote the influential "Flight 93

¹ Naves Marie-Cécile, “Donald Trump et les médias,” *Pouvoirs* N° 172, no. 1 (2020): 76–79, <https://doi.org/10.3917/pouv.172.0075>.

² Ruiz and Vagnoux, “Aux Racines Du « trumpisme »,” 13.

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Election" essay, which framed the 2016 election as a last-chance battle to save America, some of his passages 2016:¹

"...2016 is the Flight 93 election: charge the cockpit or you die. You may die anyway. You or the leader of your party may make it into the cockpit and not know how to fly or land the plane. There are no guarantees. Except one: if you do not try, death is certain. To compound the metaphor: a Hillary Clinton presidency is Russian roulette with a semi-auto. With Trump, at least you can spin the cylinder and take your chances..."

As the title suggests, Anton likens the 2016 presidential election to the case of Flight 93, the last plane hijacked on September 11, 2001. Its passengers, after resisting the hijackers, chose to bring the plane down rather than face certain death. In his analogy, Hillary Clinton stands for the hijackers, while Donald Trump represents the passengers who chose to act. In 2024, Ryan Williams, President of The Claremont Institute, issued the following statement on President Trump's election victory:

*"President Trump's mandate represents a critical moment in the fight to preserve America's Founding principles and renew the promise that our forefathers saw in this great land almost 250 years ago. The road ahead will demand courage, clarity, and unwavering commitment to constitutional order, freedom, and the integrity of our Republic. The Claremont institute has stood for the teaching, defense, and application of these principles for 45 years. We now stand ready to support this vision and work alongside all those committed to restoring America's rightful course."*²

Williams strongly supports Trump, presenting his election victories as a mandate to defend America's founding principles. It frames Trump as a protector of constitutional order against progressive threats.

¹"The Flight 93 Election," Claremont Review of Books, accessed April 29, 2026, <https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/digital/the-flight-93-election/>.

² Ryder Selmi, "Statement on President Donald Trump's Victory," *The Claremont Institute*, November 6, 2024, <https://www.claremont.org/statement-on-president-donald-trumps-victory/>.

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The Heritage Foundation also supports Trumpism. In 2024, Kevin D. Roberts, President of Heritage and Trustee since 2023, said:

"We believe that we are 'not ordinary. We are patriots. We believe that America's best days are yet to come, and that if we advance conservative policies today, we can make America safer, more virtuous, and more prosperous for our children. Donald Trump is the leader of this movement"¹

1.3.3 The Political Behavior of Donald J. Trump

While no politician's personality singlehandedly explains every decision, Trump is arguably one of the most personality-driven leaders modern America has seen. One of the most frequently observed features of Donald Trump's leadership style is his grandiose self-presentation.² Trump presents himself as uniquely capable, claiming he alone could prevent or solve global crises like the Russia Ukraine war. He also highlights his past successes, such as building a **"great economy,"**³ and reframes challenges like tariffs as proof of his strength, portraying him as the one who can protect Americans while making others pay.

Psychologically, these behaviors reflect inflated self-importance and a constant need for admiration, which in politics can appear charismatic to supporters but alienating to critics. This personality profoundly shapes political behavior, guiding both leadership style and voter perceptions, and influencing how policies, rhetoric, and public image are constructed and received. This provides a lens to understand Trump's approach to politics.

According to Tony Schwartz, Donald Trump lacks a coherent ideological framework. Instead, he is driven primarily by immediate self-interest, a trait that

¹ Kevin D. Roberts PhD, "With Trump's Win, 'Ordinary' Americans Declared Independence from the Elites," The Heritage Foundation, accessed April 29, 2026, <https://www.heritage.org/conservatism/commentary/trumps-win-ordinary-americans-declared-independence-the-elites>.

² "The Psychology of Trump's 2025 Presidency: Traits, Behaviours, and Underlying Dynamics — Simply Put Psych," accessed May 1, 2026, <https://simplyputpsych.co.uk/global-psych/the-psychological-of-trumps-2025-presidency-traits-behaviours-and-underlying-dynamics>.

³ "(16) Trump: 'We Built the Greatest Economy in the History of the World' - YouTube," accessed May 1, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_IXvIMNQ1E.

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can be described in political science as "***pragmatic***". Following the example of his father, Fred Trump, he built a prominent career in real estate and business, which contributed to shaping a mindset focused predominantly on personal gain.

Based on his actions and rhetoric, Trump exemplifies a right-wing populist leader, characterized by anti-immigrant stances, appeals to nationalist sentiment, and a combative style that positions himself as the defender of "the people" against perceived elites.

Many scholars and Trump himself have drawn comparisons between him and Andrew Jackson, emphasizing their shared anti-establishment stance and populist appeal. Jackson, a prominent military figure, failed to secure the popular vote in the 1824 election but successfully mobilized support to achieve a decisive victory in 1828. Trump invokes this precedent to suggest that, like Jackson, he too can overcome contested elections and secure victory.¹

As mentioned in the earlier sections, some scholars approach Trumpism as authoritarianism, in this context Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky in their book *How Democracies Die?* developed a "***Litmus test***". Based on Scientist Juan Linz's book called "*The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*" published in 1978 in which he mentioned the role of politicians showing how their behavior can either reinforce democracy or put it at risk. Building on that we will try to apply the litmus test to examine Donald Trump's political behavior.²

The framework consists of four indicators*, each contributing 25% to the overall measure. Three of these indicators are further subdivided into four criteria, with each criterion equally weighted at 25% within its respective indicator. The

¹ Jonathan Murphy, *Trump and Jackson: A Fitting Comparison? – Contested U.S. Presidential Elections (Fall 2024)*, n.d., accessed May 1, 2026, <https://his295-fall2024.sites.grinnell.edu/week-3/trump-and-jackson-a-fitting-comparison/>.

² Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 22–24.

* The scoring system applied here is an interpretive adaptation by the researcher. While Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt do not assign numerical weights, this study introduces a quantified approach to allow for systematic analysis. The results are intended as heuristic rather than definitive measurements.

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remaining indicator comprises three criteria, each carrying a weight of 33.33% to ensure the indicator as a whole still represents 25% of the total score.

Table 6 A litmus test for examining Donald Trump's political behavior.

Indicator	Criterion	Trump's behavior	Result
Rejection (or weak commitment) to democratic rules of the game 85% Which constitute 21,25%	Do they reject the Constitution or express a willingness to violate it?	Yes, Trump tried to end birthright citizenship, violating the 14th Amendment; courts blocked it as unconstitutional.	20%
	Do they suggest a need for antidemocratic measures, such as canceling elections?	No, he did not ask for cancellation but he doubted the 2020 elections integrity.	15%
	Do they support or promote extraconstitutional actions like coups, violent uprisings, or protests? mass	Yes, After the 2020 election, Trump called it "stolen" and urged supporters to protest in D.C. on January 6.	25%
	Do they attempt to undermine the legitimacy of elections?	Yes, in 2020 elections, Trump claimed that the results were illegitimate.	25%
Denial of the legitimacy of political opponents 65% Which constitute 16,25%	Do they describe their rivals as subversive, or opposed to the existing constitutional order?	He rarely frames rivals explicitly as rejecting the Constitution itself in a formal/legal sense. Instead, his rhetoric is more populist and delegitimizing, portraying opponents as: corrupt, anti-American...ect	15%
	Do they claim that their rivals constitute an existential threat, either to national security or to	Yes, Trump has described Democrats and political opponents	25%

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	the prevailing way of life?	as: "destroying America"	
	Do they falsely portray rivals as lawbreakers to disqualify politically?	Yes, there is substantial evidence that Trump uses criminal accusations rhetorically to disqualify rivals, sometimes without solid evidentiary grounding.	25%
	Do they falsely claim rivals are secretly working for a foreign government?	No, Trump generally does not rely on that specific claim consistent or central way.	0%
Toleration or encouragement of violence 65% Which constitute 16,25%	Do they have any ties to armed gangs or other organizations that engage in illicit violence?	Donald Weak Yes, Trump told the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by" during a 2020 debate, that was seen as signaling rather than a formal tie.	10%
	Have they or their partisan allies sponsored or encouraged mob attacks on opponents?	Indirectly Donald Trump pre-January 6 Capitol attack rhetoric was seen as encouraging a mob attack on institutions political.	15%
	Have they tacitly endorsed violence by their supporters by refusing to unambiguously condemn it and punish it?	Yes, Donald Trump was criticized for delayed and ambiguous condemnation during the January 6 Capitol attack.	20%
	Have they praised (or refused to condemn) other significant acts of political violence, either in the past or elsewhere in the world?	Yes, for instance Donald Trump praised Kim Jong- un as powerful.	20%
Readiness to curtail civil liberties opponents,	Have they backed laws limiting protests, criticism, or civic freedoms?	Yes, for instance Trump criticized Black Lives Matter demonstrations, framing them as unlawful.	33,33 %

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including media 100% Which constitute 25%	Have they threatened to take legal or other punitive action against critics in rival parties, civil society, or the media?	Yes, Donald Trump repeatedly threatened media outlets, journalists, and political opponents with lawsuits, for reporting or criticizing him.	33,33 %
	Have they praised repressive measures taken by other governments, either in the past or elsewhere in the world?	Yes, Donald Trump expressed admiration for Vladimir Putin, praising his leadership style despite Russia's record of suppressing political opposition.	33,33 %
Final result	78.75%		

“Made by the researcher based on Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky work”

This analysis indicates that Trump exhibits a high level of authoritarian tendencies (78.75%), particularly in undermining democratic norms, delegitimizing opponents, and tolerating or encouraging political violence, while showing comparatively weaker patterns in claims of foreign collusion or formal ties to violent groups. Based on the indicators, we can define Donald Trump's political behavior as a hybrid form of pragmatic populism with authoritarian leanings.

1.3.4 Tools of Trumpism

1.3.4.1 Political Discourse

Hidden ideologies and politicians' perceptions can be revealed through in- depth analysis of their political discourse. Trump's speeches are different¹; they depart from traditional political communication, functioning less as formal addresses and more as performative events. Trump strategically employs populist language within his discourse, notably using what may be termed "Language Games".² He

¹ “Speaking Trumpian,” Claremont Review of Books, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/speaking-trumpian/>.

² Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 300.

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is an expert in employing **pejorative language**, occasionally bordering on profanity when lashing out at opponents.

Note his use of the phrase "this maniac" in reference to the Governor of Virginia. In another claim, Trump uses indexical to shift focus from a context to another, also to keep his audience attentive to and focused on his claim; "This crazy man of Virginia "This maniac He said that... He said that... and note how Trump disparages opponents through his use of pejorative language "maniac, crazy..."¹

Naming, that is directly referring to a person by name or title, is yet another strategy, which Trump follows to make his claims meaningful and relevant.² In addition, **promising**; in Donald Trump's discourse the language of promise departs from conventional political commitments. Rather than establishing a clear, verifiable obligation, his promises are marked by a persistent assertion that they either have been fulfilled or were never intended in a literal sense, even when empirical evidence indicates otherwise. This produces a form of strategic ambiguity in which the promise is simultaneously maintained and reinterpreted.³

Trump rhetorically reneges on the original commitment while preserving its appearance through semantic reframing. His repeated use of the reporting verb "say" ("when I say... that's what I said... I did not say... I never said...") functions as a discursive mechanism to shift the focus from the substance of the promise to its phrasing. In doing so, he redefines the original claim post hoc, narrowing or altering its meaning to evade accountability.⁴

"When I say Mexico is going to pay for the wall, that's what I said: Mexico is going to pay. I did not say they are going to write me a cheque for \$20 billion or \$10 billion. No one is going to write a check. I said they are going to pay for the wall. And if Congress approves this. Incredible trade bill that we made with Mexico and Canada, by the way but with Mexico, in this case they're paying for the wall many, many times over..."

¹ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 300.

² Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 300.

³ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 303.

⁴ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 303.

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"Just a couple of things, because I knew the fake news likes to say it. When during the campaign, I would say, 'Mexico is going to pay for it. Obviously, I never said this, and never meant, they are going to write out a cheque. I said, 'They're going to pay for it. They are. They are paying for it with the incredible deal we made, called the United States. Mexico and Canada: USMCA deal...'”¹

Note the circumventive nature of Trump's language game of **blaming** in which the reporting verb "say". It is a particular circumventive discursive technique, which Trump employs whenever reminded of broken promises.² Trump like "I", "we", and they" "them" ect. Additionally, when he discusses approximately his personality, he customises the expressions such equally as "I can win", "I can change, "I can make America great", as well as, vowed to finish the war". The lexicon as well as collocations recycled in these communications not only imitate Trump's party-political philosophy but also signify his optimistic self-perception.³

Trump frequently employs slogans such as "Make America Great Again" and "America First," along with expressions like "our enemies." Trump's logo "Make America Great Again" presupposes that the US used to be great before some administrations like the one of Obama; but it is no longer great now. Trump's logo necessitates some further reforms and policies to bring America back great again. For this fact, Trump says in his announcement speech:

"Our country is in a serious trouble, we do not have victories anymore. We used to have victories, but we do not have them. When was the last time anybody saw us beating, let us say. China in trade deal, they kill us. I beat China all the time, all the time"”⁴

It has become evident that Trump uses the foreign threats as enemies that must be defeated for America to become great again. Trump blames the other for the fact that America is no longer great. He relies on nationalistic statements; the "us" and "them" discourse shows a power relation where America should be superior and

¹ Akande, U. S. *Democracy in Danger*, 303.

² Akande, U. S. *Democracy in Danger*, 303.

³ Maria Nisar et al., *the Study on Lexical Discourse Analysis of Trump's Political Speeches*, no. 6 (2020): 3276.

⁴ C-SPAN, *Donald Trump Presidential Campaign Announcement Full Speech (C-SPAN)*, 2015, 47:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apjNfkysjbM>.

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the reason why America is inferior is due to the other; America's inferiority within the international field of competition is blamed on foreign threats.

When Trump addresses the other, he often turns to traditional stereotypes and images of the enemy and offers very simple solutions. For example, in the case of building a wall along the Mexican border to keep them out. The nationalistic idea of "us" sharing one national identity and foreigners being "them" or "they" is clearly exemplified in the vast amount of times. "They" is used to describe either China, Japan, Mexico, Iran...ect. For instance Trump speaking about Iran having nuclear:

"...Iran, the bully of the Middle East, must now make peace. If they do not, future attacks will be far greater and a lot easier. For 40 years, Iran has been saying death to America... They have been killing our people..."¹

Trump deliberately plays on feelings and manipulates emotions; he claimed to be "someone who could represent what Americans really think, and perhaps more importantly, feel". A Biker for Trump told journalist Ed Pilkington, Trump "speaks his own mind". A woman with the colors of the American flag in her hat manifested that Trump spoke from the heart and that differently from professional politicians; he is down to our level. He speaks it like it is". British journalist Matt Taibbi reports that a young Pennsylvanian supporter of Trump told him: "When Trump talks, I actually understand what he's saying... But like, when Hillary Clinton talks, it just sounds like it is hard to understand".²

In sum, this demonstrates how Trump's discourses language both mobilizes supporters and frames complex issues in simple, emotionally charged terms.

1.3.4.2 Conspiracy Narrative

Conspiracism has four goals; it aims to erode confidence in public institutions and ordinary people-powered democracy, to create disorder and delays that

¹ Sky News Australia, *WATCH: President Trump Speaks Following US Strikes on Iranian Nuclear Sites*, 2025, 04:11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ewMRyeK1x0>.

² Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 373.

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consume a lot of energy, money, and airtime. It targets to render community-based democratic deliberations and problem solving more divisive and less functional; and finally to allowing other agents (notably authoritarian and corporate leaders) to fill the breach and seize control amidst the chaos they have manufactured and offer their own services as uniquely gifted rescuer-saviors.¹

Trumpism illustrates how conspiracism narratives can move from the margins to become central tools of political mobilization and legitimation within a major party. Early examples, like the 2011 "birther" claim, helped Trump construct a public image as a spokesperson for "concerned citizens". During the 2015-2016 campaign, he used conspiracies to delegitimize opponents for instance, questioning Ted Cruz's presidential eligibility and to position himself as a defender of truth against a corrupt elite.²

To navigate the stigma of conspiratorial discourse, he employed rhetorical strategies such as "a lot of people are saying," which circulated claims without direct endorsement, and signaling tactics like appearing on the Alex Jones Show, which aligned him with conspiracy-minded audiences while maintaining appeal to moderate voters.³ This approach intensified during moments of political vulnerability. As seen in his 2016 West Palm Beach claim that Hillary Clinton conspired with "international financial elites". In the post 2020 "stolen election" narrative, rejected by courts but persuasive to Republican voters. The climax came with his January 6, 2021 speech, framing the election as a conspiracy involving the "radical left," big tech, and "Republican traitors," mobilizing supporters toward collective action.⁴ These examples demonstrate how conspiracy narratives under Trumpism have shifted from peripheral rhetoric to political tools.

¹ Christopher Jon Delogu, "Vulnerability and Conspiracism in the United States from McCarthyism to Trumpism," *ELAD-SILDA*, no. 9 (May 2024): 3, <https://doi.org/10.35562/elad-silda.1470>.

² Michael Butter, "Conspiracy Theory after Trump," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (2022): 8–12, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2022.0054>.

³ Butter, "Conspiracy Theory after Trump," 8.

⁴ Butter, "Conspiracy Theory after Trump," 13.

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1.3.4.3 Unpredictability

Unpredictability is one of Trump's political tools¹. As Reince Priebus, his first chief of staff, described Trump's management style:

"Trump is always attentive to narrative. He likes conflict; puts opposites together and lets them fight. He doesn't care about process; he wants to own the decision."

In many ways, this is reminiscent of Franklin Roosevelt. In his bargaining technique, Trump starts with surprise and extreme positions before turning to bargaining and compromise. As Trump describes in *The Art of the Deal*, he used this management and bargaining style in his New York real estate business. 'This highlights the extent to which his background in business has shaped and informed his approach to political leadership.'²

1.3.4.4 Negotiation approach

The negotiation style of Donald Trump, as derived from his business writings, public appearances, and political actions, is fundamentally coercive and centered on exploiting vulnerabilities through advantage and bravado. Eugene Kogan framed this approach by dividing it into four interrelated roles³

Table 7 Donald Trump's negotiation styles.

Trump as an observer	Trump "sizes up" counterparts to identify weaknesses, treating them as opponents rather than partners in mutual gain.
Trump as a performer	Trump frames negotiation as "performance art," using media visibility, extreme opening demands, and feigned willingness to walk away to test the other party's desperation.

¹ Joseph S. Nye, *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 170.

² Nye, *Do Morals Matter?* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 170.

³ Eugene B. Kogan, "Art of the Power Deal: The Four Negotiation Roles of Donald J. Trump," *Negotiation Journal* 35, no. 1 (2019): 67–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nejo.12265>.

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Trump as a controller	Trump favors a top-down, bureaucracy-free style and prefers bilateral over multilateral negotiations, allowing him to maintain direct dominance over weaker actors.
Trump as a disrupter	Trump relies on instinct and unpredictability, minimizing uncertainty for himself while maximizing it for others by keeping options open and opponents' off-balance.

“Made by the researcher based on Eugene Kogan work”

These roles are reinforced by specific tactics including targeting counterparts with limited alternative, undermining their Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement, using selective generosity to create indebtedness and demand loyalty and threatening disproportionate retribution in response to perceived unfairness and finally deadline as a technique when he uses time pressure as a bargaining tool, as he did with Iran.¹

At the core of this strategy lies the "**structured choice**," whereby Trump reduces the negotiation to a binary outcome: acceptance of a deal framed as highly advantageous or rejection accompanied by the risk of unpredictable and potentially damaging consequences.²

¹ WFAA, *Trump Sets another Deadline on Iran Strait Standoff*, 2026, 02:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ml0PgmFLeF0>.

² Kogan, "Art of the Power Deal," 73–74.

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Results and Findings

To sum up part one; we have gotten to the following findings:

American liberal democracy is based on focusing on individual freedom, the power of the people, and the rule of law, while also using rules to protect citizens and make the government accountable. It combines ideas and institutions to protect minority rights. However, it faces ongoing problems, such as populism, political division, and the slow weakening of democratic norms, showing that democracy is always changing and not guaranteed.

Populism in the United States has historically emerged during periods of social and economic tension, framing politics as a conflict between "the people" and "the elite". It functions as a flexible political strategy, adapting to left and right wing ideologies, and can both challenge liberal democratic institutions. Over time, American populist movements demonstrate how populism evolves in response to economic, social, and technological changes, increasingly influencing political communication and contesting the norms of liberal democracy.

Trumpism related to the American president Donald J. Trump is a right-wing populist and paleoconservative movement fueled by economic frustrations, cultural anxieties, and anti-elite sentiment. Donald Trump's charismatic, media-savvy, and unpredictable leadership reinforced by populist rhetoric, conspiratorial narratives, and backing from conservative intellectual circles enabled him to mobilize a broad base of support and secure a victorious return in the 2024 elections.

**Part Two: Challenges and Continuities of
American Liberal Democracy under
Trump's Presidency**

Part Two: Challenges and Continuities of American Liberal Democracy under Trump's Presidency

According to a growing body of scholarly literature, the rise of Trumpism since 2016 particularly during Donald Trump's second mandate has been associated with a range of actions and policies that may pose significant challenges to the foundations of liberal democracy and potentially contribute to its erosion. In this context, the present section aims to assess the implications of the Trump administration's conduct at both the national and international levels.

To ensure analytical clarity, this part is structured into three main sections. The first examines the impact of Trump's leadership on democratic institutions and norms. The second section focuses on public policy, analyzing both its economic orientation and its socio-cultural dimension. The final section explores the international positioning of the United States during the Trump era, emphasizing how his behavior, rhetoric, and worldview have influenced global perceptions of American leadership and reshaped aspects of the international order.

2.1 Democratic Institutions and Norms in the Era of Trump

“The Trump administration has sought to erase parts of American history”

NPR Staff

2.1.1 Congress and Separation of Powers

The rise of Trumpism fundamentally altered the balance of power between the presidency and Congress, exposing vulnerabilities in the constitutional system designed to constrain executive authority. During his tenure, congressional Republicans often surrendered core constitutional responsibilities, effectively neutralizing traditional checks on presidential power.

Under Trump, impeachment has become largely symbolic. Scholars describe it as "*essentially meaningless*" because partisan cohesion within his party made it "*inconceivable*" that he would be convicted and removed by Senate Republicans. Consequently, the threat of impeachment no longer functions as a viable deterrent against presidential overreach.¹

Trump demonstrated that a president could adopt a strategy of "*all-out resistance*" to congressional oversight. By ordering blanket refusals to comply with subpoenas, he faced minimal political pushback. Moreover, investigations often failed to influence public opinion, as voters rarely shifted their views when congressional signals were split along party lines. This combination of executive defiance and limited public accountability weakened one of Congress's central mechanisms for checking presidential power.²

Congress's traditional control over federal spending power of the purse was undermined. When Trump refused to spend appropriated funds or defunded

¹ Eric Schickler, *What Donald Trump Has Taught Us about American Political Institutions*, n.d., 54.

² Schickler, *What Donald Trump Has Taught Us about American Political Institutions*, 54.

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authorized programs, congressional Republicans frequently responded with "***silence or approval.***" This allowed the president to implement what effectively functioned as a "de facto line-item veto", defunding programs without legislative opposition and further concentrating power in the executive branch.¹

Trump's presidency revealed a profound shift in political loyalty. Members of Congress increasingly prioritized party allegiance over institutional responsibilities. For Republican lawmakers, conservative media and social media activists acted as a disciplining force, making it politically essential to avoid angering Trump or his core supporters.² As a result, Congress's traditional role as a counterbalance to the executive was weakened, leaving institutional power subordinate to party loyalty.

Unitary executive theory:

With congressional compliance, Trump was able to operationalize aspects of unitary executive theory: expanding presidential control over the administrative state. He eliminated agencies, converted civil servants into political appointees, and leveraged federal grants to influence societal institutions. These tactics allowed him to bend key sectors of society businesses, universities, and media to his will without meaningful legislative interference.

In July 2016, at the Republican National Convention, Donald Trump declared: "I alone can fix it"³

In November 2017, he stated: "The one that matters is me. I am the only one who matters,"⁴

¹ Schickler, *What Donald Trump Has Taught Us about American Political Institutions*, 55.

² Schickler, *What Donald Trump Has Taught Us about American Political Institutions*, 54.

³ A. B. C. News, "FULL TEXT: Donald Trump's 2016 Republican National Convention Speech," ABC News, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://abcnews.com/Politics/full-text-donald-trumps-2016-republican-national-convention/story?id=40786529>.

⁴ Bill Chappell, "'I'm The Only One That Matters,' Trump Says of State Dept. Job Vacancies," America, *NPR*, November 3, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/11/03/561797675/im-the-only-one-that-matters-trump-says-of-state-dept-job-vacancies>.

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Later that year he asserted, "I have absolute right to do what I want *to* do with the Department of Justice."

Trump exercised removal power by firing high-ranking officials, including Sally Yates, James Comey, Rex Tillerson, and Andrew McCabe within his first fourteen months, and in May 2019, he fired the Secretary of Homeland Security, Kristjen Nielsen. He directed subordinates, ordering the Department of Justice in May 2018 to investigate the Federal Bureau of Investigation regarding a campaign agent from his 2016 presidential campaign, and in September 2019, he instructed the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to support his claims about Hurricane Dorian. In August 2020, reports emerged that he wanted to install politically sympathetic officials at the United States Postal Service to influence mail delivery.¹

Trump used executive privilege extensively, withholding one hundred thousand pages of records regarding Judge Brett Kavanaugh in September 2018 and the full report by Special Counsel Robert Mueller in May 2019. He issued seventy signing statements, nearly double the number issued by President Barack Obama, challenging a bill imposing sanctions on Russia in August 2017 and a seven hundred billion dollar defense bill in December 2017.²

Ultimately, members of Congress have found that achieving personal goals, such as reelection or policy success, often requires alignment with the president, even as constitutional checks are undermined. Trump's approach demonstrates how presidential assertiveness, combined with party compliance, can neutralize congressional power and reshape the administrative state, leaving traditional mechanisms for oversight and accountability largely ineffective.

¹ Schickler, *What Donald Trump Has Taught Us about American Political Institutions*, 498.

² Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 496.

Despite these actions, Donald Trump often failed to fully control his executive branch. Jeff Sessions recused himself in March 2017 against Trump's wishes, Don McGahn refused orders from the Department of Justice in the summer of 2017, and the Department of Defense denied requests from the Department of Homeland Security in October 2018. Whom Trump frequently referred to as "*deep state*".¹

2.1.2 Courts and independent agencies

Soon after his inauguration in 2016, he sought loyalty from heads of U.S. intelligence agencies, including the FBI, CIA, and NSA, apparently to shield against investigations into his campaign's Russia ties. During his first week, he summoned FBI Director James Comey to a one-on-one White House dinner, reportedly asking for a pledge of loyalty. He later pressured Comey to drop investigations into former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, pressed DNI Daniel Coats and CIA Director Mike Pompeo to intervene, and appealed to Coats and NSA head Michael Rogers to deny collusion (both refused).²

Trump punished agencies acting independently, most prominently firing Comey when he could not protect the administration and expanded the Russia probe the first preterm FBI dismissal in 82 years not tied to ethical violations. Similarly, he attempted to establish a personal relationship with Manhattan U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara, where later removing him when investigations threatened his inner circle. Trump also criticized judges: after Judge James Robart blocked the travel ban, Trump called it:

"The opinion of this so-called judge,"³

In addition, he criticized temporary blocks on withholding funds from sanctuary cities, even threatening to break up the Ninth Circuit. In August 2017, he pardoned controversial former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio without DOJ consultation,

¹ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 504–508.

² Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 141.

³ Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 142.

violating norms by issuing a politically motivated pardon popular with his base. Scholars warned such moves could undermine judicial independence. The administration also undermined the Office of Government Ethics (OGE). Director Walter Shaub criticized Trump during the transition, prompting White House attacks and attempts to halt investigations into ex-lobbyist appointments; later Shaub resigned.¹

Congressional attempts to hold the president accountable also faltered: Trump was impeached twice first in 2019 for withholding military aid to Ukraine and again in 2021 for the Capitol invasion but Senate Republicans blocked both removal efforts, prioritizing party loyalty over institutional integrity.²

Trump's behavior toward courts, law enforcement, and independent agencies followed an authoritarian playbook, including using the Department of Justice and FBI against Democrats. Yet he could not fully capture the referees: Senate Republicans blocked replacements of Comey and Sessions.

2.1.3 Transformation within the Republican Party (GOP)

The presidency of Donald Trump has profoundly reshaped the Republican Party, altering its relationship with democratic norms. This transformation reflects a broader process of partisan realignment with lasting implications for American democracy.

First, Trump's leadership has driven a marked rightward shift within the party. The GOP has increasingly incorporated previously marginal elements into its mainstream discourse. This evolution has fostered a political culture characterized by: anti-establishment rhetoric and emotional mobilization. As a result, ideological radicalization has become a defining feature of contemporary Republican identity. Second, this transformation has intensified the party's demographic and electoral

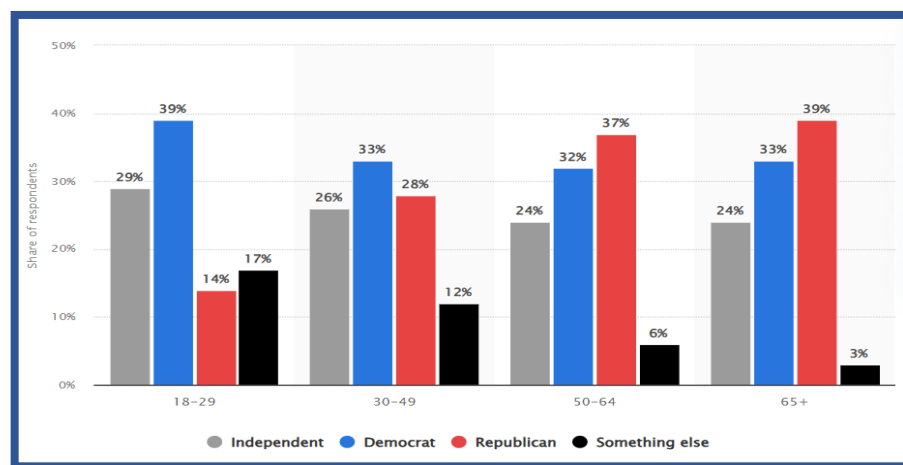
¹ Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 142–43.

² David M. Driesen, "Donald Trump and the Collapse of Checks and Balances," *SMU Law Review Forum* 77, no. 1 (2024): 203, <https://doi.org/10.25172/slrf.77.1.7>.

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challenges. The GOP has grown more reliant on an older, predominantly white electoral base, placing it at odds with long-term demographic trends in the United States.¹ As the electorate becomes more diverse, this reliance creates structural electoral vulnerabilities, particularly in national popular vote contests. In 2024, 57% of White voters supported Republicans as illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 7 Party identification in the United States in 2023, by age



Source: Statista²

According to the figure, Americans between 18 and 29 years of age were more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than any other surveyed age group. While 39 percent identified as Democrats, only 14 percent identified as Republicans. However, those 50 and older identified more with the Republican Party.

Third, decreasing the priority of party loyalty over institutional loyalty, rendering traditional guardrails such as impeachment and Senate confirmation increasingly ineffective. The Republican Party in Congress has transitioned from checking executive overreach to facilitating it. Despite the House of Representatives impeaching Donald Trump twice as mentioned before, Senate

¹ Michael Espinoza, "Donald Trump's Impact on the Republican Party," *Policy Studies* 42, nos. 5-6 (2021): 13-12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2021.1950667>.

² "Party Identification U.S. by Age 2023," Statista, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/319068/party-identification-in-the-united-states-by-generation/>.

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Republicans defeated both removal efforts, with many Senators refusing to convict him out of fear that barring his candidacy would permanently weaken their own electoral prospects.¹

The party has been largely purged of members who favor democratic institutions over the "***cult of personality***" surrounding Trump, and demographic changes and economic inequality have further eroded traditional support for the party, making it more reliant on Trump's base. This contrasts with the Watergate era, when both parties threatened to impeach President Nixon, illustrating that institutional loyalty once overcame partisan division in a way it no longer does.²

2.1.4 Press and Media

An independent press and media are a bulwark of democratic institutions; no democracy can live without them.

2.1.4.1 Public Criticism

Every American president since Washington has done battle with the media. Many of them privately despised it. However, with few exceptions, American presidents have recognized the media's centrality as a democratic institution and respected its place in the political system. Even presidents who scorned the media in private treated it with a certain minimum of respect and civility in public. This basic norm gave rise to a host of unwritten rules governing the president's relationship with the press. Some of these norms such as waving to the press corps before boarding Air Force One-were superficial, but others, such as holding press conferences accessible to all members of the White House press corps, were more significant.³

President Trump criticizes publicly the media outlets and even individual journalists. That is without precedent in modern American history. He describes

¹ Driesen, "Donald Trump and the Collapse of Checks and Balances," 202–203.

² Driesen, "Donald Trump and the Collapse of Checks and Balances," 206.

³ Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 159.

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the media as "among the most dishonest human beings on Earth," and repeatedly accuses such critical news outlets as the New York Times, the Washington Post, and CNN of delivering "fake news." Trump is not above personal attacks. Even Richard Nixon, who privately viewed the media as "the enemy," never made such public critics.¹ The following examples provide further evidence in support of this claim. During an interview, Donald Trump told the journalist:

"...CNN is a fake news... do not talk to me..."²

Donald Trump Clashes with New York Times Reporter during Tense Discussion on Iran:

"... You're Fake..."³

The public denigration of the media by President Trump constitutes a challenge to the norms underpinning American liberal democracy. Such behavior undermines trust in media institutions and sets a precedent that could weaken the press's role as a check on executive power, ultimately testing the resilience of democratic governance in the United States. This behavior had a profound impact on the American public, particularly among Republican constituents, whose trust in mainstream media has significantly declined.

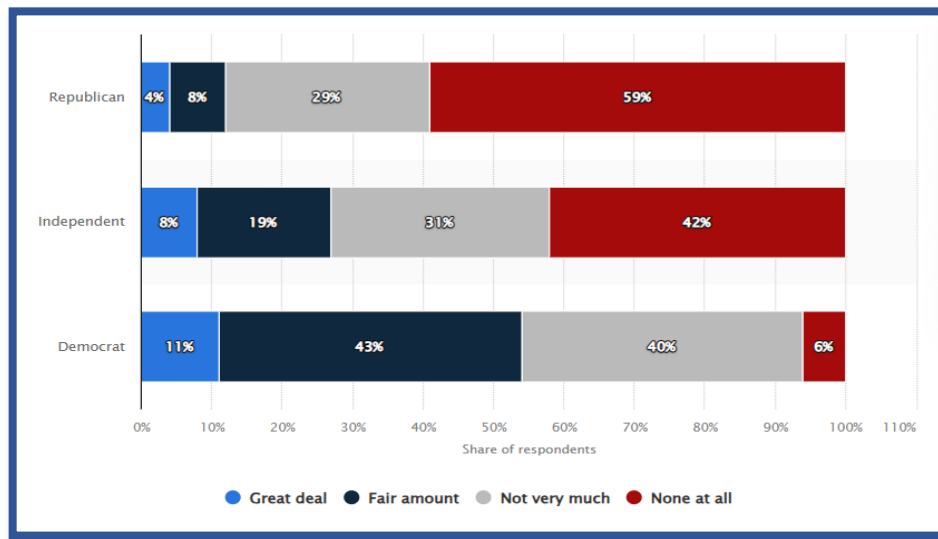
¹ Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 159.

² *Trump vs CNN Reporter*, n.d., accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/cjrPtdzYqWo>.

³ DRM News, "You're Fake", *Trump Clashes with New York Times Reporter over Iran War in Heated Exchange* | AC1G, 2026, 05:05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UY3bahufC8Q>.

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Figure 8 Level of trust mass media the United States as of September 2024, by political affiliation.



Source: Statista¹

President Trump also considered using government regulatory agencies against unfriendly media companies. During the 2016 campaign, he had threatened Jeff Bezos, the owner of the Washington Post and Amazon, with antitrust action, tweeting:

*"If I become president, oh do they have problems."*²

He also threatened to block the pending merger of Time Warner (CNN's parent company) and AT&T, and during the first months of his presidency, there were reports that White House advisors considered using the administration's antitrust authority as a source of advantage against CNN. In addition, in October 2017, Trump confronted NBC and other networks by threatening to "challenge their license." Trump went beyond threats, to try to use the machinery of government to punish critics. During his first week in office, President Trump signed an executive order authorizing federal agencies to withhold funding from "sanctuary cities" that refused to cooperate with the administration's restriction on undocumented

¹ "Trust Levels in Mass Media to Report News Fairly U.S. by Politics 2024 | Statista," accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1347601/trust-mass-media-party-us/>.

² Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 55.

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immigrants. "If we have to," he declared in February 2017, "we'll defund." However, he was blocked by the courts.¹

Trump also employs physical imagery and incitement, as in July 2017 when he shared a video on Twitter showing him hitting a figure whose head was replaced by the CNN logo, which CNN condemned as a potential call to violence. He broke long-standing traditions by refusing to attend the annual White House Correspondents Association dinner and forbidding his advisors from attending signaling defiance toward the press. Additionally, he has threatened to exclude networks, specifically Fox News, from hosting presidential debates if their coverage is deemed insufficiently supportive.²

In 2026, Trump criticized Pope Leo XIV. In an apparent response, Trump criticized the pope for "*catering to the Radical Left*" and failing to support the U.S. on matters of national security³. "I like his brother Louis much better than I like him, because Louis is all MAGA," Trump wrote, referring to Louis Prevost, who lives in Florida. "*He gets it, and Leo doesn't!*" Meloni, who has governed more as a pragmatist than an ideologue, took the pope's side: "I find President Trump's remarks about the Holy Father unacceptable." Trump did the hard work for Meloni in response, framing her as disloyal, not the person he thought he knew.⁴

Overall, these actions illustrate Trump's confrontational approach toward the media and his willingness to challenge established norms. However, although President Trump has waged a war of words against the media and other critics, those words have not (yet) led to action. No journalists have been arrested, and no media outlets have altered their coverage due to pressure from the government.⁵

¹ Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 144–45.

² Naves Marie-Cécile, "Donald Trump et les médias," 82–83.

³ *Trump Slams Pope for Being 'Weak on Crime,'* n.d., accessed May 1, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/shorts/DEMX1_83wlo.

⁴ "Anti-Trumpism Unites Europe - The New York Times," accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/22/world/anti-trumpism-europe-spain-italy-ukraine.html>.

⁵ Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 145.

2.1.2.4 False Statements

The political trajectory of Donald Trump is characterized as a "post-truth", an era defined by the use of propaganda. His political career is described as being grounded in the "birther" myth, erroneously claiming that Barack Obama was not born in the United States. In 2008: Trump began making a "big show" of demanding Obama's birth certificate, despite the Obama campaign providing photocopies of the original Hawaii certificate.¹

June 16, 2015: During his presidential campaign, Trump used inflammatory rhetoric, claiming Mexico sends "*people that have lots of problems,*" including "*drugs,*" "*crime,*" and "*rapists*". As a result, "**Build the Wall**" became a central campaign theme; however, former Mexican President Vicente Fox insisted Mexico would not pay for it, and studies showed more Mexicans were actually returning to Mexico than entering the U.S. between 2009 and 2014.²

Trump used media spectacle to dominate the political landscape. From mid-June to mid-July 2015, Trump received 46% of the news media coverage of the Republican field and 60% of Google news searches. June 2015: it was estimated Trump had received \$3 billion worth of free media coverage. August 21, 2015: A "mega-rally" in Mobile, Alabama, drew approximately 20,000 spectators. The media coverage of Trump's plane flying over the stadium is compared to the 1934 Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*.³

Rhetorical Devices: Trump utilized slogans with historical baggage, such as "America First" (linked to an anti-interventionist, often anti-Semitic movement in the early 1940s) and "the silent majority" (a term used by Richard Nixon in 1968 to appeal to aggrieved white voters).

¹ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 9.

² Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 448–49.

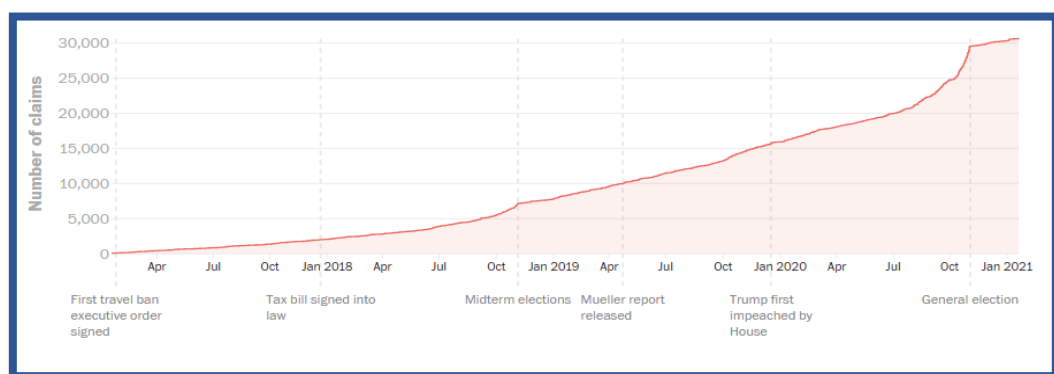
³ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 450.

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Trump's image as a self-made billionaire superhero: While Trump claimed he started with a \$1 million loan from his father, a New York Times exposé alleged he actually received the equivalent of over \$413 million in today's dollars from his father's real estate empire. *The Apprentice* (2005-2015): This show reinforced his image as a powerful leader.¹

In January 2017 Inauguration: Trump's team claimed he had the largest inauguration crowd in history. Despite claims of 31 million viewers, Nielsen reported 30.6 million, which was lower than Obama's 2009 inauguration (38 million) and Ronald Reagan's 1981 record (42 million). "Alternative Facts": Counselor Kellyanne Conway used this term to defend false statements made by Press Secretary Sean Spicer regarding crowd sizes.² In 2019, while COVID-19 Trump did not tell the truth about the pandemic, claiming the virus was "*under control*" and "*disappearing*" while it was actually ravaging the country. By January 24, 2021, The Washington Post had documented 30,573 false or misleading claims made by Trump over four years.

Figure 9 The False or Misleading Claims Made by President Trump While in Office First Mandate.



Source: Washington Post³

¹ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 454.

² Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 456.

³ "Analysis | Tracking All of President Trump's False or Misleading Claims," Washington Post, accessed April 8, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/>.

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The culmination of Trump's "politics of false statements" was the claim that the 2020 election was stolen in January 6, 2021 the Insurrection: Following the "***Stop the Steal***" movement, a mob assaulted the U.S. Capitol, attempting to overturn the Electoral College results. During the period from 2022 to 2024 Election: Despite these events, Trump announced that he would run for president again, continuing to assert that the 2020 election was fraudulent. The strategic use of "False Statements" by Trump poses a profound challenge to liberal democracy, normalizing misinformation, eroding trust in institutions, and undermining the legitimacy of elections. His tenure revealed how vulnerable democratic norms are when a leader prioritizes personal and political gain over objective truth.

2.1.5 Elections

Democracy depends on transparent and competitive elections; no democratic system can endure without them. In his first mandate in 2016, The Trump administration took early actions regarding voting rights. The creation of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity, chaired by Vice President Mike Pence and Kris Kobach, aimed to collect "***stories of fraud***" to justify state-level voter restrictions and encourage voter roll purges.¹

Efforts to implement strict voter identification "ID" laws disproportionately targeted low-income and minority voters, with one study noting that 25% of African Americans lacked government-issued identification compared to 8% of whites. Trump's first year in office in 2017 followed an "electoral authoritarian script", including attempts to sideline referees, pack the FBI with loyalists, and block investigations, though many efforts were slowed by Republican opposition or administrative mismanagement. While these actions tested the guardrails of democracy, the country did not immediately cross into authoritarianism, reflecting the typically gradual nature of democratic erosion.²

¹ Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 147.

² Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 148.

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Following the 2020 elections in which Donald Trump lost to Joe Biden. Trump and segments of the Republican Party sought to overturn the results through a combination of legal, extralegal, and rhetorical strategies. Trump's allies filed 62 lawsuits in state and federal courts, including a Supreme Court case supported by 126 Republican members of Congress aiming to nullify votes in four states. He personally pressured state officials, notably calling Georgia's Secretary of State to "find" votes and summoning Michigan legislative leaders to the White House to challenge their electoral votes.¹

Trump also attempted to use the Justice Department to declare the election corrupt and considered replacing the acting Attorney General with Jeffrey Clark, who was willing to support baseless claims. Conspiracy theories circulated regarding foreign interference, "Italygate," and alleged widespread voter fraud, amplified by sympathetic media outlets.²

However, given his multiple failures in court and in pressuring Republican officials in battleground states to overturn the election results, Trump switched to different tactic. Trump called on his followers to join him at a "Save America" rally at the Ellipse in Washington, DC, on January 6 in 2021 to what he called *"stop the steal."* On December 19, in 2020 he famously tweeted: "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!" Trump took the stage at 1:00 p.m., telling the tens of thousands in attendance:

"We will not take it anymore, and that's what this is all about"

"If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore"³

He called the 140 Republican members of Congress who promised to challenge the Electoral College vote **"warriors"** and **"patriots."** Trump urged the crowd to

¹ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 120–21.

² Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 122.

³ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 136.

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march to the Capitol building, saying; *"I'll be there with you"*. He then did not make his promise.¹

Organizations supported Trump, for instance The Proud Boys, led by Enrique Tarrio intensified their internal organization, adopting stricter coordination and instructing members to remain inconspicuous on January 6. Previously visible at pro-Trump events such as "Stop the Steal" rallies, the group shifted toward a more discreet posture, suggesting a higher level of strategic planning, and they helped support this political mobilization.²

As pro-Trump demonstrators threatened democracy from the outside of the Capitol building, Republican politicians threatened it from the inside. Starting with Missouri Senator Josh Hawley, who was infamously, photographed raising a fist in support of the rioters, 13 Republican Senators and 147 Representatives announced they would not vote to certify the Electoral College results. Democratic resistance to the voter suppression initiatives took place mostly at the federal level, where Biden's Department of Justice took the lead.³

A significant segment of the Republican Party actively supported or remained silent about these efforts, pressuring state legislatures, marginalizing dissenters, and signaling a shift toward prioritizing loyalty to Trump over democratic principles. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), Federal oversight later documented that extremist threats tied to election denial were detectable in open source data months before January 6, 2021, and that agencies were aware of planned violence directed at Congress.⁴

¹ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 136.

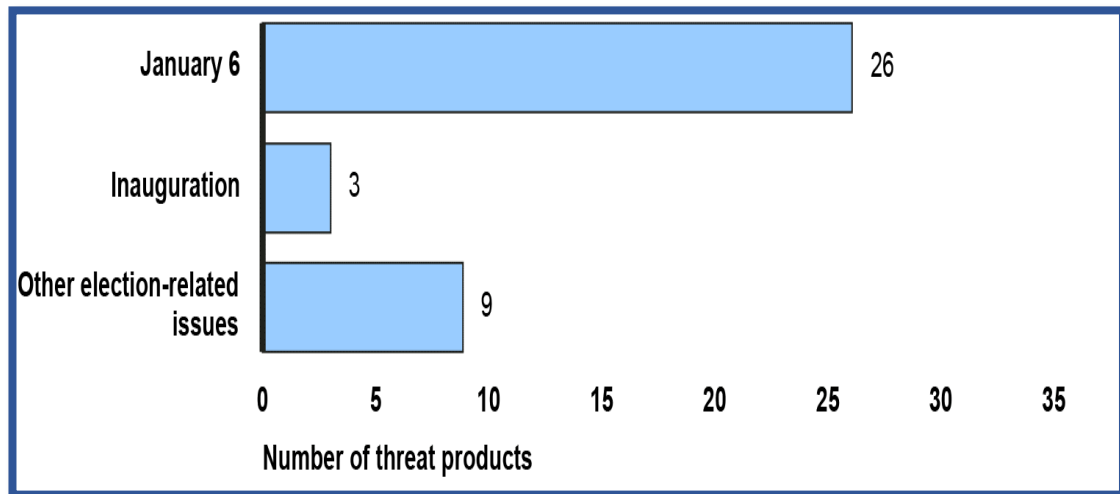
² "FINAL REPORT of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol," accessed May 3, 2026, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-REPORT/html-submitted/ch6.html>.

³ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 139.

⁴ "GAO-22-105963, CAPITOL ATTACK: Federal Agencies' Use of Open Source Data and Related Threat Products Prior to January 6, 2021," n.d., accessed April 8, 2026, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105963.pdf>.

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Figure 10 Number of Relevant Threat Products Agencies Developed Prior to January 6, 2021



Source: GAO¹

The 2020 elections demonstrates how Donald Trump used populist and manipulative rhetoric to mobilize his base and undermine democratic institutions, portraying himself as the sole defender of the people against a corrupt establishment. Many Republicans concluded that perhaps an extreme "Make America Great Again" based political strategy was not the road to success. The attempt to undo the 2020 election results failed, indicating that, however, weakened, the guard rails of American democracy held.

¹ "GAO-22-105963, CAPITOL ATTACK: Federal Agencies' Use of Open Source Data and Related Threat Products Prior to January 6, 2021," 2.

2.2 The Trump Administration and Public Policy

“We all bleed the same red blood of patriots, we all enjoy the same glorious freedoms, and we all salute the same great American Flag”

Donald J. Trump

2.2.1 Domestic Economy

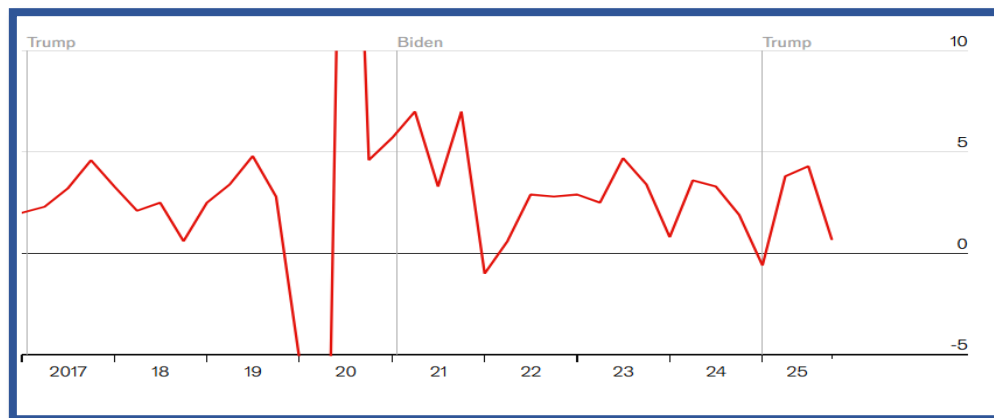
Trump is recognized for his "Protectionism" through strong support of American manufacturing. He aims to limit imports through the imposition of tariffs. He seeks to reduce regulations on domestic manufacturing and create more jobs within the US labor force, intending to decrease dependence on foreign businesses. Some scholars refer to this as "Trumponomics".*

In 2017, Trump's administration passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), which lowered individual and corporate tax rates. According to the Congressional Budget Office, whilst this spurred short-term economic growth, it primarily benefited higher-income households and contributed to the federal budget deficit, adding approximately \$1.9 trillion to the national debt over ten years. In addition, Trump increased government spending, notably on defense and the military. Despite his campaign promise to eliminate the national debt, it grew by 39%, reaching \$27.75 trillion by the end of his term in January 2021.¹

* The term used to describe President Donald Trump's economic policies and plans.

¹ "Trumponomics 2025: Economic Effects, Market & Policy Impact," Plus500, accessed May 2, 2026, <https://us.plus500.com/newsandmarketinsights/trumponomics-explained-what-are-donald-trumps-economic-effects>.

Figure 11 GDP percentage change from “2017 to mid-2025”



Source: The Economist¹

In the third quarter of 2025, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 4.4% on an annualized basis well above the already-impressive 2.4% achieved between 2022 and 2024 on average. However, the fourth-quarter figure was unexpectedly low at 0.7%. GDP growth slowed mainly for a technical reason: the government shutdown in October and November.

The COVID-19 crisis in 2020-2021 caused a severe economic disruption, resulting in a 3.4% contraction in GDP in 2020, the sharpest decline since the Great Depression. The unemployment rate surged to 14.8% in April 2020. In response, the administration enacted the CARES Act in March 2020, forming part of a \$3 trillion stimulus package. Approximately 160 million Americans received direct financial assistance payments of up to \$1,200. The economy subsequently rebounded in 2021 with 5.7% GDP growth, the highest since 1984.²

For his second mandate, sector-specific domestic policies further include cuts of 35-50% to health and medical research, and general science and technology research funding. Raising concerns about a weakening of the US research pipeline and declining global leadership in Artificial intelligence and biomedicine,

¹ "The US Economy under Donald Trump," The Economist, accessed May 2, 2026, <https://www.economist.com/interactive/trump-approval-tracker/economy>.

² Radu Livui and Radu Carmen, *AMERICA FIRST: ASSESSING THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE FIRST TRUMP ADMINISTRATION*, n.d., 617.

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alongside healthcare reforms targeting Medicaid reductions of up to \$880 billion, layoffs of 10,000 Health and Human Service HHS employees, and the dismantling of epidemic surveillance committees, which increase vulnerability to public health crises.¹

For environmental and climate policies: it involves withdrawal from the Paris Accord, freezing wind project leases, rolling back Environmental Protection Agency regulations, increase oil and gas development in Alaska and repealing clean energy tax credits that could increase household energy expenditures by up to \$430 annually.²

One of the most significant institutional transformations undertaken during the Trump administration was the rapid deployment of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) created by executive order; it is not a federal department but a task force led by Elon Musk. DOGE's activities included an extensive staffing reviews and targeted staff removals across multiple agencies, including examining all new civil service hires, attempts to dismantle or drastically cut federal agencies, including Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). That is undergoing significant restructuring and downsizing under acting leadership and accessing federal payment systems, including those of the American Treasury.³

In November 2025, it was reported that DOGE contrary to reports of ceasing operations continued its work with a focus on artificial intelligence (AI) and information technology (IT) modernization through its long-term counterpart. DOGE's aggressive moves to shutter and downsize federal agencies without the backing of congressional authority and U.S. law could, if allowed to stand by U.S. courts, generate significant institutional and socio-economic consequences,

¹ Gary Gensler et al., eds., *The Economic Consequences of the Second Trump Administration: A Preliminary Assessment*, Rapid Response Economics 6 (CEPR Press, 2025), 170.

² Gensler et al., *The Economic Consequences of the Second Trump Administration*, 181.

³ Stella Osoba Full Bio Stella Osoba is the Senior Editor of trading et al., "How Trump's Second Term Could Shape the U.S. Economy," Investopedia, accessed May 2, 2026, <https://www.investopedia.com/donald-trump-presidency-economic-impact-8666666>.

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including substantial job losses in Washington and other regions with high concentrations of government employment.¹

Overall, the domestic economic and public policy agenda associated with the Trump administration reflects a coherent shift toward protectionism, deregulation, and executive-driven restructuring of the federal state. While policies such as tax reductions, tariff-based industrial strategy, and labor market restrictions are framed as mechanisms to strengthen national production and economic sovereignty, their outcomes reveal a more complex and contested set of effects, including rising fiscal pressures, uneven distributional impacts, and potential constraints on long-term growth. These developments suggest that the Trump policy framework not only reshapes economic governance but also redefines the role of the state through the expansion of administrative centralization.

2.2.2 Socio-cultural transformations

2.2.2.1 Women

In this section, the impact of the Trump administration's policies and rhetoric on women is analyzed through the dual lenses of "lawfare" and "wordfare," both of which reveal how institutional and discursive power mechanisms interacted to reshape gendered rights and norms in the United States.

Lawfare perspective:

The most consequential long-term outcome was the 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which overturned *Roe v. Wade* and ended federal constitutional protection for abortion rights that had been in place since 1973. This decision can be understood as the result of several decades of sustained anti-abortion advocacy and legal mobilization. It was also facilitated by changes in the composition of the Supreme Court during the

¹ trading et al., "How Trump's Second Term Could Shape the U.S. Economy."

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presidency of Donald Trump, including the appointments of Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett. In addition, the administration appointed 226 federal judges, contributing to a measurable shift in the demographic composition of the federal judiciary, with approximately 76% of appointees being men and 84% identified as white.¹

Alongside domestic legal restructuring, the administration also reshaped reproductive healthcare access through federal policy: "Gag Rule" finalized in March 2019 barred providers receiving federal funding from referring patients for abortion services, resulting in 981 clinics approximately one in four providers exiting the network and jeopardizing care for 1.6 million female patients.²

Similarly, modifications to the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program redirected funding toward abstinence-only approaches, while a 2020 Supreme Court ruling upheld employer religious exemptions that allowed exclusion of contraception coverage, affecting approximately 62 million women.³

Wordfare perspective:

It demonstrates how rhetorical practices and public discourse functioned as tools of symbolic power that reinforced patriarchal structures. The term refers to the weaponization of language in the Trump era, it manifested through both personal and institutional communication.

Trump's rhetoric included statements that received extensive media attention. During his political career, he also engaged in public criticism of several female political figures, including Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, and Maxine Waters in

¹ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 314.

² Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 317.

³ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 317.

2018. In 2019, he addressed four congressional representatives' women of color with the statement that they should "go back to the places from which they came".¹

Taken together, the interplay of lawfare and wordfare illustrates how the Trump administration's policy choices and rhetorical practices jointly contributed to a structural and symbolic reconfiguration of women's rights, access to healthcare, and public legitimacy within the American political system.

However, White evangelical Christian women supported Donald Trump mainly because they prioritized political and religious goals over his personal behavior. They were willing to overlook his controversial character because they believed he would advance their key interests, especially appointing conservative Supreme Court justices and protecting abortion restrictions. For example, many saw him a modern "King Cyrus," meaning a flawed leader used by God to achieve a greater purpose. Others justified their support by comparing him to other politicians they also viewed as morally flawed, which made his behavior seem no worse in comparison. This helped reduce their discomfort about supporting him.²

Their support was also strengthened by media and identity factors: many relied on conservative outlets like Fox News and saw mainstream media as biased, which reinforced an "us vs. them" mindset. In this way, supporting Trump became part of their religious and political identity, not just a personal choice.

2.2.2.2 Black Lives Matter

The presidency of Donald Trump influenced the trajectory of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, particularly through "law-and-order" rhetoric that characterized the movement as a "Marxist organization" and its activists as "thugs" or "anarchists."³ Some scholars argue that such discourse contributed to narratives

¹ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 465.

² Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 238–41.

³ Akande, *U. S. Democracy in Danger*, 346.

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of racial polarization and perceptions of group-based grievance among segments of his political base.

2.2.2.3 Bias

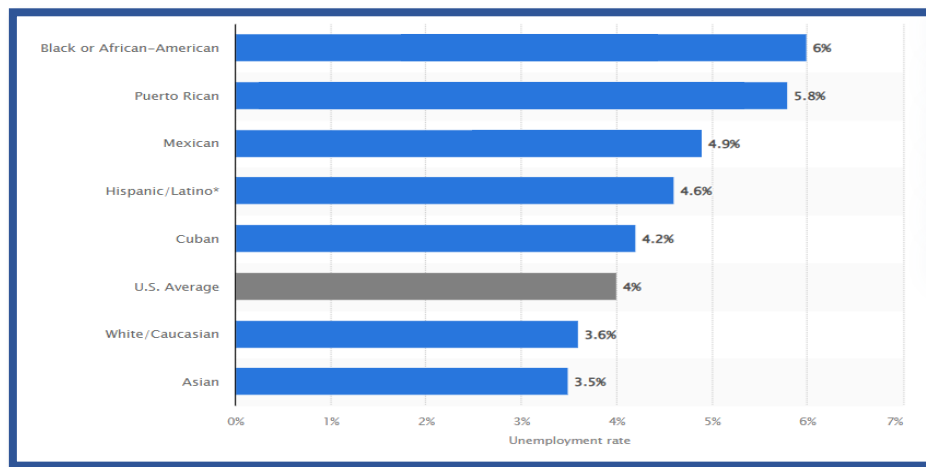
White supremacy is indirectly reflected in Donald Trump's political discourse through specific discursive strategies that function as ideological mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. His rhetoric operates both explicitly and implicitly, whereby positive and negative attributes are differentially assigned to in-groups and out-groups, thereby contributing to the construction of social and political hierarchies. As discussed in Part One, Trump's discourse is often characterized by a subjective framing rather than strictly evidence-based argumentation, frequently relying on expressions such as "I think" or "I believe," as well as modal adverbs like "probably," which present generalized claims as personal opinion rather than empirically verified statements.

Within this framework, Trump's discourse may be examined through predication strategies, whereby certain attributes are ascribed to social groups, for instance when Mexican immigrants are described in terms associated with issues in some of his statements.

"...when Mexico sends its people they're not sending their best they're not sending you they're not sending you they're sending people that have lots of problems and they're bringing those problems with us..."¹

¹ Trump Of The Day, *Donald Trump on Mexicans - Drug Dealers and Rapists (2016 Election)*, 2017, 01:10, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHRCi9j9VTc>.

Figure 12 Unemployment in the United States by Ethnicity



Source: Statista¹

As illustrated in the figure, unemployment is higher among Black, Porto Rican and Mexican, while White and Asian populations have lower rates, below the national average. That is why Trump consider them as a problem.

Referential strategies are also observable, through which groups are categorized using social or identity-based markers, sometimes resulting in generalized associations. Perspectivation or framing strategies further appear in the emphasis on personal involvement and subjective positioning, which can serve to justify claims without explicit empirical substantiation, which construct hierarchical representations of groups, such as portraying Asians as lacking business manners or stereotyping Jewish people as particularly “trusted” with money. An illustrative example: Donald Trump in describing the difference between the American way and the Chinese/Japanese way of negotiation deals:

¹ “Unemployment Rate by Race Ethnicity U.S. 2024| Statista,” accessed May 3, 2026, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/237917/us-unemployment-rate-by-race-and-ethnicity/>.

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"Negotiating with Japan, negotiating with China, when these people walk into the room, they don't say, 'Oh, hello, how is the weather, so beautiful outside, isn't it lovely? How are the Yankees doing?'"¹

The fragment has been considered as having prejudiced remarks. By reading the text carefully, we can refer to the stereotypical strategy, which Trump has tackled while describing Chinese and Japanese. In other words. Trump identifies some traits in the linguistic form of explicit and implicit predicates the first interpretation of Trump's words is that he tries to encircle Chinese and Japanese with the lack of manner, such as saying hello, inquiring or describing the weather etc. Therefore, from his speech, it is a direct realization of negative traits to describe Chinese and Japanese and an indirect realization of the positive traits of Americans.²

Overall, Trump's language can be interpreted as contributing to the generalization of certain characteristics across social and ethnic groups, producing pragmatic meanings that may be associated with processes of exclusion. Such discourse may reinforce existing social and political divisions along racial, gendered, and ideological lines, which can complicate processes of consensus building and the maintenance of shared democratic norms that are often considered important for liberal democratic systems.

2.2.3 Project 2025

Project 2025, formally known as the 2025 Presidential Transition Project, is a unified effort by the conservative movement to ensure that the next conservative administration is prepared to govern starting at noon on January 20, 2025. Led by the Heritage Foundation and a coalition of more than 50 leading conservative organizations.

¹ "Donald Trump Mocks Asians With Broken-English Accent During Campaign Rally In Iowa [VIDEO] | IBTimes," accessed May 3, 2026, <https://www.ibtimes.com/donald-trump-mocks-asians-broken-english-accent-during-campaign-rally-iowa-video-2069216>.

² "Political Discourse Analysis: A Critical Analysis of Trump's Political Speeches.," 165, accessed April 6, 2026, https://www.academia.edu/42721968/Political_Discourse_Analysis_a_Critical_Analysis_of_Trump_s_Political_Speeches?auto=download.

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It provides a comprehensive blueprint for a potential second Donald Trump administration and constitutes a systematic preparation for a "**Trump 2.0**" term through four primary pillars¹ of influence designed to provide the personnel and policy framework necessary for immediate action upon the next President's inauguration, thereby ensuring rapid operational readiness and coordinated implementation across executive structures.

Table 8 the Four Functional Pillars of the 2025 Presidential Transition Project

Pillar I	The Policy Guide: Mandate For Leadership	The Conservative Promise provides a consensus view of how federal agencies should be governed and offers concrete policy recommendations.
Pillar II	The Personnel Database	A database that allows conservative candidates to build professional profiles, which are then reviewed and collated for the incoming President's team to streamline the appointment process.
Pillar III	The Presidential Administration Academy	An educational system taught by experts to train both newcomers and experienced leaders on how the government functions and how to function within it.
Pillar IV	The Playbook	Transition plans and agency-specific "playbooks" drafted to be implemented as soon as the President takes the oath of office.

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Project 2025 is grounded in the core axiom that "**personnel is policy**", reflecting a strategic effort to restructure the federal state by recruiting, vetting, and training

¹ Radosław Arkady Fiedler, "Project 2025: A Blueprint for Transforming Donald Trump's Administration 2.0," *Journal of Modern Science* 64, no. 4 (2025): 111, <https://doi.org/10.13166/jms/215087>.

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thousands of conservatives to replace career bureaucrats from the outset of a new administration. The project advances a transformative vision of governance centered on dismantling the "*un-fireable*" administrative apparatus and reasserting direct presidential control over federal agencies. Notably through mechanisms such as the reinstatement of Schedule F, the centralization of appointments within the Office of Presidential Personnel, and the enhanced coordinating role of the Office of Management and Budget as the "keeper of commander's intent." This institutional reconfiguration is accompanied by a broader agenda of structural consolidation, including the redistribution of key departments such as Education and Homeland Security.¹

Economically, the project promotes a program of tax simplification, deregulation, and monetary reorientation, including the reduction of tax rates, the curtailment of the Federal Reserve's dual mandate, and a strategy of trade recalibration marked by decoupling from China. In the realm of public policy, it advances socially conservative objectives focused on "restoring the family".²

Unlike past administrations that relied on a non-partisan civil service, Project 2025 has built personnel recruitment database designed to replace career civil servants with ideological loyalists. Redefining federal policy language, restructuring health and education systems, and expanding domestic energy production while rolling back environmental frameworks. In terms of national sovereignty in defense and foreign policy, it includes the prioritization of strategic threats, withdrawal from international organizations, and the tightening of border controls.³

The Heritage Foundation's historical record of accomplishment reinforces the significance of this preparation; for example, the Reagan administration implemented approximately 60% of Heritage's recommendations from a similar

¹ "Project 2025," n.d., 7–32.

² "Project 2025," 3.

³ "Project 2025," 191.

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mandate in the 1980s.¹ The project 2025-policy agenda also raises concerns regarding civil liberties and social pluralism, particularly through proposed bans on gender-affirming care, restrictions on reproductive rights, and mass deportations, which civil rights organizations interpret as threats to marginalized groups, and withdrawal of federal funding from universities that support them.

In health care policy, the project seeks to institute a "Life Agenda" by removing terms such as "abortion" and "reproductive health" from all federal regulations. Key proposals include the establishment of a de facto nationwide abortion ban through the application of the Comstock Act to prohibit the mailing of medication abortion, the expansion of federal surveillance over pregnant individuals, and the authorization of medical providers to deny care based on personal religious beliefs, thereby raising significant concerns regarding access to healthcare autonomy. The project denies the existence of transgender identities, seeking its prohibition. It further proposes the removal of anti-discrimination protections in housing and employment, alongside the exclusion of federal funding for gender-affirming care.²

Taken together, these elements illustrate that Project 2025 constitutes not merely a policy agenda, but a comprehensive attempt to realign institutional authority, ideological orientation, and state capacity in accordance with the broader political logic of Trumpism. This level of preparation is grounded in the "**unitary executive theory**" mentioned in the earlier sections, which seeks to maximize presidential authority over the "*administrative state*". By centralizing power and pre-vetting loyalist staff, the project aims to avoid the perceived "bureaucratic overreach" and internal resistance that supporters believe hindered Trump's first term.

¹ Fiedler, "Project 2025," 107.

² "Project 2025: What It Means for Women, Families, and Gender Justice.," n.d., 3-4-8.

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The strategic role of the Heritage Foundation reflects a broader evolution in think tank influence within American politics. Such institutions have shifted from academic "idea incubators" to powerful brokers of policy translation. As a result, ongoing concerns about transparency and donor influence raise questions about the neutrality of policy formulation and the extent to which these organizations serve ideological rather than purely scholarly functions.

2.3 International Position of the United States

“Populists perceive international politics through a moralistic point of view”

Mudde C. Kaltwasser

2.3.1 Shifts in Foreign Policy

2.3.1.1 Donald Trump's worldview

Donald Trump's worldview represents a populist-nationalist shift that marks a clear departure from the long-standing tradition of liberal internationalism in U.S. foreign policy. In terms of national identity, liberal internationalism historically grounded foreign policy in universal ideals and normative principles. By contrast, Trump's paradigm emphasizes a more particularistic conception of the nation, portraying the United States as defined by a distinct cultural and civilizational identity, with a specific “*reason for being*” that extends beyond its role as economic actor in a global system.¹

Trump's approach reflects a zero-sum understanding of international relations. Lindberg argued, for Trump the relevant standards are Hobbesian realism.² Rather than viewing global politics through the lens of interdependence and mutual benefit, he interprets it as a competitive arena in which states vie for power, dominance, and material advantage. From this perspective, earlier commitments to extensive international engagement are criticized as having enabled other countries to accumulate gains at the perceived expense of American wealth, strength, and influence.

Another central feature of this worldview is its hostility to “globalism”, which is framed as a transnational, elite-driven system often associated with a “Davos”

¹ Edward Ashbee and Steven Hurst, “The Trump Foreign Policy Record and the Concept of Transformational Change,” *Global Affairs* 6, no. 1 (2020): 10–11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2020.1734954>.

² Joseph S. Nye, *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*, ProQuest Ebook Central (Oxford University Press, 2020), 172.

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elite that privileges international actors while undermining domestic working-class interests. This framing reinforces a broader populist critique of being anti-establishments and anti-elite.¹

Moreover, Trump privileges a bilateral and transactional approach to international economic relations. He expresses skepticism toward large multilateral agreements, which he views as diluting U.S. advantage, and instead favors one-on-one negotiations that maximize asymmetric advantages derived from American economic and strategic power. This worldview departs from the normative tradition of moral leadership in U.S. foreign policy.

Whereas liberal internationalism incorporated the promotion of democracy universal values, Trump explicitly rejects this role. He asserts that the United States should not "lecture" other nations on how to govern or organize their societies. The logic of Trumpism is simply to criticize the other empires, exploiting the fact that they are both weaker than the United States, in order to extract concessions and claim victories. Trump declared in his inaugural address:

"We've defended other nations' borders while refusing to defend our own and spent trillions and trillions of dollars overseas while America has fallen into disrepair and decay.... From this day forward, it is going to be only America first.... Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength... We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example..."²

The Trump administration's approach to foreign policy is characterized by a rejection of both Bush-era adventurism and perceived Obama-era weakness as he sees. It is grounded in a "**Peace through Strength**" logic, whereby the primary goal is the pursuit of "**strength**" rather than "**leadership**" based on the belief that a strong military depends on a revitalized U.S. economy, a view that in some respects aligns with the Chinese concept of "comprehensive national power".³

¹ Ashbee and Hurst, "The Trump Foreign Policy Record and the Concept of Transformational Change," 11.

² Nye, *Do Morals Matter?* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 171.

³ "Foreign Policy in the Trump Administration," n.d., 2.

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In parallel, in economic and transactional terms define foreign relationships, reflecting a “*deal making*” mindset that often overlooks the connective tissue between geopolitical issues. This approach is reinforced by Disruption as Strategy, in which Trump and his advisors argue that uncertainty among allies and adversaries increases bargaining advantage, though experts caution that this undermines the predictability required for the international order established in the 1940s and 1950s.¹

President Trump contends that his “America First” foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American security above all else. The term “America First” aims to capture President Trump's view that the United States is in decline and that previous administrations allowed other nations to take advantage of the United States a position he has more or less espoused for decades.²

While President Trump may have termed his approach to foreign policy, “America First,” scholars argue that in practice, his policy should be called “Trump First.” Trump's approach is driven more by his own impulses than a sense of commitment or duty to pursue American interests. One former senior U.S. official compared President Trump's administration to a “royal court” where “everyone is jockeying for favor; instead of a “functioning cabinet, he has courtiers.” In this official's view, there is “no Trump doctrine, no Trump government or administration”; the only constants in White House decision-making are “Trump's impulsive, convulsive, intuitive approach, and the fact that, if something's important, he has to do it himself.”³

¹ “Foreign Policy in the Trump Administration,” 2.

² VerDate Mar, *The Cost of Trump's Foreign Policy: Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security*, n.d., 11.

³ Mar, *The Cost of Trump's Foreign Policy: Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security*, 12.

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Beyond what has been mentioned, Trump's foreign policy according to scholars is based on, chaos instead of process¹, he often announce a new policy or shift through twitter, and here are some examples in the following table:

Table 9 Unpredictable Foreign Policy Tweets by President Donald Trump

July 2018	Threatened Iranian President Rouhani: "...never, ever threaten the united states again, or you will suffer consequences the likes of which few throughout history have ever suffered before..." ²
January 2020	Threatened Iran that the U.S. military will "quickly & fully strike back, & perhaps in a disproportionate manner," if the country attacks Americans, and claimed that the tweet served as a notification to Congress. ³

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According to Joseph Nye, American soft power has declined considerably after the beginning of the Trump administration, as tweets can help to set the global agenda but do not produce soft power if their tone and substance are offensive to foreign publics and leaders. Many of Trump's tweets are far from diplomatic in their language or personal criticism of foreign countries or leaders. Trump's defenders replied that soft power does not matter. Trump's budget director, Mick Mulvaney, proclaimed *"Hard power budget"* as he reduced funds for the State Department and the US Agency for International Development by 30%.⁴

Neglect of key global threats; one of the most notable features of President Trump's foreign policy is his neglect, perhaps intentional, of pressing global

¹ Mar, *The Cost of Trump's Foreign Policy: Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security*, 12.

² "Donald J. Trump sur X : 'To Iranian President Rouhani: NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE. WE ARE NO LONGER A COUNTRY THAT WILL STAND FOR YOUR DEMENTED WORDS OF VIOLENCE & DEATH. BE CAUTIOUS!' / X," X (formerly Twitter), July 23, 2018, <https://x.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1021234525626609666>.

³ "Donald J. Trump sur X : 'These Media Posts will serve as notification to the United States Congress that should Iran strike any U.S. person or target, the United States will quickly & fully strike back, & perhaps in a disproportionate manner. Such legal notice is not required, but is given nevertheless!' / X," X (formerly Twitter), January 5, 2020, <https://x.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1213919480574812160>.

⁴ Nye, *Do Morals Matter?* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 173.

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problems, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and global forced migration. Under President Trump, the United States has severely curtailed its domestic efforts to slow its emission of greenhouse gases, and the United States has completely abandoned the Paris Climate Agreement. In the face of an unprecedented crisis of global migration, the United States has retreated from humanitarian obligations and international cooperation and dealt a grave blow to the international system set up to manage displaced people.¹

Efforts to advance his own personal and political interests; foreign leaders who were willing to flatter Trump often received more favorable policy outcomes, while those who did not faced personal attacks and more hostile policy shifts. For example, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe successfully used flattery describing Trump as "**bright and talented**" and a "**trustworthy leader**" to cultivate a strong bilateral relationship. In contrast, Trump frequently criticized German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who did not engage in such actions, and repeatedly threatened Germany with auto tariffs.²

Another example of President Trump's interactions with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is often described as the "**clearest example**" of using U.S. foreign policy for domestic political gain. Trump withheld critical U.S. security assistance to Ukraine, despite its need for military support against Russian forces, including equipment such as sniper rifles and counter-artillery radars. During a July 25, 2019 phone call, he pressured Zelensky to investigate his political opponent Joe Biden, explicitly asking him to "*do us a favor though.*" This pressure was intended to benefit Trump's 2020 election prospects, despite assessments from U.S. national security agencies that the aid served American strategic interests. These actions ultimately contributed to the initiation of impeachment proceedings against him in late 2019.³

¹ Mar, *The Cost of Trump's Foreign Policy: Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security*, 18.

² Mar, *The Cost of Trump's Foreign Policy: Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security*, 24.

³ Mar, *The Cost of Trump's Foreign Policy: Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security*, 27.

Finally, Trump's foreign policy is based on expansionism too, reflected in proposals to acquire Greenland, integrate Canada as a 51st state, and regain strategic control over the Panama Canal, notably after the March 6, 2025 BlackRock deal to repurchase key ports from Chinese control.¹

2.3.1.2 National Security Strategy 2025

The 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS) is structured around a set of clearly defined priorities. It emphasizes securing U.S. borders against mass immigration, terrorism, and narcotics trafficking; building the world's most powerful military, with a particular focus on nuclear deterrence; and advancing economic innovation through the use of tariffs, the reshoring of supply chains, and the pursuit of energy dominance, alongside a rejection of "Net Zero" climate policies.

In the international sphere, the strategy seeks to stabilize the Western Hemisphere through a "Trump Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific in response to China's rise, and support European security while encouraging a revival of its Western civilizational identity. A notable section is devoted to the preservation of American values, framed as grounded in God-given natural rights² (an intellectual lineage often associated with thinkers such as John Locke as stated in part one), freedom of speech, and religious liberty.

The NSS advances an America First strategy that rejects post-Cold War globalism, prioritizes sovereignty, industrial and military power, and reorients U.S. leadership toward transactional dominance and regional preeminence rather than liberal internationalism.³

¹ Donald Trump, *Donald Trump, the World Order and the European Union: Neoimperialism or Second Cold War?*, n.d., 6–7.

² Yannick Harrel, "ANALYSE - La Stratégie de Sécurité Nationale des États-Unis en 2025 : Un miroir des divergences transatlantiques," *Le Diplomate*, January 8, 2026, <https://lediplomate.media/analyse-strategie-securite-nationale-etats-unis-2025-miroir-divergences-transatlantiques/>.

³ Bonnie Stratton, "Analysis: The US National Security Strategy," *CT Group - Trusted Global Consultancy for Strategic Success*, December 15, 2025, <https://ctgroup.com/newsroom/analysis-the-us-national-security-strategy/>.

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The table below demonstrates the main shifts in the U.S. national security strategy:

Table 10 Key Policy Shifts in the U.S. Security Strategy 2025

Policy area	Post-cold war consensus (1991-2024)	2025 NSS – Trump 2.0
Primary Threat	External (“Authoritarian States”, “Terror”)	Internal ("Internal Subversion", "Deep State")
Border Policy	Management & Law Enforcement	Militarization ("Primary Element of Security")
NATO Funding	2% of GDP Target (Aspirational)	5% of GDP Target (Mandatory for Protection)
Trade Policy	Free Trade / WTO Integration	Universal Tariffs (10%) / Reciprocity
Russia Strategy	Containment / Isolation	Strategic Stability / Reintegration (Anti- China)
Latin America	Partnership/Cooperation	Monroe Doctrine / Kinetic Strikes on Cartels

Source: GovFacts¹

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Overall, the 2025 NSS marks a shift toward a more assertive, sovereignty-centered framework that redefines threats, recalibrates alliances, and prioritizes power projection and national resilience over cooperative international governance.

¹ Deborah Rod, “An Analysis of Trump’s 2025 National Security Strategy,” *GovFacts*, December 7, 2025, <https://govfacts.org/policy-security/an-analysis-of-trumps-2025-national-security-strategy/>.

2.3.2 “America First” Implications

2.3.2.1 International organizations and agreements

This section is analyzed according to the “*Poliheuristic theory*” which explains foreign policy decision-making as a two-stage process:

- In the first stage, policymakers use cognitive shortcuts to eliminate options that threaten domestic political survival or contradict core values.
- In the second stage, the administration conducts a more rational cost benefit evaluation of the remaining alternatives (renegotiation or withdrawal).¹

Trump, in his first mandate applied this across five key cases: the Paris Agreement (2020), where Trump argued that climate commitments imposed economic burdens with limited long-term temperature reduction effects. The United States joined back in 2021 under Biden presidency. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (2017), which was rejected due to concerns over wage disparities and its perceived disadvantage to U.S. workers despite tariff- reduction benefits. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) (2018), from which the U.S. withdrew over alleged institutional bias and unmet reform demands. UNESCO, (2017) where financial arrears and perceived political bias outweighed benefits such as heritage-linked tourism. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), (2018) where continued funding was deemed inconsistent with shifting domestic security priorities despite the U.S. role as a major donor.²

In his second mandate, on February 4, 2025, Trump issued Executive Order 14199 (Withdrawing the United States from and Ending Funding to Certain United Nations Organizations and Reviewing United States Support to All International

¹ Muhammad Alfian Maulana and Nur Rachmat Yulianto, “Donald Trump’s Foreign Policy: Withdrawal From International Regimes and Organizations,” *Intermestic: Journal of International Studies* 8, no. 2 (2024): 539, <https://doi.org/10.24198/intermestic.v8n2.6>.

² Maulana and Yulianto, “Donald Trump’s Foreign Policy,” 546.

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Organizations). That Executive Order directed the Secretary of State, in consultation with the United States Representative to the United Nations, to conduct a review of all international intergovernmental organizations of which the United States is a member and provides any type of funding or other support, and all conventions and treaties to which the United States is a party. To determine which organizations, conventions, and treaties are contrary to the interests of the United States.¹

In January 7, 2026, President Trump announced officially the withdrawal of the United States from 66 international organizations identified as part of the Trump Administration's review of wasteful, ineffective, and harmful international organizations. Review of additional international organizations pursuant to Executive Order 14199 remains ongoing.²

Table 11 International Organizations from which the United States Withdrew “2025-2026”

Non United Nations Organizations	United Nations Organizations
24/7 Carbon-Free Energy Compact.	Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
Colombo Plan Council.	Economic Commission for Africa.
Commission for Environmental Cooperation.	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.
Education Cannot Wait.	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.
European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats.	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.
Forum of European National Highway Research Laboratories.	International Law Commission.
Freedom Online Coalition.	

¹ Presidential Memoranda, “Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations, Conventions, and Treaties That Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States,” *The White House*, January 7, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-conventions-and-treaties-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states/>.

² “Withdrawal from Wasteful, Ineffective, or Harmful International Organizations,” *United States Department of State*, n.d., accessed May 4, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/01/withdrawal-from-wasteful-ineffective-or-harmful-international-organizations/>.

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Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund.	International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.
Global Counterterrorism Forum.	International Trade Centre.
Global Forum on Cyber Expertise.	Office of the Special Adviser on Africa.
Global Forum on Migration and Development.	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children in Armed Conflict.
Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research.	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.
Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals, and Sustainable Development.	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.	Peacebuilding Commission.
Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.	Peacebuilding Fund.
International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property.	Permanent Forum on People of African Descent
International Cotton Advisory Committee.	UN Alliance of Civilizations.
International Development Law Organization.	UN Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries.
International Energy Forum.	UN Conference on Trade and Development.
International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies.	UN Democracy Fund.
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.	UN Energy.
International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law.	UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.
International Lead and Zine Study Group.	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
International Renewable Energy Agency.	UN Human Settlements Programme.
International Solar Alliance.	UN Institute for Training and Research.
International Tropical Timber Organization.	UN Oceans.
International Union for Conservation of Nature.	UN Population Fund.
	UN Register of Conventional Arms.

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Pan American Institute of Geography and History.	UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.
Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation.	UN System Staff College.
Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia.	UN Water.
Regional Cooperation Council.	UN University.
Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century.	
Science and Technology Center in Ukraine.	
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme.	
Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.	

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In addition, in 22 January 2026, the Trump administration officially announced its withdrawal from World Health Organization (WHO). Trump justified this as the organization's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic that arose out of Wuhan, China, and other global health crises, its failure to adopt urgently needed reforms, and its inability to demonstrate independence from the inappropriate political influence of WHO member states.¹

Overall, the withdrawal represents the most politically and strategically rational choice within the framework of Poliheuristic theory, where the “remain” option is excluded because it conflicted with the “America First” agenda while withdrawing aligned with its objectives. It reduces financial and political constraints, and fulfills key electoral promises, but at the cost of diminishing U.S. international influence. As this pattern reflects a broader strategic retrenchment of the United States from multilateral governance structures, contributing to weakening institutional rule-based cooperation. It also reduces U.S. agenda-setting capacity within

¹ Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “U.S. Formally Withdraws From World Health Organization,” U.S., *The New York Times*, January 22, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/22/us/politics/united-states-withdraws-world-health-organization.html>.

international institutions, allowing alternative powers to expand their influence in norms creation.

2.3.2.2 International Trade

Since World War II, the international order has been anchored in free trade, human rights, and multilateral cooperation under U.S. leadership; however, under the Trump administration this framework shifted toward a more self-interested and unilateral power dynamic, weakening trust among allies and global partners.

As we mentioned in the earlier sections, Trump is a protectionist. As a result, his administration shifted away from traditional free-trade approaches toward protectionism, most notably through the trade war with China beginning in 2018. The administration imposed tariffs on approximately \$370 billion worth of Chinese goods, which triggered retaliatory tariffs from China. Although these measures aimed to protect domestic employment, the trade deficit widened from \$502 billion in 2016 to \$676 billion in 2020. A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York estimated that these tariffs resulted in a 0.2% reduction in GDP in 2019.¹

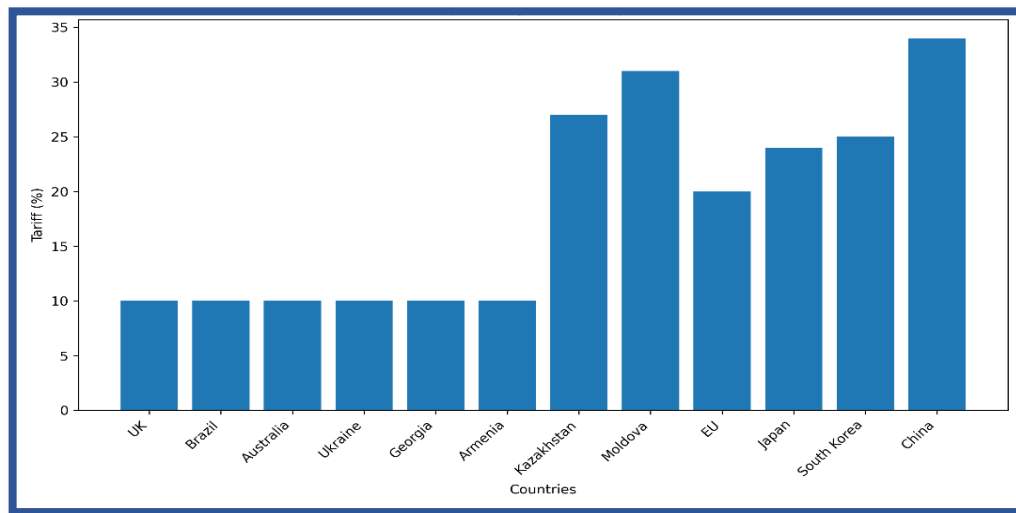
In April 2025, while his second mandate Donald Trump followed the same policy imposing tariffs on imports of products from 210 countries and territories. The list does not include only a few countries, including Russia, which either have tough sanctions that restrict trade or have imposed tariffs earlier, as in the case of Canada and Mexico. In just 2 days, both stock markets and oil prices have fallen by more than 10%. The U.S. imposed a 10% base tariff on most countries, including major economies like the UK, Brazil, and Australia, as well as former Soviet states such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia. Exceptions include higher tariffs: 27% on imports from Kazakhstan and 31% from Moldova. Key trading partners were hit harder: the EU faces a 20% tariff, Japan 24%, South Korea 25%,

¹ Livui and Carmen, *AMERICA FIRST: ASSESSING THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE FIRST TRUMP ADMINISTRATION*, 613–17.

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and China initially 34%, later raised to 84%. Tariffs between 40-50% were also introduced on Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and other Asian and African nations.¹

Figure 13 Tariffs imposed by Donald Trump 2025.



Source: Donald Trump's Economic Policy in 2025 and Its Impact on the World Economy.²

These measures took effect on April 9 but were temporarily suspended for 90 days the same day, notably; even remote territories like the uninhabited Heard and McDonald Islands were included in the 10% tariff list.³ The White House explained this was to close loopholes, as the islands exported machinery and manufactured goods to the U.S. in 2022. All these new tariffs are officially intended to protect American manufacturers from what the administration describes as "**unfair foreign competition**". According to a formal statement from the White House, such practices by trade partners lead to reduced domestic consumption and wages, an expanding trade deficit and ultimately pose a threat to national security.

¹ Aa. Malikova and V. A. Kotova, "DONALD TRUMP'S ECONOMIC POLICY IN 2025 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WORLD ECONOMY," *Прогрессивная Экономика*, no. 4 (April 2025): 245, https://doi.org/10.54861/27131211_2025_4_240.

² Malikova and Kotova, "DONALD TRUMP'S ECONOMIC POLICY IN 2025 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WORLD ECONOMY," 245.

³ Malikova and Kotova, "DONALD TRUMP'S ECONOMIC POLICY IN 2025 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WORLD ECONOMY," 245.

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President Trump characterizes the new tariffs as reciprocal. In his view, other nations have pursued unjust trade policies toward the U.S., including both high tariffs on American products and non-tariff barriers that restrict U.S. exporters from expanding into foreign markets. These barriers include insufficient protection of intellectual property, restrictions on U.S. investments, and excessive bureaucratic requirements. U.S. authorities view excessively cheap imports as a major contributor to structural economic problems. Between 1997 and 2024, the U.S. lost approximately 5 million manufacturing jobs due to domestic industries being displaced by imports and American firms relocating production overseas to lower-cost labor markets.¹

Following a sharp market decline after the April announcement, the United States temporarily suspended parts of its reciprocal tariffs and shifted toward a series of bilateral, "bespoke" trade deals by July 2025. These agreements combined tariff reductions with large-scale investment and purchase commitments. Including the UK (autos tariff cut to 10%). Vietnam (46% to 20% with higher duties on transshipped goods), Indonesia (19% tariff plus energy and agricultural purchases). Japan (\$550 billion in U.S. investments for a 15% tariff rate). The European Union (\$600 billion in investments and \$750 billion in energy and defense purchases for a 15% tariff). South Korea (\$350 billion in investments and \$100 billion in energy purchases for a 15% tariff). These measures were widely viewed as inconsistent with World Trade Organization principles, particularly MFN and binding tariff rules, though the U.S. justified them on national security grounds. Reinforcing a broader shift toward a transactional, managed-trade system based on bilateral bargaining rather than multilateral rules.²

¹ Malikova and Kotova, "DONALD TRUMP'S ECONOMIC POLICY IN 2025 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WORLD ECONOMY," 246.

² Jeffrey L. Dunoff and Mark A. Pollack, "The Trump Administration's Trade Policy and the International Trading System," *American Journal of International Law* 119, no. 4 (2025): 696–97, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ajil.2025.10108>.

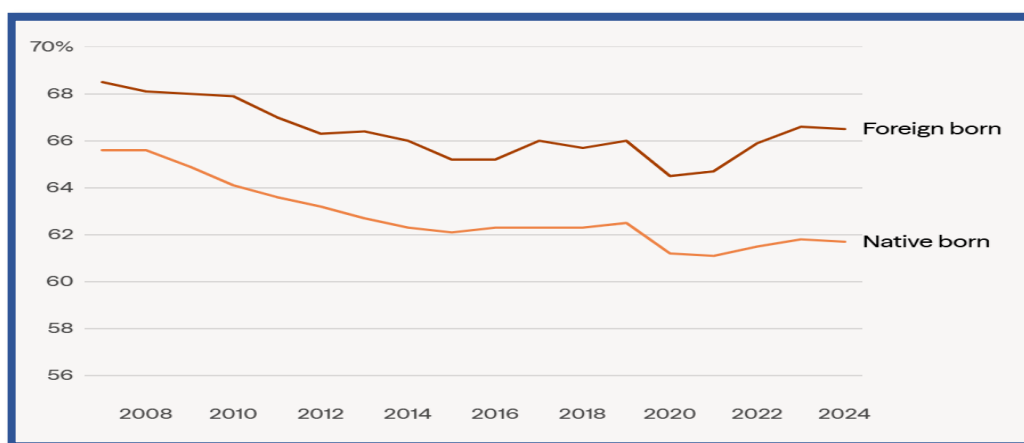
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Trump's policy of tariffs encourages other major powers to adopt transactional and interest-driven foreign policies, undermining norms of cooperation, predictability, and institutional legitimacy. Ultimately, it erodes the normative foundations of liberal democracy by privileging national sovereignty and power competition over shared democratic and economic standards.

2.3.2.3 Immigration Policy

Immigration has been a major driver of U.S. growth and innovation. It contributed since the mid-1960s to 8% higher patenting, 6% higher income per capita, and 5% higher wages, while immigrants accounted for 25% of inventors and 16% of entrepreneurs between 1990 and 2016 despite being only 10% of the population, and immigrants founded around 36% of U.S. firms (44% in Silicon Valley). It also strengthens the labor market, as a 1% increase in foreign-born workers raises productivity by 0.97% and increases wages for less-educated natives by 1.7% to 2.6%. Historical evidence showed that restrictive policies like the 1929-1934 repatriations and the 1964 Bracero exclusion did not improve native employment or wages.¹

Figure 14 Immigrants Participate in the Labor Force at an Above-Average Rate.



Source: Council on Foreign Relations.²

¹ "Matteo Neri Lainé & Hillel Rapoport, the Consequences of Trumps-Migration-Policies," n.d., 1–9.

² "How Does Immigration Affect the U.S. Economy? | Council on Foreign Relations," December 4, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/how-does-immigration-affect-us-economy>.

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Trump administration is widely characterized by a restrictive stance on immigration, with both mandates placing immigration control at the center of its political agenda. Framed within the broader "America First" doctrine, immigration policies were reoriented toward enforcement, deterrence, and the reduction of both irregular and legal inflows.

Between January and September 2017, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) made 110,568 arrests (a 42% increase from 2016) and carried out 61,094 interior removals (up 37%). Notably, 31,888 of those arrested had no criminal convictions, marking a shift away from the prior focus on "serious criminals," who accounted for 90% of removals in 2016. In parallel, the Trump administration sharply restricted humanitarian admissions, lowering the refugee ceiling from 110,000 (FY 2017) to 45,000 (FY 2018), with only 53,716 refugees admitted in FY 2017. It also ended the Central American Minors (CAM) program (affecting 1,500 children) and revoked parole for 2,700 additional minors. Moreover, border apprehensions fell 26% in FY 2017 (the lowest since 1971), while legal immigration procedures became more stringent through mandatory in-person green card interviews and the suspension of visa interview waivers. These changes coincided with declines in mobility indicators, including a 3.9% drop in tourism, a 7% fall in international students, and a 15% decrease in H-1B visa applications.¹

Much of the Trump administration's immigration agenda faced judicial resistance, particularly the travel ban. Three versions were issued in 2017 (Executive Orders 13769 and 13780, and Proclamation 9645), reflecting ongoing legal contestation. The Supreme Court ultimately upheld the final version and allowed its implementation during litigation, underscoring the judiciary's key role in shaping executive authority in immigration policy.²

¹ Sarah Pierce and Andrew Selee, *Immigration under Trump: A Review of Policy Shifts in the Year since the Election*, n.d., 3–7.

² Pierce and Selee, *Immigration under Trump: A Review of Policy Shifts in the Year Since the Election*, 8.

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Trump's 2024-campaign platform included different policies; large-scale deportations and ending birthright citizenship, specific targets including the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which currently protects approximately 860,000 immigrants, winding down H-2 visa programs over the next 10 to 20 years and increasing application fees across the board.¹

Given these policies, the second-term immigration agenda for Donald Trump is characterized as a "*shock-and-awe blitz*" of executive actions aimed at targeting millions of immigrants, centering on mass deportation, the weakening of core rights for children and families, and the dismantling of the asylum system.

The plan prioritizes the "largest domestic deportation operation in American history," involving the removal of millions annually through the creation of a new deportation force by federalizing state National Guard units and potentially deploying active-duty military personnel. Alongside the construction of large-scale detention, camps and the expansion of expedited removal procedures into the interior of the country to bypass traditional legal hearings, including the possible invocation of the Alien Enemies Act of 1789. It also targets vulnerable populations by threatening the loss of legal status for approximately 700,000 Temporary Protected Status holders 500,000 Dreamers, and 175,000 Ukrainians. In addition, challenging the constitutional guarantee of public education established in *Plyler v. Doe*; it further raises the possibility of reinstating family separation policies that previously affected around 6,000 families.²

According to scholars, these anti-immigration policies are projected to have negative macroeconomic effects, potentially reducing U.S. GDP by 2.6% to 6.2%, with labor force declines and large fiscal losses under both low- and mass-deportation scenarios. In addition to a negative impact of U.S. population which is

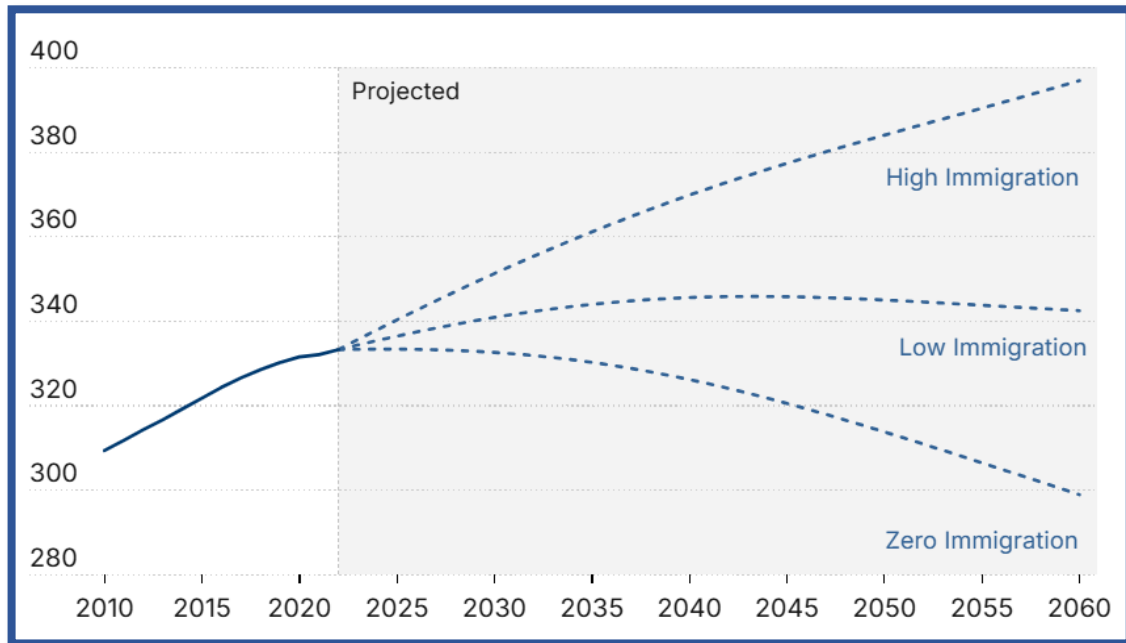
¹ "Matteo Neri Lainé & Hillel Rapoport, The Consequences of Trumps-Migration-Policies," 2.

² "Trump on Immigration," n.d., 1–13.

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expected to decline by more than 7 million by 2040 as illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 15 Zero migration's scenario impact on the U.S. population by 2060



Source: Brookings¹

¹ "The Impact of Immigrants on the US Economy," *Brookings*, n.d., accessed May 4, 2026, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-impact-of-immigrants-on-the-us-economy/>.

2.3.3 Impact on International Alliances and Rivalries

2.3.3.1 North Atlantic Treaty Organization “NATO”

Donald Trump adopted an unusually critical and public stance toward NATO and U.S. allies, departing from the traditional practice of managing such disagreements privately without undermining the alliance itself. This approach is considered destabilizing, as it questions NATO's foundational role in U.S. national security. Nonetheless, Trump has at times reaffirmed support for the alliance in terms consistent with the longstanding commitment upheld by previous presidents since Harry Truman noting:

"We strongly support NATO. We only ask that all of the NATO members make their full and proper financial contributions to the NATO Alliance"¹

Indeed previous presidents of the U.S. criticized NATO, and Trump feels validation by their disagreements. However, he feels also that they were unsuccessful in making efforts to pressure NATO alliances to fulfill their defense commitments. Trump summed this up after his last NATO summit in 2018:

"Now, what has happened is, presidents over many years, from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama, they came in, they said, "Okay, hey, do the best you can," and they left. Nobody did anything about it Moreover, it got to a point where the United States was paying for 90 percent of NATO. That is not fair. So it's changed"²

Under the Trump administration NATO became the arena through which allies and adversaries were redefined according to Trump's populist logic of political antagonism, blurring the line between cooperative partnership and confrontational rivalry. In this context, NATO represented a critical site where populist narratives and burden-sharing disputes converged, amplifying tensions about European

¹ Jorge Benitez, "U.S. NATO Policy in the Age of Trump: Controversy and Consistency," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 43, no. 1 (2019): 180.

² "Remarks by President Trump at Press Conference after NATO Summit | Brussels, Belgium – The White House," accessed May 4, 2026, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-conference-nato-summit-brussels-belgium/>.

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dependency on American power while modifying the role of United States' leadership, bringing instability and uncertainty to both allies and adversaries. Trump's treatment of NATO was defined as questionable and problematic, as illustrated by his 2017 address in Brussels at NATO's new headquarters, where he blamed member states for not meeting their financial commitments to the alliance" and declined to reiterate U.S. commitment to Article 5.¹

In July 2018, during a NATO summit breakfast, Trump accused Germany of being "*totally controlled by Russia*" due to Nord Stream 2, portraying it as an unreliable ally and blurring the line between ally and adversary while reinforcing his narrative of American victimhood. By framing NATO as an unfair deal for the American people, Trump reinforced his domestic populist narrative while reordering the symbolic hierarchy of allies and adversaries, complicating transatlantic solidarity. The impact extended beyond immediate policy consequences to the reshaping of normative frameworks of alliance politics. The centrality of burden sharing to Trump's NATO discourse cannot be overemphasized; he elevated it as evidence that U.S. citizens were being systematically exploited. By casting NATO as both a military alliance and a financial deal in which the United States was "getting ripped off," Trump situated foreign policy within domestic distributive justice, claiming, "*Massive amounts of money is owed.*" Consequently, this framing constructed a hierarchy of allies based on financial contribution, distinguishing between those who "pay their bills" and those who are "delinquent," thereby disrupting NATO's traditional emphasis on collective identity and replacing it with a transactional logic of alliance commitments.²

In June 24-25, 2025, NATO Summit in The Hague centered on a landmark agreement to increase defense spending among the alliance's 32 members, which the White House described as a "***monumental victory***" and which marked President

¹ "From Alliance to Contestation: How Trump's Populist Rhetoric Reviewed U.S. Relations with United Kingdom and the European Union," n.d., 68.

² "From Alliance to Contestation: How Trump's Populist Rhetoric Reviewed U.S. Relations with United Kingdom and the European Union," 69.

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Trump's first attendance since taking office in January 2025. The key outcome was a new defense investment framework-committing allies to spend 5% of GDP annually on defense and security by 2035. Comprising 3.5% for core defense requirements and 1.5% for related expenditures such as infrastructure and industrial capacity, with Ukraine-related financial and material support also counted toward this target, alongside plans to enhance capabilities, including a fivefold increase in air defense systems. This builds on earlier progress, where 23 allies met the 2% GDP benchmark in 2024 compared to only three in 2014, with expectations that all members will reach the 2% threshold by the end of 2025.¹

Overall, the 2025 NATO Summit is a policy turning point where Trump's pressure strategy is portrayed as contributing to a major expansion of defense investment commitments among member states. It links Trump's long-standing “*fair share*” argument to a broader redefinition of NATO responsibilities, emphasizing greater European spending and reduced U.S. financial dominance within the alliance.

2.3.3.2 European Union “EU”

The stability of the link with the United States began fracturing significantly in February 2025. As the Trump administration shifted toward a relationship based primarily on trade and military contributions, imposing 25% tariffs on European steel, aluminum, and other products, demanding an increase in EU defense spending from the 2% target to 5% of GDP, and announcing plans to cease funding European defense and withdraw 90,000 U.S. troops from European territory. In parallel, the EU has played a leading financial role in the Ukraine conflict, contributing €241 billion compared to the U.S. €119 billion (or \$69.2 billion according to State Department figures), while being excluded alongside Ukraine

¹ Paul Belkin, *NATO's June 2025 Summit in The Hague*, n.d., 1–2.

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from peace talks convened in Saudi Arabia in February 2025 between the U.S. and Russia.¹

In terms of European politics, the second Trump administration has reinforced linkages within European radical-right actors through endorsements of European figures. In February 2025, JD Vance endorsed Alternative for Germany leader Alice Weidel, while the U.S. also supported George Simion and Karol Nawrocki. These actions legitimize actors but also create tensions due to Trump's “*intelligent protectionism*,” tariffs, and differing positions on Russia and Ukraine; for example, Giorgia Meloni has struggled to align U.S. and EU economic interests. A transnational radical-right network has also emerged, centered on Viktor Orbán and Fidesz, with reported cooperation in 2024 on Trump's program design and coordination through institutions such as the Danube Institute, and CPAC (Poland, May 2025), including over \$1.4 million in funding to U.S. far-right researchers.²

In digital and technology policy: the US promotes rapid AI development through the “Winning the AI Race” strategy after canceling Biden-era safeguards, while the EU AI Act applies a precautionary, risk-based framework criticized by Washington as restrictive. Similarly, the EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA) and Digital Services Act (DSA) are viewed by US actors as discriminatory, leading to Section 301 investigations, tariff threats, and disputes intensified by the €2.95 billion Google fine and €120 million X fine. In data governance, tensions persist between the EU's General Data Protection Regulation and the US fragmented system. In energy, the EU committed in 2025 to purchasing US\$750 billion in US energy exports by 2028 to reduce Russian gas dependence, while climate divergence deepened due to US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the Global Methane Pledge. Contrasting with EU instruments like the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (2026), alongside cooperation on Small Modular

¹ Trump, *Donald Trump, the World Order and the European Union: Neoimperialism or Second Cold War?*, 7–12.

² Rosa Balfour et al., *The European Radical Right in the Age of Trump 2.0*, n.d., 8–10.

Reactors.¹ Overall, these developments reflect that Donald Trump is pushing away from traditional international cooperation by favoring selective engagement.

2.3.3.3 China and Russia

Over recent decades, China has experienced sustained economic growth, emerging as a global economic powerhouse. Its large domestic market and industrial expansion have attracted major multinational corporations across sectors such as technology, automotive, and consumer goods. In 2022, China secured over \$189 billion in foreign direct investment, ranking second globally.²

Trump reframes U.S. competition with China by arguing that the United States should abandon its costly role as the "world's protector." Instead of sustaining the global system, his approach prioritizes reducing burdens while adopting new rules that better serve national interests. The aim is to maintain U.S. dominance while simultaneously constraining China's rise.

Viewing China as the primary strategic competitor, President Donald Trump has pursued a policy aimed at containing its rise. A key element of this approach is the attempt to weaken the strategic alignment between China and Russia, effectively seeking to isolate it from its ally. However, both China and Russia remain conscious of this strategy and adjust their cooperation accordingly.

During the 2024 campaign, Donald Trump claimed he could quickly end the Russia- Ukraine war,³ often speaking favorably of Vladimir Putin while criticizing Volodymyr Zelenskyy. After returning to office, he maintained this stance,

¹ European Parliament. Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services and Mark Nils Strand, *The near-Term Future of the Transatlantic Relationship* (European Parliament, 2026), 5–27, <https://doi.org/10.2861/2253629>.

² This text provides general information Statista assumes no liability for the information given being complete or correct Due to varying update cycles and Statistics Can Display More up-to-Date Data Than Referenced in the Text, "Topic: Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into China," Statista, accessed May 5, 2026, <https://www.statista.com/topics/8962/foreign-direct-investment-fdi-into-china/>.

³ Peter Baker, "Trump Vowed to End the Ukraine War Before Taking Office. The War Rages On.," U.S., *The New York Times*, January 19, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/19/us/politics/trump-promise-ending-ukraine-war.html>.

pressing Ukraine to compensate U.S. support reportedly through access to rare minerals and blaming Kyiv when it resisted. At the same time, his tone toward Moscow remained conciliatory, even as the United States broke with its usual allies in a United Nations General Assembly vote by siding with Russia.¹

This reflects a broader worldview in which traditional international norms and alliances carry less weight. Rather than acting as a global guarantor, the U.S. is seen as one power among others, pursuing its interests independently even if that means pressuring allies or reshaping alignments. In this logic, countering China becomes the central priority, making a more flexible stance toward Russia strategically acceptable.

2.3.3.5 Middle East

The second Trump administration appears more radical than the first, both in its intentions and its actions. During his initial term, Donald Trump had already demonstrated a tendency to pursue uncompromising pro-Israel policies and to adopt a strongly confrontational stance toward Iran. As noted by Hasni Abidi, this trajectory was expected to intensify in a potential Trump II," particularly given the increasing fragility of institutional checks and balances in the United States.²

In assessing the Trump administration's Middle East policy, two interconnected decisions stand out for their transformative regional impact: direct military escalation against Iran and sustained political alignment with Israeli strategy in Gaza.³

¹ Peter Dickinson, "US Sides with Russia against Ukraine and Europe at the United Nations," *Atlantic Council*, February 25, 2025, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/us-sides-with-russia-against-ukraine-and-europe-at-the-united-nations/>.

² Hasni Abidi, *Le Moyen-Orient selon Donald Trump: essai*, with Centre d'études et de recherche sur le monde arabe et méditerranéen, Encre d'Orient (ErickBonnier, 2025), 23.

³ Mona Yacoubian, *The Trump Administration's Middle East Policy: Shaping an Emerging Regional Order*, October 6, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/trump-administrations-middle-east-policy-shaping-emerging-regional-order>.

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In the Iranian case, the 28 February 2026 joint U.S.-Israel strikes marked a major escalation aimed at regime change and the dismantling of Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. The killing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his succession by Mojtaba Khamenei triggered rapid regional escalation, as Iran responded with widespread missile and drone attacks targeting Israel, U.S. forces, and Gulf States. The conflict expanded into Lebanon and Yemen and severely disrupted regional energy security after the Strait of Hormuz became constrained, producing what the International Energy Agency described as the most severe global oil supply shock in history.¹ A potential site for US military action is in the far north of the Persian Gulf. See the chart below:

Figure 16 Map of the Strait of Hormuz



Source: Stock Adobe²

In parallel, U.S. policy toward Palestine and Gaza reflected sustained alignment with Israeli strategic objectives. The Trump administration provided consistent

¹ "Philip Left, US/Israeli-Iran Conflict 2026," n.d., 20–21.

² "Persian Gulf Region, Political Map. Also Arabian Gulf, a Mediterranean Sea in West Asia, Located between Iran and Arabian Peninsula, Connected to the Gulf of Oman in the East by the Strait of Hormuz. Stock Vector | Adobe Stock," accessed May 4, 2026, <https://stock.adobe.com/uk/images/persian-gulf-region-political-map-also-arabian-gulf-a-mediterranean-sea-in-west-asia-located-between-iran-and-arabian-peninsula-connected-to-the-gulf-of-oman-in-the-east-by-the-strait-of-hormuz/633089921>.

political backing to the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, including support for restrictions on humanitarian aid and continued diplomatic reinforcement even amid controversial Israeli military actions. Although occasional calls were made for de-escalation, they were not accompanied by meaningful coercive advantage. This approach was reinforced by earlier normalization efforts under the Abraham Accords, which expanded Israel's regional diplomatic recognition and were positioned as a foundation for further Arab-Israeli normalization, particularly with Saudi Arabia.¹

This broader regional strategy was further consolidated through deepening U.S.-Gulf alignment, most notably the November 2025 agreements between the United States and Saudi Arabia. These arrangements significantly expanded Saudi investment in the U.S. economy and deepened cooperation in nuclear energy, critical minerals, artificial intelligence, and defense",² reflecting an "America First" framework that nonetheless redefined U.S. engagement in the Middle East through transactional partnerships and strategic burden sharing.

Overall, these policies indicate a shift toward a unilateral, militarized, and transactional U.S. regional posture, where escalation management, alliance consolidation, and economic statecraft replace traditional multilateral diplomacy. The combined effect is a reconfiguration of Middle Eastern order characterized by heightened instability, intensified great-power competition, and the weakening of institutional mechanisms for conflict resolution.

¹ Raphael Cohen-Almagor, "President Trump's Policies in the Middle East," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, ahead of print, 2025, 2–4, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5130961>.

² The White House, "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Solidifies Economic and Defense Partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," *The White House*, November 18, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/11/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-solidifies-economic-and-defense-partnership-with-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia/>.

2.3.3.6 Latin America

In his second term, U.S. President Donald Trump has put Latin America at the center of U.S. foreign policy. His agenda, which focuses on migration, trade, and security, runs through the region.¹ The second Trump administration has adopted an increasingly coercive policy, from drone strikes on alleged drug traffickers to increased tariffs on imports, and from a blockade on fuel shipments and threats of invasion in Cuba to the January 3 military incursion into Venezuela.²

Venezuela stands as a key illustration of a broader transformation in international relations in which "**hard power**" and coercive force appear to have displaced the relevance of international law. The U.S. intervention culminated in the arrest and capture of Nicolás Maduro, following a sequence of operations initiated in September 2025 that included more than 35 naval attacks and a blockade of oil tankers. These actions justified by Washington as necessary to remove an illegitimate government" within the framework of a "**Peace through Strength**" strategy articulated in the 2025 National Security Strategy as mentioned earlier.³

Beyond security rationales, the intervention also reflected geopolitical competition, as the United States sought to curb the influence of Russia, China, and Iran in Latin America, with Venezuela viewed as a strategically accessible and symbolically significant target for demonstrating U.S. great-power status. Additionally, energy interests in Venezuela's vast heavy oil reserves the largest in the world alongside reports that Maduro had previously offered to open oil and sold

¹ "The Trump Administration on Latin America | AS/COA," March 26, 2026, <https://www.as-coa.org/content/trump-administration-latin-america>.

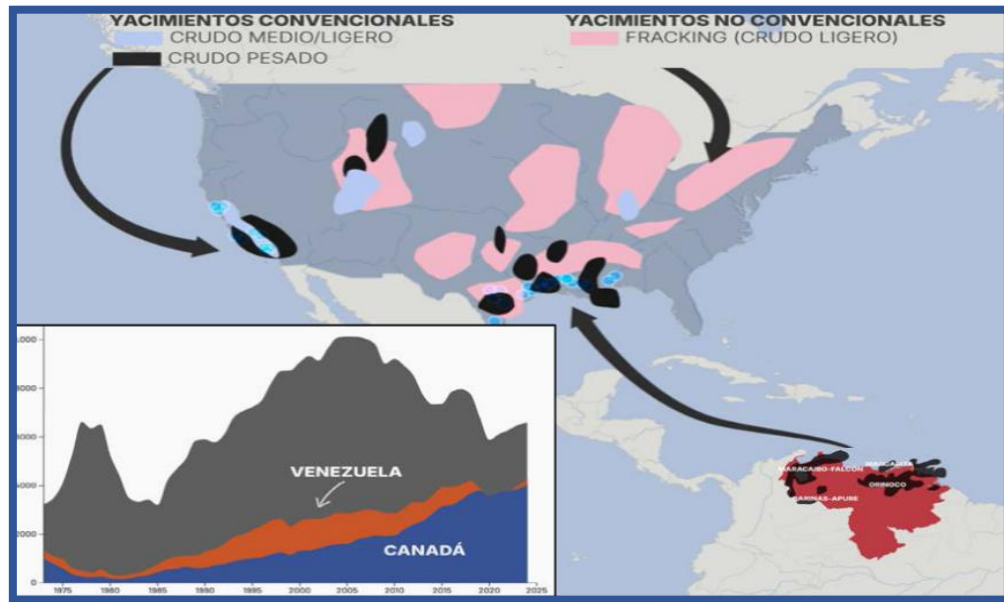
² Tony Wood, "Trump's Coercive Tactics in Latin America Evoke Era of Gunboat Diplomacy – and the Rise of Anti-Imperialism It Helped Spur," *The Conversation*, April 17, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.64628/AAI.p6g4vhpga>.

³ Gonzalo Rodríguez Suances, *The "Ethos" of Trump's War and Its Implications for International Security*, n.d., 1–11.

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projects to U.S. companies and redirect exports from China to the United States in an attempt to avoid escalation.¹

Figure 17 Main Sources of Heavy Crude Oil Imports to the US



Source: the “Ethos” of Trump’s War and its Implications for International Security²

This intervention reflects a strategic miscalculation, producing a situation in which military victory lacks governance planning, thereby undermining U.S. credibility as a stabilizing global actor and reinforcing the perception of a broader erosion of international law, as coercive action increasingly overrides established principles of sovereignty and legal constraint.

In Argentina, Javier Milei has emerged as President Trump's "favorite world leader," a relationship grounded in strong personal and ideological affinity, with Trump explicitly stating; “...You are my favorite President...”³ Moreover, hosting Milei at

¹ Gonzalo Rodríguez Suances, *The “Ethos” of Trump’s War and Its Implications for International Security*, 10.

² Gonzalo Rodríguez Suances, *The “Ethos” of Trump’s War and Its Implications for International Security*, 10.

³ Michelle Goldberg, “Opinion | Trump Has a New Favorite Foreign Leader. He’s Known as the Madman.,” *Opinion, The New York Times*, December 10, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/09/opinion/donald-trump-javier-milei.html>.

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Mar-a-Lago shortly after the U.S. election.¹ This bond is shaped by their shared outsider status, as both leaders rose to power as political figures who reject traditional political rules and conventions. It is reinforced by a common ideological orientation, as both strongly defend conservative values and a capitalist economic model, while Milei has additionally promoted a "cultural war" against the left, rejecting concepts such as "gender ideology" and climate change and emphasizing individualism and free-market principles. This demonstrates Trump's foreign policy, where personal affinity and ideological alignment increasingly shape diplomatic engagement alongside strategic interests.

In Mexico, as mentioned the Trump era introduced an illegalization of migrants, framing them as threats to national security and shifting U.S. policy toward a highly coercive measures, including a "**zero-tolerance**" policy at the border. Accordingly, Trump increased the number of border patrol agents, electronic surveillance and drones to intercept and arrest illegal migrants on the border with Mexico. This illegalization of mainly Central American and Mexican migrants by Donald Trump led to the instrumentalization of these people in order to put more pressure on the Mexican side. Based on his anti-migrant rhetoric, Trump shaped his national security strategy toward Mexico, denouncing a specific porosity of the US-Mexico border, blaming Mexico for the lack of control over the migration flows and border, stating that he would proceed with the construction of a physical wall on the southern border.²

The tightening of anti-migration and security policies under the Trump administration has been accompanied by a gradual deterioration in diplomatic relations between the United States and Mexico. As early as January 2025, six

¹ "Trump Meets with Argentina's President, the First Foreign Leader He's Met with since Election | AP News," accessed May 4, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-milei-first-foreign-leader-meeting-postelection-bd1e4e1042cff30214a3ac3435756ca1>.

² Nikolas Kouloglou, "The Trump Era and Counter Migrant Smuggling: A New Geopolitical Order on the US–Mexico Borders?," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Latino-Américaines et Caraïbes* 48, no. 2 (2023): 6–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08263663.2023.2174305>.

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opening the door to increased pressure measures and even potential military action scenarios. This approach is part of an increasingly coercive rhetoric, further intensified after the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro on January 4, 2026, as mentioned.¹

In this context, Donald Trump again raised the possibility of military intervention in Mexico, accusing the country of being heavily influenced by drug cartels and of not doing enough to curb irregular crossings and fentanyl trafficking, thereby further straining bilateral relations and weakening cooperation between the two countries.

Trump's staunch appeasement of former president Jair Bolsonaro during the trial for his involvement in a coup attempt led to a major US-Brazil crisis, intensified by sanctions against Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes. Nevertheless, these actions strengthened Brazil's traditional sense of autonomy in foreign policy, historically aimed at leveraging its regional power and position in the Global South while resisting Washington's impositions. Brazil responded by organizing the Rio de Janeiro BRICS summit, hosting COP30 in Belém, and expanding Mercosur toward South-South partnerships, including an agreement with the UAE.²

Finally, in Colombia, Trump's isolation of President Gustavo Petro, marked by escalating accusations and sanctions, significantly reshaped Colombian foreign policy. While relations with the United States had historically been defined by cooperation against drug trafficking and strong US intervention, particularly under the 2000s Uribe administration and its "Respite Polum" doctrine prioritizing alignment with Washington and internal counterinsurgency, Petro shifted this

¹ Cléa Fortuné, "Trump et Le Mexique : Tensions Dans Les Mots, Coopération Sécuritaire Dans Les Faits," *The Conversation*, January 20, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.64628/AAK.936rtfqsn>.

² Alberto Maresca, "The Impact of the Second Trump Administration on Latin American Foreign Policy," *Ghent Institute for International and European Studies – Ghent University*, January 12, 2026, <https://unu.edu/cris/journal-article/impact-second-trump-administration-latin-american-foreign-policy>.

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trajectory. In response to Trump's accusations regarding cocaine exports, he reduced diplomatic engagement with the White House, expanded ties with China, advanced Colombia's accession to the BRICS-led New Development Bank, and broke diplomatic relations with Israel.¹

Overall, Trump's policy of accusations and sanctions toward Brazil and Colombia proved counterproductive, as it strained bilateral relations and encouraged both countries to diversify their partnerships away from the United States. Across multiple cases from Venezuela to Argentina and Mexico and from Brazil to Colombia Trump's approach, illustrate how his own beliefs and worldview influence his foreign policy towards Latin America.

Evaluation:

Building upon the preliminary analysis of President Donald Trump's political conducted in part one, the following evaluation applies Joseph Nye's theoretical framework.

Table 12 Trump's Ethical Scorecard based on Joseph S. Nye's Evaluation

Intentions and Motives		Evaluation
Moral vision:	Attractive values and good motives	
Prudence:	Balance of values and risks	
Means		
Force:	Proportion, discrimination, necessity	
Liberal:	Balance of values and risks	

¹ Maresca, "The Impact of the Second Trump Administration on Latin American Foreign Policy."

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Consequences		
Fiduciary:	Success for long-term U.S. interests	Mixed
Cosmopolitan:	Minimal damage to others	Weak
Educational:	Truthful, moral discourse broadened	Weak

Source: Do Morals Matter?¹

“Made by the researcher”

The scorecard suggests a predominantly negative ethical assessment under Nye's framework, where intentions are mixed, means are largely coercive and weakly aligned with liberal constraints, and consequences are mostly unfavorable in terms of global harm, weakened norms, and limited contribution to constructive international discourse, despite only partial gains in U.S. strategic interests.

¹ Nye, *Do Morals Matter?* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 179.

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Results and Findings

To sum up part two; we have gotten to the following findings:

The findings demonstrate a dual outcome: while the Trump presidency weakened congressional oversight and expanded executive dominance, it did not fully eliminate institutional constraints. Instead, U.S. democratic governance evolved into a more contested system, where traditional separation of powers remained formally intact but functionally strained.

Domestic policy under Trump is not fragmented but structurally consistent: it combines economic nationalism and socio-cultural reordering, resulting in strengthened executive power alongside increased political and social polarization.

The second Trump administration marks a structural shift in U.S. foreign policy from liberal internationalism toward a unilateral, transactional, and coercive “America First” approach.

Conclusion

Conclusion

This work aimed to analyze the rise of Trumpism and its implications for the American Liberal Democracy. The findings suggest the central hypothesis of the study: while Trumpism has accelerated the erosion of certain democratic norms & principles and reshaped the boundaries of political discourse, it has not fully dismantled the structural foundations of American liberal democracy. Rather, it has exposed its internal tensions, revealed its fragilities, and demonstrated its continued capacity for institutional endurance under pressure.

Based on the analysis conducted throughout this study, it concludes that Donald Trump did not originate the processes of democratic norm erosion in the United States; rather, his presidency significantly accelerated and rendered more visible pre-existing structural and political tendencies, rooted in long-term economic, political and socio-cultural factors. These conditions constituted a fertile environment for the emergence and consolidation of Trumpism.

Although Trumpism is not formally an academic ideology, segments of intellectual and policy producing circles may have indirectly reinforced its development. In this regard, think tanks appear to have partially shifted from their traditional role neutral policy producers toward actors that increasingly contribute to the legitimization of partisan and ideologically aligned narratives. This evolution may have facilitated the diffusion of Trumpist discourse within broader political and public spheres.

It is also evident that Donald Trump is not the first American president to implicitly challenge elements of liberal democratic norms, particularly regarding executive authority and institutional checks and balances. However, what distinguishes his presidency is the explicit, direct, and confrontational manner in which these norms are contested. Despite these tensions, American liberal democracy has not collapsed. Instead, it has demonstrated institutional continuity under conditions of normative stress. In this sense, Trumpism should not be understood as the origin of democratic vulnerability, but as a substance that exposed and deepened existing fragilities within the system.

Conclusion

Trumpism has contributed to a broader transformation of contemporary political discourse, challenging long-standing scholarly assumptions that portray American liberal democracy as a universal and stable model of governance. Through both his first and predominantly second mandates, Trump has shown that this model remains subject to internal contestation and normative erosion, while retaining its institutional resilience from (courts, elites...etc)

Internationally, Donald Trump introduced a significant reorientation under the “America First” framework, privileging narrowly defined national interests over multilateral commitments and liberal internationalist principles. This shift rendered U.S. foreign policy more transactional, emphasizing reciprocity, burden sharing, and the reassessment of international agreements in order to ensure the U.S. supremacy. Although this did not constitute a complete rupture with traditional strategic orientations, it strengthened realist tendencies while degrading the institutional dimensions of American global leadership.

Ultimately, the rise of Trumpism reflects how certain forms of leadership may be associated with patterns of democracy backsliding. This leads to a central theoretical question for future research: in the context where liberal democracy is facing a degree of instability, what political paradigm is likely to emerge as a competing/alternative framework for global influence of liberal democracy and gain universalization?

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