

Johan Martin Gerrard

Trumping the Republican Party:

Trumpism and ideological change in the
Republican Party

Master's thesis in History with Teacher Education, years 8-13

Supervisor: Espen Storli

Co-supervisor: Madeleine Louise Lynch Dungy

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Department of Modern History and Society



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Preface

Thank you to Espen Storli and Madeleine Louise Lynch Dungy for invaluable advice, constructive feedback, and countless grammar corrections throughout this process.

Thank you to my peers for the countless hours we have spent studying, despairing, having fun, worrying, and playing table tennis together.

Thank you to my colleagues in Snevert for the emotional support, and the much-needed breaks from study you have given me.

I am eternally grateful to my parents and sister for their limitless support throughout my five years at NTNU,

Johan Martin Gerrard, May 2024

Abstract

Donald J. Trump winning the election in 2016 was a watershed event in the history of American politics. A man who was criticized by conservative intellectuals and Republicans for not being conservative would go on to win the election and unite the conservative party behind his 'America First' politics, which spearheads the political movement that is 'Trumpism'. As a consequence, scholars question if the conservative identity of the Republican Party is changing behind Trump. By analyzing and comparing the election year State of the Union addresses of the last six Republican presidents, this thesis answers to what degree this may be the case. This thesis centers around the ideological makeup of Trumpism, and whether or not it represents an ideological break from Republican Party tradition. Ultimately, the findings exhibit both continuity and discontinuity. However, it paints a picture of a Republican Party that is transforming its symbolic ideology behind Trumpism, and that continues to do so in the 2024 election.

Sammendrag

Donald J. Trump sin seier i det amerikanske valget i 2016 representerer et vannskille i amerikansk politisk historie. En mann som ble kritisert av konservative tenkere og republikanere for å ikke være konservativ vant valget, og samlet det konservative partiet bak seg. Trump sin periode som president representerer den politiske bevegelsen 'Trumpism', med mål om å sette Amerika og Amerikanere først. På bakgrunn av dette er et sentralt spørsmål i forskningsfeltet rundt Trump, om den konservative identiteten til det republikanske partiet er i en endringsprosess bak Trump. Ved å analysere og sammenligne Unionens tilstand-talene fra de seks siste republikanske presidentene har holdt i deres gjenvalgsår, vil denne oppgaven svare på i hvilken grad dette er tilfellet. Denne oppgaven sentrerer rundt den ideologiske sammensetningen til Trumpism, og hvorvidt den representerer et ideologisk brudd med den republikanske parti-tradisjonen. Funnene fra analysene viser tegn både kontinuitet og brudd. Likevel reflekterer funnene et bilde av et republikansk parti som endrer dets symbolske ideologi bak Trumpism, og som tilsynelatende fortsetter slik i 2024 valget.

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1. Introduction

You know, they have a word. It sort of became old-fashioned. It's called a nationalist. And I say, really, we're not supposed to use that word. You know what I am? I'm a nationalist, OK? I'm a nationalist.

Donald Trump, Speech in Houston, Texas, October 22, 2018

Donald J. Trump's candidacy and eventual victory in the 2016 presidential election is a watershed event in the history of American politics. At the onset of Trump's campaign, Republican stalwarts and conservatives expressed their doubts of his ideological inconsistencies. As it became clearer that Trump was to be the Republican nominee, conservative actors and institutions strongly condemned the man, and the issues he endorsed. The critical argument against Trump was that he was not conservative and should therefore not represent the conservative Party. However, over the course of the 2016 election, this changed. As the general election was approaching, roughly half of the sitting Republican senators explicitly endorsed Trump, with more than 150 sitting House members endorsing his campaign. Some went further in their endorsement and suggested that Trump even represented a new brand of conservatism.¹

Trump was elected in 2016 and over the course of four years his administration represented a political movement that was populist, nationalist and conservative in nature. This political movement has been nicknamed 'Trumpism', and is, in several ways, without historical equal. No other modern Republican president has vilified the Democratic Party to the same degree, or with the same persistency as Donald Trump. His nationalist approach to international relations, both friends and foes, represents a break with modern Republican tradition. Yet, some research outright states that 'Trumpism' is not an entirely new phenomenon. David Montejano puts it rather harshly: "Trump should thus be seen as the ugly, mature manifestation of deep-rooted anxieties, couched under the rubric of "national security" and

¹ Barber, M., & Pope, J. C. (2019A). Conservatism in the Era of Trump. *Perspectives on Politics*, 17(3), p. 720

patriotism, about the racial and cultural make-up of the country.”² Others argue that the core makeup of ‘Trumpism’ are various American traditions of conservatism and nationalism.³ Clearly, there is research that suggests Trump’s election and presidency are the results of long-standing processes and established traditions within the political ideological landscape of the United States of America.

This thesis concerns itself with these long-standing processes and established traditions, but within the modern Republican Party itself. Despite the criticisms and doubts of Trump’s ideological beliefs, he was still nominated as the Republican presidential candidate, he would win the election, and he would enjoy the support of the majority of the Republican Party during his presidency. This thesis will address and understand these disparities by analyzing and comparing the political discourse of Donald Trump and his five previous Republican predecessors. The aim is to map out the expressed Republican Party ideology since the 1970s, and how ‘Trumpism’ exists as a possible extension of this. This will contribute with a better understanding of why the Republican Party united behind Trump as they did, as well as a nuanced analysis of Trumpism in relation to Republican Party ideology, and of how the Republican Party ideology has developed from the second half of the 20th century to present day. To do this I will analyze and compare the State of the Union addresses (henceforth abbreviated as SUA) from the reelection year of each Republican president, from Richard M. Nixon to Donald Trump. The thesis statement is as follows:

To what degree does Trumpism represent an ideological break from Republican Party tradition?

1.1. Historiography

Despite the short timespan since Donald Trump was elected president, there is already a considerable volume of research available regarding Trump as a political phenomenon.

² Montejano, D. (2021). Deconstructing Trumpism : Lessons from the Recent Past and for the Near Future. In Rosaldo, R., Pratt, M. L., & Gonzales, F. (Ed.). *Trumpism, Mexican America, and the struggle for Latinx citizenship*, p. 60

³ Campani, G., Fabelo Concepción, S., Rodriguez Soler, A., & Sánchez Savín, C. (2022). The Rise of Donald Trump Right-Wing Populism in the United States: Middle American Radicalism and Anti-Immigration Discourse. *Societies*, 12(6), p. 18

However, this vast volume of research is not uniform in its conclusions. This chapter will present existing research that is representative of the core scholarly perspectives on Donald Trump as a political phenomenon. Furthermore, the comparative nature of the thesis means that the scholarly consensus on several other fields of research needs to be addressed. Ideology in America, Republican Party ideology and American conservatism, and the State of the Union address, are the ones most significant to the thesis.

1.1.1. Donald Trump as a political phenomenon

The circumstances of his election, his controversies as president, and the increasing sense of polarization in American politics and society has made many researchers inclined to approach Donald Trump as a political phenomenon to study. Within the larger field of political studies, there are, in fact, so many studies dedicated to Trump that it is possible to treat it as its own separate field of research. A common trend within this research field is the orientation towards Trump's appeal to the American working-class as an explanation to his election and presidency, whether it is through Trump's hostile attitude towards illegal immigrants, his restoration of the US manufacturing industry, or his bad-mannered style of politics. Several researchers turn their eyes towards history as a means of understanding Trump's political beliefs, though they often do so with the intention of describing where it is intellectually rooted. However, understanding Trumpism within the framework of Republican Party ideology is an approach that is underrepresented in the research field surrounding Trump, which this thesis intends to contribute with. As such, this thesis relies on the following literature and research to define the characteristics of Trump and Trumpism as a political phenomenon.

If there is one aspect regarding Donald Trump that researchers tend to agree on, it is that Donald Trump's own political style and beliefs affect Trumpism. After all, the political movement is named after him. This makes it important to understand Trump's own beliefs and ideas. Christian Fuchs (2021) provides an overview of Donald Trump's personal ideology in his book *Digital Demagogue: Authoritarian Capitalism in the Age of Trump and Twitter*. Fuchs relies on Trump's own book from 2007, *Trump 101: The Way to Success*, to identify four key elements of Trump's personal ideology, which he nicknames Trumpology. The four elements Fuchs identifies are possessive hyper-individualism, the idea of hard work,

hierarchical leadership, and social Darwinism.⁴ Summarized, Fuchs argues Trump presents a worldview of ‘survival of the fittest’, where survival is measured by accumulation of capital and made possible through hard work and authoritarian leadership, at the expense of your enemies.

Simon Mollan and Beverly Geesin (2020) provide another important insight regarding the relationship between Donald Trump and Trumpism in their article *Donald Trump and Trumpism: Leadership, ideology, and narrative of business executive turned politician*. They draw on perspectives from management and organization studies to critically interpret Donald Trump’s business career, and how his approach to business has combined with radical conservative ideas to create Trumpism. The most important conclusion they reach is the idea that his own personal approach to business was informing the conservative political agenda his administration was pursuing.⁵ In other words, they attach significance to Donald Trump’s personality and political style when describing Trumpism. This thesis relies on this article to show a consistency in Trump’s worldview before and during his time as a politician, which is necessary to validate that Trump’s personal ideas and beliefs are his own and not carefully designed products by political strategists and advisors.

David Montejano (2021) deconstructs Trumpism in “Chapter 3. Deconstructing Trumpism: Lessons from the Recent Past and the Near Future” from the book *Trumpism, Mexican America, and the Struggle for Latinx Citizenship*. Montejano sees Trumpism as a political movement based on Anglo-Saxon populism, which calls for an isolationist “America first” posture through border walls, immigration restriction, and trade protectionism.⁶ He concludes that Trumpism should be seen as the manifestation of deep-rooted anxieties within the U.S. regarding the racial and cultural make-up of the country.⁷ In other words, Montejano concludes that the nativist and racial component sits at the core of Trumpism, from which isolationist and conservative elements spring out.

Campani, Concepción, Soler, and Savin (2022) present a more diverse conclusion regarding the ideological make-up of Trumpism in their article *The Rise of Donald Trump Right-Wing*

⁴ Fuchs, C. (2018). *Digital Demagogue* (1st ed.), p. 166

⁵ Mollan, S., & Geesin, B. (2020). Donald Trump and Trumpism: Leadership, ideology and narrative of the business executive turned politician. *Organization*, 27(3), p. 413

⁶ Montejano, 2021, p. 57

⁷ Montejano, 2021, p. 60

Populism in the United States: Middle American Radicalism and Anti-Immigration Discourse. They present conservatism, nationalism, nativism, and white supremacy as the core elements of Trumpism.⁸ Their conclusions differ from Montejano's in their emphasis on conservatism and nationalism. Campani, Concepción, Soler, and Savin argue that Trump's political rhetoric is a result of conservatism combined with nationalism, which then beget certain levels of nativism and white supremacy. In other words, they argue that conservatism and nationalism are the core elements of Trump's political views, from which other elements such as nativism, isolationism and protectionism derives from.

Robert Schertzer and Eric Woods (2021) examined the twitter communication of Donald Trump during his 2016 election campaign in the article *#Nationalism: he ethno-nationalist populism of Donald Trump's Twitter communication*. Although this thesis is mainly concerned with the presidency of Trump, the article still provides valuable insights into how Trump constructed a sense of unity through the negative positioning of other significant groups. In other words, it proves how Trump utilized populism as a way of constructing a nationalist movement. Alongside Campani, Concepción, Soler, and Savin (2022), and Monetjano (2021), they all illustrate the current state of research regarding Trumpism and its core components. Now, although researchers differ in what core elements they consider the most significant within Trumpism, they all select from the same set of elements: conservatism, nationalism, and populism. Specifically, Trumpism is comprised of conservatism, and a form of nationalism that espouses isolationism, protectionism, and nativism, which is delivered in a populist narrative. These three elements are structurally significant to this thesis, as they form the comparative basis against the Republican Party ideology that answers the thesis statement.

Some researchers have sought to understand the success of Donald Trump by analysing his presidency as a continuity or anomaly in the political history of the US. There are many ways of judging whether Trump is a continuity or not, and Richard Lachmann (2019) sought to do so by reviewing Donald Trump's actions as president in the article *Trump: Authoritarian, Just Another Neoliberal Republican, or Both?*. He found that except for trade and immigration, Donald Trump furthered existing Republican priorities in the fields of tax cuts, deregulation,

⁸ Campani et. Al., 2022, p. 18

weakening labor unions, and appointing right-wing judges.⁹ Trade and immigration are the policy areas where Trumpism's nationalist populist elements are most evident, which suggests that Trumpism may be a political anomaly. However, Lachmann identifies areas of policy where Trump furthers the Republican agenda. In that way, Trumpism may indicate continuity with the Republican Party tradition. This bilateral conclusion indicates a need for further research, which this thesis provides.

Eugene Goodheart (2019) makes it clear that Donald Trump does not behave in accordance with the principles espoused by the leading conservative intellectuals in the U.S. in the article *Conservatism in Trump Time*. Goodheart clearly does not believe Donald Trump to be a continuation of conservative tradition in the U.S. and ends the article asking how conservative intellectuals fail to see the gross disparity between the intellectual culture they espouse and the barbarous behavior of Trump.¹⁰ Goodheart ponders whether the conservative intellectuals are willing to set aside their integrity for helping their party gain and retain power, or if Trump is the catalyst of a poison contained and concealed within the party since the Nixon days.¹¹ The important takeaway from this article is not the possible answers to why conservatives fail to see the disparity, but the fact that conservatism is seemingly changing. Either conservatives are changing to adhere to Trump, or Trump is exposing the true nature of the conservative party. This is something the thesis can provide answers to.

This idea of Trump signaling a change in modern American conservatism is further expanded upon in Michael Barber and Jemery Pope's (2019) article *Conservatism in the Era of Trump*. They examine the different groups of Republican voters across three different types of ideology: operational, symbolic, and conceptual.¹² Their findings indicate ideological fissures within the Republican voter base and suggest a Republican Party that is far from unified in what it means to be conservative.¹³ Barber and Pope suggest that this disparity between what Republican voters believe conservatism entails is indicative of an ongoing change in what conservatism is. They state that the ideological fissures may signal a change in conservative symbols, from traditionally conservative ideas to a brand of conservatism built upon a

⁹ Lachmann, R. (2019). Trump: authoritarian, just another neoliberal republican, or both? *Sociologia*, 89, p. 9

¹⁰ Goodheart, E. (2019). Conservatism in Trump Time. *Society*, 56(3), p. 202

¹¹ Goodheart, 2019, p. 202

¹² Barber & Pope, 2019A, p. 719

¹³ Barber & Pope, 2019A, p. 719

negative affective stance against liberals and the Democratic Party.¹⁴ This thesis can expand on this by comparing the values Trump roots conservative policies within, with his predecessors.

These articles reflect the current state of research regarding conservatism in the era of Trump. There may not be a clear conclusion about what is changing, and why, but conservatism is apparently changing. This thesis intervenes in this specific subfield of research regarding Trumpism. By examining Trumpism's roots in Republican Party ideology, we can gain a better and more nuanced understanding of how much of a change, and what kind of change in the conservative party Trumpism represents.

1.1.1. Ideology in America and the State of the Union

For a long time, there existed a view among scholars that ideology had a smaller role in American politics, compared to the other democracies of Western Europe. Although John Gerring (1997) does not share this view, he lists 29 different scholars from the early 1800s to late 1900s who believe so in his book *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996*. Gerring's book aims to disprove the nonideology argument of these 29 scholars, through the ambitious undertaking of mapping out the role of ideology in American Party politics. He identifies two distinct ideological epochs in the Republican Party: National (1828-1924) and Neoliberal (1928-1992).¹⁵ He does this by analyzing a series of campaign speeches made by presidential candidates throughout history. There are two weaknesses in Gerring's analysis. Firstly, he admits that political rhetoric is not always translated to actual policymaking. This has led to criticism from other scholars regarding if campaign speeches could be "election-winning gimmickry" rather than deeply held ideological views.¹⁶ Second, he strays from the scholarly consensus in ascribing the Republican Party a distinct ideology from the 1920s and onwards. The ideological divide that was exposed by Barry Goldwater's failed bid for President as the Republican candidate in 1964, and the subsequent conservative capture of the Party, implies that the Republican Party was not ideologically coherent before this time.

¹⁴ Barber & Pope, 2019A, p. 733

¹⁵ Gerring, John (1998). *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996*, p. 15

¹⁶ Speel, R. W. (2000). The Evolution of Republican and Democratic Ideologies - John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996*. *Journal of Policy History*, 12(3), p. 415

Nevertheless, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996* is useful to this thesis as it provides an accurate description of the core elements of the neoliberal Republican Party ideology. These core elements coincide with the constellation of economic, social, and national security themes that Jerome L. Himmelstein (1990) presents as the make-up of modern American conservatism in: *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism*. However, Himmelstein explicitly states that this movement started in the 1950s.¹⁷ Given that Himmelstein and Gerring ascribe the same ideological elements to modern American conservatism and Republican Party ideology, it is possible to treat the neoliberal Republican Party as the conservative party. After all, the Republican Party is seen as, and speaks of itself, as the conservative party.¹⁸

Gerring and Himmelstein provide important structural elements to the thesis by describing the core elements of the modern conservative Republican Party ideology. However, this thesis situates these core elements in the conservative capture and ideological transformation to the 1960s and 1970s. The emphasis on Goldwater and the conservative capture marks the beginning of the period relevant to this thesis and is an important baseline that needs proper delineation. I rely on the following literature to do this.

Brian M. Conley (2013) expands on the “Goldwater Phenomenon” in the article *The Politics of Party Renewal: The “Service Party” and the Origins of the Post-Goldwater Republican Right*. He states how Goldwater’s defeat compounded a deepening ideological divide between conservatives and more moderate party members.¹⁹ Conley is mostly concerned with how the process of party renewal happened, yet his conclusion is relevant to this thesis. He concludes that the process of Party renewal, instead of reform, after the 1964 Goldwater loss helped unify the Republican Party behind the conservative movement.²⁰ The most important takeaway from this conclusion is the fact that the Republican Party only became ideologically coherent from the 1960s onward.

Matt Grossman and David A. Hopkins (2015) deem the Conservative Capture as the moment the Republican Party became an ideological movement in their article *Ideological*

¹⁷ Himmelstein, J. I. (1990). *To the Right : the Transformation of American Conservatism* (Reprint 2019), p. 13

¹⁸ Ellis, C., & Stimson, J. A. (2012). *Ideology in America*, p. 2

¹⁹ Conley, B. M. (2013). The Politics of Party Renewal: The “Service Party” and the Origins of the Post-Goldwater Republican Right. *Studies in American Political Development*, 27(1), p. 51

²⁰ Conley 2013, p. 67

Republicans and Group Interest Democrats: The Asymmetry of American Politics. Beyond simply aligning with the scholarly consensus that the modern Republican Party has been ideologically coherent since the 1970s, the article was published in 2015 which makes it an accurate representation of the scholarly view of the role of ideology within the Republican Party before Donald Trump. For the purpose of this thesis, their most important contribution is their comparison of the contemporary (as of 2015), ideologically driven Republican Party with a supposedly less ideological Republican Party of the past. They identify the Party's transition to an ideological movement as occurring in the 1970s.²¹ This is significant in the sense that they present the contemporary (read 2015) Republican Party as part of an ideological movement that originated more than 50 years ago. In other words, the contemporary Republican Party was an ideological continuation of Republican Party tradition reaching back to the 1970s.

Ideology in America is a book written by Christopher Ellis and James A. Stimson (2012), and it adds to the argument that ideology is an important element of American politics. Specifically, they draw upon and explain the "Operational-Symbolic Disconnect" (OSD), a known theory in political studies. Summarized, they argue that there are two faces of ideology in America. The first is symbolic ideology, which is a representation of what citizens believe their views to be, be it liberal, conservative, moderate or something else. Operational ideology is grounded in concrete decisions; what specific actions a citizen believes the Government should take or not take.²² Ellis and Stimson find that the majority of Americans are symbolically conservative, but operationally liberal.²³ This is the "Operational-Symbolic Disconnect". The theory is relevant to the thesis as it contributes with a possible answer the Republican Party's success after the conservative capture and can be used to explain why Trumpism is argued to be a new type of conservatism. Specifically, the thesis relies on the two faces of ideology in America to discuss the thesis statement.

The OSD is supported by other scholars. It was first noted in 1967 by Lloyd A. Free and Hadley Cantril in *The Political Beliefs of Americans*.²⁴ Barber and Pope (2019), this time with the article *Does Party Trump Ideology? Disentangling Party and Ideology in America*,

²¹ Grossmann, M., & Hopkins, D. A. (2015). Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats: The Asymmetry of American Party Politics. *Perspectives on Politics*, 13(1), p. 121

²² Ellis & Stimson, 2012, p. 11

²³ Ellis & Stimson, 2012, p. 11

²⁴ Ellis & Stimson, 2012, p. 11

used the OSD to argue that citizens behave as party loyalists instead of principled ideologues.²⁵ Though this means that symbolic ideology is not a good measure of operational ideology within the public, it does not translate to the Republican politicians, who are symbolically and operationally coherent. Therefore, it is still possible to extract information about Republican Party ideology from speeches and addresses.

This brings us to the State of the Union Address. *Addressing the State of the Union: The Evolution and Impact of the President's Big Speech* by Donna R. Hoffman and Alison D. Howard (2006) is the most comprehensive and in-depth piece of research on the address. The book documents both the political significance and legislative impact of the State of the Union Addresses. It is important to this thesis in two ways. First, it presents the Address through time, and how it has changed in form, content, and power. This is very relevant to the methodological choices of this thesis. Second, it defines the rhetoric employed by presidents in the address as policy-making rhetoric. Policymaking rhetoric is designed to convince Congress and the American people to approve of the President's policies and is done by incorporating symbolism and language that resonates with U.S. citizens.²⁶ In other words, the rapport-and-recommend structure of the SUA ensures that Presidents present both their symbolic and operational ideology in the address.

Collen J. Shogan (2015) provides a more recent piece of research in the article *The President's State of the Union Address: Tradition, Function, and Policy Implications*. Shogan does not present a different view of the address compared to Hoffman and Howard but does contribute specific statistics regarding common elements found within the address. In other words, Shogan's article provides this thesis with a generalized description of the State of the Union Address, of which the Republican Presidents' addresses can be compared. For example, Shogan identifies bipartisanship as a theme that is typical.²⁷ As such, a high or low degree of bipartisanship within an address becomes natural to discuss as it sets the address apart from the average. Furthermore, statistical averages regarding the number of policy

²⁵ Barber, M., & Pope, J. C. (2019B). Does Party Trump Ideology? Disentangling Party and Ideology in America. *The American Political Science Review*, 113(1), p. 52

²⁶ Hoffman, D. R., & Howard, A. D. (2006). *Addressing the state of the union : the evolution and impact of the president's big speech*, p. 57

²⁷ Shogan, C. J. (2015). The President's State of the Union Address: Tradition, Function, and Policy Implications. *Congressional Research Service*, p. 7

proposals from different periods in the progression of presidential terms are provided by Shogan, which informs the methodological choice of data in this thesis.

1.1.2. Theoretical concepts

The ideology of Trump is best characterized as a conservative nationalist-populist ideology, in which nativist, anti-globalist, and free-market views exist. In order to properly apply these terms to the analysis of the SUAs, we must first understand what these terms mean and imply. We will begin with populism, as it is perhaps the defining feature of Trumpism

It is profoundly difficult to construct a generalized description, or a universal definition of populism as an ideology or as a political movement.²⁸ The core feature of populism lies in its ‘empty heart’; it lacks the core values of other ideologies and attaches itself to other ideologies such as nationalism or socialism.²⁹ As such, populism and populist movements, politics, and ideas are defined and dependent of the contexts they appear in. The context defines the core of each and every instance of populism throughout history. Therefore, populism has often been referred to as a discursive frame rather than its own ideology.³⁰ The key feature of this discursive frame is two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the ‘pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite’.³¹ Populism can be an ideology, a strategy, or a political style, but it will consistently play on the opposition of two homogeneous and antagonistic groups. Paul Taggart summarizes it as follows: “Populism is an episodic, anti-political, empty-hearted, chameleonic celebration of the heartland in the face of crisis”.³²

As we have already mentioned, populism usually attaches itself to another ideology with more defined key values. The populist movement spearheaded by Trump is seemingly attached to a form of nationalism. Nationalism is a concept that has affected world history for the last two centuries, although in different forms and intersecting with other ideologies. Lloyd Kramer argues that the ideology has arguably contributed more violent conflicts than any other political or ideological force in the contemporary world.³³ Since the dust settled after WWII, nationalism has had a rather negative ring to it, considering it was national

²⁸ Taggart, P. A. (2000). *Populism*, p. 2

²⁹ Taggart, 2000, p. 4

³⁰ Jupskås, A. R. (2020, September 7). What is Populism? *C-REX – Center for Research on Extremism, UIO*

³¹ Jupskås, 2020

³² Taggart, 2000, p. 5

³³ Kramer, L. S. (2011). *Nationalism in Europe and America*, p. 1

warfare that had led to two world wars in the span of 30 years. In order to understand what nationalism is today, we turn to a prominent scholar on nations and nationalism: Anthony D. Smith. He has defined the nationalism of today as the following:

[...] an ideological movement to attain and maintain autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members believe it to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'. Nationalism is not simply a shared sentiment or consciousness, nor is it to be equated with the 'rise of nations'. It is an active movement inspired by an ideology and symbolism of the nation.³⁴

Smith highlights eight key motifs and themes that concern nationalisms, although to a varying degree. They are as follows:

1. *autonomy*, the longing on part of the national members to live according to their own laws, without outside interference
2. *unity*, the desire for territorial unification and unimpeded mobility, as well as social solidarity
3. *identity*, or uniqueness, the recovery of 'innate' individuality of the national community
4. *authenticity*, a rediscovery of the nations' 'true nature', unique origins, history and culture
5. *the homeland*, a sense of belonging, memory and attachment to historic territory regarded as strictly 'theirs'
6. *dignity*, the idea that the national community should be dignified with the prestige and status consistent with their 'inner worth'
7. *continuity*, a feeling of linkage between themselves and earlier cultures in a relatively unbroken line of succession
8. *destiny*, the conviction that the national community has a destined, often glorious, path of progress peculiar to themselves.³⁵

The importance of each motif and theme can fluctuate between the one nationalism or the other, and from period to period. However, they are always present within nationalisms, and can therefore be used to identify and distinguish nationalisms from each other. In the case of

³⁴ Smith, A. D. (2009). *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism: a cultural approach*, p. 61

³⁵ Smith, 2009, p. 62-63

Trump's nationalistic ideology, his slogan "Make America Great Again" and political rhetoric suggests that *identity, authenticity, the homeland, dignity, and destiny* are central motifs and themes.

Conservatism, the final defining characteristic of Trumpism, is not as much an ideology as it is a political philosophy. Although American conservatism has changed and evolved throughout the twentieth century, Jerome L. Himmelstein has identified four core beliefs of American conservatism which build upon each other:

1. The central peril facing America, and the world, is the "aggrandizement of the power of the state", the tendency of the state organizing or planning all social life.
2. The growth of the state is driven primarily in the name of equality, social welfare, or an earthly utopia.
3. A variety of different political phenoms, for example communism, social democracy, or Third World nationalism, are all in essence similar because they all tend to the aggrandizement of the power of the state.
4. By implication, only two kinds of society are possible: collectivism or free society. Free society is in the conservative mind capitalism understood in a particular way.³⁶

These four core beliefs have resulted in three core elements that make-up the conservative ideology: economic libertarianism, social traditionalism, and militant anticommunism. Not all political issues may fit within these rubrics, but what matters is that the way conservatives define themselves and what has come to be called conservatism involve the combination of these three elements.³⁷

1.2. Methodology

1.2.1. Approaching the thesis statement

This thesis relies on a comparative textual analysis of the State of the Union Addresses held by the last six Republican presidents during their reelection year. The specific approach is to use existing literature to define the core elements of Trumpism, and then analyze Donald Trump's election year State of the Union Address with the intention of proving how Trumpism is reflected within it. Specifically, the analysis of Trump's address will provide a foundation that consists of specific symbols, rhetoric, and values that will be used for

³⁶ Himmelstein, 1990, p. 30

³⁷ Himmelstein, 1990, p. 14

subsequent comparison with his Republican predecessors. This comparative analysis will provide signs of continuity and discontinuity, not only between Trump and his Republican predecessors, but between the predecessors themselves. Those signs of continuity and discontinuity will be used to answer the thesis statement: *To what degree does Trumpism represent an ideological break from Republican Party tradition?*

1.2.2. Methodological reflections

As the thesis concerns itself with the concepts of continuity and discontinuity over time, it prescribes a diachronic method of comparison of similarities and differences.³⁸ The diachronic dimension of comparison, and the emphasis on similarities are the determining factors in the choice of the State of the Union Address as the primary source material. First and foremost, the source material needs to be suitable for comparison. Over the course of the last fifty years, presidential communications have evolved alongside digital technology. For example, Donald Trump was notorious for his ceaseless posting on Twitter (now 'X'), which is a form of presidential communication that was unavailable to his Republican predecessors. This is where the State of the Union is suitable. As a constitutional duty, the State of the Union address is a speech that is steeped in tradition and ceremony. And although the form and content has evolved considerably since it was first held in 1790, it has not done so since Lyndon B. Johnson began airing the speech during prime time in 1965.³⁹ In other words, the tradition and ceremony surrounding the address ensures a level of similarity between the addresses across the relevant time period of the thesis. Thus, comparing the State of the Union Address is analytically fruitful.

The next challenge is the number of addresses that are compared. I have made the choice of limiting the size and scope of the source material to the reelection year State of the Union Addresses. Research show that the progression of the Presidential term affects the content and rhetoric of the SUA, and during an election year, claims of past achievements rise to 13% of the sentences and policy proposals increase to an average of 34 requests.⁴⁰ In other words, the reelection year SUA provides a larger basis for comparison. Furthermore, the statistical variations between addresses means that the addresses that are subject to analysis in this

³⁸ Melve, L. (2018). Kapittel 6: Å Arbeide Komparativt (p. 70-91). In Melve, L., & Ryymin, T., *Historikerens arbeidsmåter*. Universitetsforlaget.

³⁹ Shogan, 2015, p. 1, 3

⁴⁰ Shogan, 2015, p. 9

thesis need to have been held at the same point of the Presidential progression. And since several Republican Presidents never held second term SUAs, the choice of address had to be from the first term of each President. As such, the reelection year SUAs are best suited for a limited in-depth analysis.

Yet, the most important question regarding representation is whether or not a single State of the Union Address can be representative of the ideological beliefs of a President. Ideally, this thesis would have analyzed all SUAs delivered by the Republican presidents at the same depth, but the limits in size and scope placed upon the thesis by the formal frameworks removes this possibility. However, the issue of representation may be mediated by a brief examination of differences in the general approach that each president took to their SUAs. This thesis is concerned with the expressed ideological views of the Republican presidents, and as will be shown, there are not enough differences in expressed ideological beliefs between the SUAs of each President to disregard the reelection year SUAs' ability to be representative.

The last methodological choice is the decision to not go further back in time than Richard M. Nixon. Beyond the limits to size and scope placed upon the thesis by the formal framework, this decision was made on the basis of the history of the SUA, as well as the history of the Republican Party. Richard Nixon is the first Republican President to deliver and televise his address during prime time. The move towards prime-time delivery is connected to a greater acknowledgement of the American people as audience, alongside Congress. In other words, the SUAs delivered before this was more oriented towards Congress and less towards the American people. If the thesis were to analyze the expressed ideological beliefs of Republican Presidents preceding Nixon, the SUA would be less suitable for comparison because of the significant change in audience, and by extension purpose, before and after 1965. Fortunately, the move towards prime time coincides with a significant point in history of the Republican Party: The Conservative Capture. Though scholars such as Gerring argue that it is possible to speak of a Republican Party ideology from the 1920s and onwards, the "Goldwater Phenomenon" exposed an ideological divide within the party that was addressed and removed during the 1960s and 70s. Seeing as the scholarly consensus argues that the process towards the modern Republican Party began with this, I have chosen to not engage with primary sources from beyond this point in time.

2. Historical background

Although the contemporary landscape of American politics is, without doubt, affected by ideology, the role of ideology in American politics has been the subject of scholarly disputes across the 20th century. The old guard argued that ideology held a minimal role in American politics, especially compared to its democratic contemporaries in Europe.⁴¹ This may have held some truth at a certain time in history, but over the course of the 20th century this changed. Starting in the 1960s, the Republican Party began transforming to an ideological movement that was spearheaded by a right-wing conservative movement within the Party itself. This chapter will present the history of the modern Republican Party ideology, and the core elements it consists of. Should the thesis be able to accurately assess to what degree Trumpism represents an ideological break from Republican tradition, knowledge of that ideological tradition is needed. This is provided in the first subchapter.

The thesis' chosen catalyst for both Trumpism and Republican Party ideology is the State of the Union Address, which is no ordinary speech. Originating from the American Constitution, the SUA is an annual address delivered before a joint session of Congress on the current state of the union. It is steeped in ceremony and tradition, yet it has evolved considerably since it was first delivered by George Washington in 1790. The history of the SUA is knowledge needed to grasp how the address can serve as a catalyst of political ideology in America. Within the SUA, presidents provide a rapport and recommendations on the state of the union which are informed by the historical context they were delivered within. Consequently, the second subchapter presents the history of the SUA, whereas the third subchapter presents the relevant Republican Presidents, and the historic times they presided in. Together, the three subchapters will provide the necessary knowledge to answer the following question: *What are the core aspects of the Republican party ideology, and how can they be seen within the State of the Union Address?*

2.1. Ideology in American politics

2.1.1. The role of ideology

⁴¹ Gerring, 1997, p. 4

There has existed a strong and persistent view between scholars that political parties in America have been less ideological compared to other Western democracies.⁴² The argument is that both parties exist within a shared political culture. However much at odds the parties were on specific issues, they had both "[...] accepted the economic virtues of capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man".⁴³ The structural framework of party politics in America is often used as validating evidence for the non-ideological argument. As opposed to a parliamentary system of government where the prime ministerial candidates seek to bring their party to power, American politicians campaign as leaders of the nation. Thus, a presidential candidate will emphasize nation founders rather than party founders, national symbols rather than party symbols, and so forth.⁴⁴ The reliance on shared national political symbols supports the nonideological view, but more recent research have opposed the nonideology argument.

At the core of the nonideology argument sits the idea that American politics are issue-driven, and not ideologically driven. As such, the nonideology argument appears more valid for the period in American politics before the conservative capture of the Republican Party. The conservative capture of the Republican Party is signified by Barry Goldwater's failed electoral bid as the Republican candidate in 1964. Goldwater's candidacy is usually seen as the start of the conservative capture, since the man himself was such a radical conservative that he exposed the deep ideological divides that plagued the Republican Party.⁴⁵ During the 1960s, the conservative movement became a complex, effective, and organized political force that dominated the Republican party by 1968, which would eventually secure the overwhelming victory of the staunch republican Ronald Reagan in 1980.⁴⁶ The rise of the Republican right was accompanied by an increased emphasis on ideology, making the party more ideologically driven from the 1970s and onward.⁴⁷

In other words, ideology became a determining factor for the behavior of the Republican Party from the 1960s onwards. And if you compare the amount of Republican presidential

⁴² Gerring lists the following sources for the nonideology argument: Silbey, 1991, p. 75; Epstein, 1986, p. 266; Ladd, 1970, p. 30, 158; Beer, 1965, p. 49; Duverger, 1951, p. 418; Merriam, 1922, p. 201-246; Bryce, 1891, p. 2

⁴³ Gerring, 1997, p. 4

⁴⁴ Gerring, 1997, p. 8

⁴⁵ Conley, 2013

⁴⁶ Conley, 2013, p. 54

⁴⁷ Grossman & Hopkins, 2015, p. 121

candidates elected after the conservative capture with the number of elections before, the Republican Party appeared to be more successful.⁴⁸ This can be explained by the Operational-Symbolic Disconnect (OSD). It argues that a large number of Americans cling to conservative symbols while advocating liberal policies; there is a disconnect between how Americans ideologically identify themselves and what concrete policies they pursue.⁴⁹ The conservative capture turned the Republican Party into the ideological Party within American politics. Compared to the Republican Party, the Democratic Party is far less ideological and more concerned with concrete government action and policy. In other words, the Republican Party appeals to the symbolically conservative American people, whereas the Democratic Party appeals to the same operationally liberal American people. The next question to answer is exactly what are the values and ideas of the modern Republican party?

2.1.2. Republican Party Ideology

Defining the Republican Party ideology is difficult. Firstly, the Party has undergone major fundamental changes since its conception. Second, different scholars place these major changes at different points in time. It is therefore natural to start at the themes that have persisted across the many fundamental changes. At its core, the Republican Party is a party concerned with economic growth, patriotism, and preserving the social order.⁵⁰ These themes should be understood as the objectives the Republican Party has aimed to achieve. The fundamental changes should be understood as fundamental reorientations in the approach to reaching these goals.

Gerring argues that these reorientations happened during the 1920s and separates the Republican party ideology into two different ideological epochs, each defined by two different central dichotomies: Nationalism (1828-1924) – order versus anarchy, and Neoliberalism (1924-present) – the state versus the individual.⁵¹ They differ in how the rights of the individual should be protected; the most significant danger to individual rights and true freedom were no longer from foreigner's intrusion and civil disorder, but the state itself. The need to protect the individual from the federal government is rooted in the belief that citizens, families, and communities are the driving forces of successful societies, and not the

⁴⁸ Before 1964, the last four out of five presidential administrations were Democratic. Between 1968 and 2020, five out of eight administrations were Republican.

⁴⁹ Ellis & Stimson, 2012, p. 11

⁵⁰ Gerring, 1997, p. 16

⁵¹ Gerring, 1997, p. 16

government.⁵² Whereas Nationalist Republicans sought to protect individual rights through the actions of an interventionist state, Neoliberal republicans adopted the view that the individual was to be set free from the machinations of the state.⁵³

It is important to note that the transition to a neoliberal Republican Party did not happen in 1924; the transition towards the modern Republican Party appear to begin in 1924, but would not result in a coherent party ideology before the conservative capture over the course of the 1960s and 70s. Beyond just signaling ideology's determining role in Republican Party behavior, the conservative capture is also thought to signal the ideological unification of the party. Goldwater's failed 1964 election exposed a deep and growing divide between party liberals and conservatives.⁵⁴ Faced with growing ideological divides, the organizational response was one of unification and renewal. Instead of continued ideological disputes within the party, the national party leadership chose party unity behind the conservative movement.⁵⁵ As such, it is only after the conservative capture that it is possible to speak of a single modern Republican Party ideology that is united in its political aims and how to reach them.

What characterizes the modern Republican Party ideology then? At its core is the idea that American society on all levels has an organic order which is only disturbed by misguided ideas and policies, specifically the ideas and policies of a liberal government. In other words, the biggest danger to the harmonious and self-sustaining system that is American society, is government.⁵⁶ From this idea spurs a series of conservative elements that together form the make-up of the modern Republican Party. They are the following: the equal opportunity of individuals, individual freedom, antistatism, right-wing populism, anticommunism/militant patriotism, and free-market capitalism.

We start with defining the modern Republican notion of equal opportunity. Herbert Hoover captured the essences of this in his 1928 acceptance speech:

It is as if we set a race. We, through free and universal education, provide the training to the runners; we give them an equal start; we provide in the government the umpire

⁵² Ellis & Stimson, 2012, p. 5

⁵³ Gerring, 1997, p. 15

⁵⁴ Conley, 2013, p. 55

⁵⁵ Conley, 2013, p. 55

⁵⁶ Himmelstein, 1990, p. 14

of fairness in the race. The winner is he who shows the most conscientious training, the greatest ability, and the greatest character. Socialism bids to end the race equally. It holds back the speedy to the pace of the slowest...⁵⁷

The republican fight for equality is the fight to protect the individual's opportunity to emancipate themselves by removing government influence, thus reflecting the central dichotomy once more. Individual freedom and anti-statism are near self-explanatory, as it refers to the individual freedom from government influence, and the skepticism about the government's ability and responsibility to address social problems.⁵⁸

The adoption of right-wing populism was a significant new theme within modern Republican Party ideology. Populism is dependent on context, so speaking of a continuous right-wing populism within modern Republican Party ideology is not possible. However, Republican presidents and presidential candidates began framing political rhetoric within a frame of the individual citizen versus certain special interest groups. A great example of this is Nixon's 1968 election campaign, where he evoked the idea of the "silent majority" in America which was being shut out from the political processes.⁵⁹ Republicans began attacking the elite and the establishment on behalf of the people, or the individual.⁶⁰ Furthermore, neoliberal republicans began presenting religion and family values as the bulwark of civil society against the ever-growing government. Ronald Reagan is notorious for this.

Lastly, the Republican party adopted an anticommunist stance. Being anticommunist was not reserved solely for Republicans, seeing as Democrats also viewed the communist Soviet Union as the enemy. The modern Republican's anticommunist stance was built upon its partisan traditions of patriotism, or Americanism. Republicans were the defenders of social order and America.⁶¹ However, the make-up of "Americanness" changed significantly. It moved from religion, ethnicity, language, and lifestyle, to the ideology of freedom.⁶² Communism represented un-Americanness, and a danger to the "American" way of life. A fight between freedom and suppression. Modern Republicans spoke of Communism not only

⁵⁷ Hoover, acceptance speech, 11.08.1928

⁵⁸ Grossman & Hopkins, 2015, p. 120

⁵⁹ Gerring, 1997, p. 144

⁶⁰ Himmelstein, 1990, p. 92

⁶¹ Gerring, 1997, p. 152

⁶² Gerring, 1997, p. 153

as an external danger represented by the Soviet Union, but as a cancer that needed to be contained wherever it arose. That could be within the U.S. border, or in other countries such as Vietnam.⁶³ Anticommunism is synonymous with the patriotic fight for freedom and security across the world. This ‘mission’ of ensuring and protecting freedom and peace remained when the Cold War ended. For example, that same rhetoric is employed in Bush’s war on terror. As such, it is perhaps better to speak of the anticommunist element within modern Republican Party ideology as militant patriotism.

2.2. State of the Union Address

2.2.1. Form and content

The State of the Union Address is a communication between the President of the United States and Congress in which the President reports the current conditions of the nation and presents policy proposals to address those conditions.⁶⁴ The communication, which was originally called the Annual Message, originates within the Constitution, where it is required that the President “shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient».⁶⁵ The way the President has fulfilled this constitutional duty has varied throughout history. George Washington and John Adams both delivered their report orally before both houses of Congress, but Thomas Jefferson changed course and delivered his report in writing. This would remain the procedure between the years of 1801 and 1913, until Woodrow Wilson ‘stunned official Washington’ and delivered his Annual Message before a joint session of Congress.⁶⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt cemented the oral tradition of delivering the Annual Message before joint sessions of Congress and changed the name from the Annual Message to the State of the Union Address.⁶⁷

Harry Truman’s 1947 SUA was the first to be televised, and it continued to be delivered during the day until Lyndon B. Johnson changed the timing of the speech to prime time in 1965.⁶⁸ Additionally, Lyndon B. Johnson was the first President to formally include the

⁶³ Gerring, 1997, p. 155

⁶⁴ Shogan, 2015, p. 1

⁶⁵ US Const., Article II, Section 3, clause 1

⁶⁶ Shogan, 2015, p. 2

⁶⁷ Shogan, 2015, p. 2

⁶⁸ <https://www.senate.gov/about/traditions-symbols/state-of-the-union.htm>

American public in his opening, which was a significant step towards the inclusion of the public audience. Ronald Reagan introduced the tradition of inviting key guests, nicknamed ‘Lenny Skutniks’ who were ordinary Americans whose actions exemplified values and characteristics that Reagan wanted to uphold, a tradition that has been followed in every subsequent SUA.⁶⁹ The final significant development within the history of the modern SUA came in 1997 when the Address was streamed live on the internet as well.⁷⁰ Since then, there have been no major developments or changes made to the form or content of the speech. However, there have been significant changes regarding the purpose and benefits of the speech. What once was a constitutional duty of the President developed into a communicative power over the course of the twentieth century, as Presidents realized the SUA provided them with an extraordinary forum to not only appeal to Congress, but also to the American public.⁷¹

The SUA is a speech steeped in tradition and ceremony, and there are certain consistencies present within all SUAs. Given that it has been dubbed a ritual, a uniquely powerful one at that, it is not unsurprising that some aspects of the speech have not evolved considerably, especially not since Johnson began televising it to the American public in prime time.⁷² For example, scholars have identified three repetitive, sequential arguments in SUAs: public meditations on values, assessment of information and issues, and policy recommendations.⁷³ First, the president will identify a value that he deems critical to the nation. Then, an issue connected to the value is highlighted before the president presents Congress and the public with a policy recommendation that directly addresses this issue.⁷⁴ This is not the only way the SUAs maintain some consistencies between each other, despite being held in often profoundly different historical and political environments.

Three different themes tend to reoccur in the SUA: past and future, bipartisanship, and optimism. Past achievements and future goals are often used by Presidents to further develop their idea of the American national identity. Their idea of the American national identity informs which past achievements they reference, and which future goals they wish to meet. Given that the Presidents gives their address to a joint session of Congress, they often frame

⁶⁹ Shogan, 2015, p. 5

⁷⁰ Hoffman & Howard, 2006, p. 43

⁷¹ Hoffman & Howard, 2006, p. 44

⁷² Shogan, 2015, p. 4

⁷³ Campbell, K. K. & Jamieson, K. H. (2008). *Presidents creating the presidency: deeds done in words*, p. 139

⁷⁴ Shogan, 2015, p. 6

their arguments in a way that may create consensus. This aspect separates the SUA from other speeches. No matter the crisis facing the country, be it World War 2, the Cold War, 9/11, or the coronavirus, the President employs a can-do attitude. The USA has never faced a crisis deemed ‘insurmountable’ by the President during the SUA.⁷⁵

As an address designed to appeal to both Congress and the American people, it is not surprising that the content of the speech varies alongside the progression of the presidential term. Colleen Shogan has noted that the emphasis of the SUA tends to change depending on the year within the presidential term it is held. First-year addresses are more forward-looking, taking positions on a higher number of policy issues.⁷⁶ During the midterm years, the emphasis changes to policy achievements rather than policy requests. Election year addresses are not explicitly used to campaign for office, but the changes within the address are indicative of an awareness of the election. The number of past achievements highlighted increases, as well as a slight increase in policy suggestions.⁷⁷ If a president is reelected for a second term, all SUAs given during the second term tend to give more attention to foreign and defense policy, perhaps with the intention of building a legacy.⁷⁸

2.2.2. Power and purpose

Pre-twentieth century presidents were publicly silent regarding matters of policy, in stark contrast to modern presidents who “[...] regularly ‘go over the heads’ of Congress to the people in support of legislation and other initiatives.”⁷⁹ This observation refers to the establishment of the modern rhetorical presidency. Regarding the SUA, the ability to ‘go over the heads’ of Congress and address the public instead dramatically increased in 1965, when Lyndon B. Johnson began delivering his address in prime time. Additionally, the SUA allows for no other immediate viewpoints on the President’s rapport and recommendations for the nation. This makes the SUA an incredibly powerful and important tool within the modern, rhetorical presidency. It is important to note that since 1966, the opposition party has offered a televised response to the SUA immediately after the SUA. However, the response is significantly shorter, usually only lasting ten minutes on average.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Shogan, 2015, p. 7, 8.

⁷⁶ Shogan, 2015, p. 8

⁷⁷ Shogan, 2015, p. 9

⁷⁸ Hoffman & Howard, 2006, p. 119

⁷⁹ Laracey, M. (2009). The Rhetorical Presidency Today: How Does It Stand Up?, in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 39(4), p. 927

⁸⁰ Shogan, 2015, p. 12

Donna R. Hoffman and Alison D. Howard claim that “As it exists today, the SUA has extraordinary value as a speech”.⁸¹ Why is this? Clinton Rossiter argues that there are five constitutional roles assigned to the presidency: chief of state, chief executive, chief diplomat, commander-in-chief, and chief legislator. Furthermore, he identified five extraconstitutional roles: party chief, voice of the people, protector of peace, manager of prosperity, and leader of a coalition of free nations.⁸² The SUA is, in its current form, a “bully pulpit” from which the President may carry out all his roles, both constitutional and extraconstitutional.⁸³ Consequently, within the rhetorical modern presidency, the SUA provides the president with a unique opportunity to promote his policy recommendations, its power is only amplified by the fact that the SUA allows for no other immediate viewpoints. It is worth noting that the power and purpose of the address do not appear to change depending on whether the President is Republican or Democrat. The next important step is to provide a brief, but necessary description of the Republican presidencies and what they were defined by.

2.3. History of Republican Presidents

2.3.1. Richard Nixon (1969-1974): Remnants of an ideological divide

The presidency of Richard Nixon appears to show signs of the ideological divide of the Republican Party that the party sought to end in the 1960s. This is evident when comparing Nixon’s legislative agenda to that of modern republicanism, as we can identify both liberal and conservative tendencies. Nixon inherited the mantle of President during an especially tumultuous period in American history. The political landscape in 1968 was defined by race riots, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., and of course, the Cold War. As a Republican president, Nixon remains a rather curious case. Noam Chomsky went as far as to name Nixon as the last liberal president.⁸⁴ This is due to his administration’s activist approach to domestic matters such as environmental protection, welfare reform, and Native American rights. On the other hand, Nixon reflected a typical modern Republican political ideology through his distaste of big government and bureaucracy.⁸⁵ It is worth noting

⁸¹ Hoffman & Howard, 2006, p. 49

⁸² Hoffman & Howard, 2006, p. 49

⁸³ Hoffman & Howard, 2006, p. 50

⁸⁴ Conetta, 2014, February 21

⁸⁵ Gould, L. L. (2014), *The Republicans*, p. 268

that his “liberal” tendencies disappeared during his second term as he sought domestic change through restructuring the government, making it less intrusive and smaller.⁸⁶ Nixon reigned during a time when the Republican Party was restructuring itself behind the conservative movement within the party. The liberal and conservative tendencies of Nixon seem to reflect the ideological divide within the party.

The 1972 address of President Nixon is clearly affected by the Cold War and the Vietnam war, as well as the decade of domestic turmoil that was the 1960s. President Nixon spends less time looking back at history. Instead, the address holds a clear orientation towards the future, where the United States will have a central leading role in the international world. Domestically, Nixon called for Congress to set aside partisan interest to serve national interest; for doing what is right and doing it the right way.⁸⁷ It reads more like a call for action to Congress and the leadership of the United States, and less as a message to the American public. The core themes are clearly optimism and bipartisanship. His liberal tendencies are present within the address by emphasizing the positive effects of federal jurisdiction, and his intention of making executive government more effective and response.⁸⁸ These examples contradict the modern Republican Party ideological belief of limiting government influence. On the other hand, Nixon exhibited conservative tendencies by his emphasis on economic growth.

When compared to the rest of Nixon’s SUAs, the address held in 1972 does not stand out in any major way. Both his domestic and foreign focus remains rather static. Regarding domestic issues, Nixon consistently emphasized welfare reform, economic growth, environmental protection, health care, strengthening state and local governments, and reorganizing federal government. He had a mostly Republican approach to these issues, which was echoed by the positive responses from other Republicans.⁸⁹ Nixon’s years in office marked a period of ‘détente’ with the Soviet Union, which was decisive regarding his administration’s foreign policy. The spirit of ‘détente’ is not a typically Republican one. The Watergate scandal would bring an early end to Nixon’s presidency, but he did deliver two more SUAs. These signaled an ideological shift further towards right-wing conservatism. It is

⁸⁶ Gould, 2014, p. 272

⁸⁷ Address on the State of the Union Before a Joint Session of Congress, January 20, 1972

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Kalb, D., Peters, G., & Woolley, J. T. (2007) *State of the Union: Presidential Rhetoric from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush*, p. 679

evident in is more direct conservative expressions where he stated the need for the US to “draw the line” regarding Government expenditure, and the reduction of liberal tendencies.⁹⁰

2.3.2. Gerald R. Ford (1974-1977): Picking up the pieces

Gerald R. Ford is the only president of the United States who was not elected to office, neither as president nor vice president. He was appointed vice president to Nixon after Spiro Agnew resigned from his post as vice president in 1973. When Nixon resigned to avoid facing impeachment in 1974, Ford became president, and faced a near-impossible task. Democrats controlled both houses in Congress. The Watergate scandal had toppled a Republican administration that been in office since 1969 and ensured that Ford was president during a time of great disillusionment with the presidency. Additionally, the economy was suffering.⁹¹ Ford had a reputation as an honest politician, though this reputation took a hit in 1974 when he pardoned Nixon. In terms of his political ideology, Ford was a modern, but moderate Republican. He consistently promoted Republican policies, both domestic and foreign. However, he was moderate in his presentation of these policies. Instead of presenting government as the problem, he argued that massive national programs were intended to help, but too often failed and made things worse.⁹²

‘New Realism’ is the phrase that summarizes the election year SUA of Gerald Ford. In the address, Ford is mainly concerned with domestic issues and policies. What he dubs ‘new realism’ can be regarded as a reorientation in what the role of government should be in regard to the American economy and social life. Ford acknowledges that Federal Government has its use, but that in recent times “we trampled on sound principles of restraint and endangered the rights of individuals.”⁹³ The entire SUA reads as a Republican reiteration of what Federal Government should and should not do. He concludes this reiteration at the end of his address: “I see these United States of America moving forward as before toward a more perfect union where the government serves and the people rule”. Noticeably, he argued that the federal government had an important purpose which sets him apart from the next Republican president.

⁹⁰ Kalb et al., 2007, p. 687

⁹¹ Kalb et al., 2007, p. 752

⁹² Kalb et al., 2007, p. 760

⁹³ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress Reporting on the State of the Union, January 19, 1976

Gerald R. Ford would only deliver three SUAs, as he lost the 1976 election to Jimmy Carter by a narrow margin. Ford's period as president of the US was ultimately colored by the same issues of economic crisis, and the unfortunate legacy of the Watergate scandal. This translates to a lack of variation across Ford's SUAs. He expresses the same Republican approach to the same domestic and foreign issues across all three addresses. The greatest sense of variation is year to year improvement of the state of the union. In his first address Ford said that the state of the union was not good. The next year it was better, before it was good as Ford handed over the presidency to Jimmy Carter.

2.3.3. Ronald Reagan (1981-1989): The embodiment of conservatism

Ronald Reagan remains perhaps the most conservative Republican president during the period of time relevant to this thesis. In many ways, he embodied the core principles of modern conservatism: He focused heavily on reducing the size of government and its expenditure, identifying the federal government as the source of America's woes.⁹⁴

Furthermore, he exhibited a clear anticommunist view by presenting the battle between the Soviet Union as the battle between freedom and oppression. To do this, he increased the federal funds spent on national defense which rose from \$134 billion in 1980 to over \$290 billion in 1988.⁹⁵ Lastly, he expressed a clear and consistent stance on a range of social issues, such as abortion, illegal drugs and "family values". The common denominator was his framing of the issues within the modern Republican theme of individual freedom.⁹⁶ In terms of the historical developments during his presidency, the Cold War reigned supreme once again. However, Reagan did not approach the conflict with the spirit of 'détente' from the 1970s.

Ronald Reagan's SUA differs from Nixon's and Ford's in important ways. Firstly, President Reagan includes several guests in his address that embody American values and beliefs. Of course, this is a tradition that President Reagan himself introduced in his 1982 SUA with Lenny Skutnik. President Reagan spends a considerable portion of his address to speak of the dangers of "the government", specifically the dangers of a large one and how to reduce its size and scope.⁹⁷ Summarized, President Reagan's SUA is mostly defined by conservatist

⁹⁴ Harris D. B. & Bailey, L. H. (2014) *The Republican Party: documents decoded*, p. 25

⁹⁵ Harris & Bailey, 2014, p. 25

⁹⁶ Harris & Bailey, 2014, p. 26

⁹⁷ Address before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 25, 1984

populism. Despite often speaking of bipartisanship, Reagan consistently presents the government as a danger to the people. He presents the dangers of government as dangers to traditional conservative values such as freedom, faith, and equal opportunity.

The 'Great Communicator' did not exhibit any sense of variation in his ideological convictions across the seven SUAs he delivered over the course of his presidency. Consistently, Reagan would identify the Federal Government as the source of the nation's woes. In his 1982 Reagan said that the Federal Government was "more pervasive, more intrusive, more unmanageable, more ineffective and costly, and above all, more unaccountable".⁹⁸ Six years later, Reagan held his last SUA where he said: "As I indicated in my first State of the Union, what ails us can be simply put: The Federal Government is too big and it spends too much money."⁹⁹ In other words, Reagan remained consistent in his modern Republican ideological beliefs.

2.3.4. George H. W. Bush (1989-1993): A hard act to follow

George Herbert Walker Bush was elected president after Ronald Reagan's second term ended. Promising a "kinder, gentler nation" in his inaugural address, Bush seemingly offered a more moderate agenda than his predecessor.¹⁰⁰ Whether or not he represented a significant departure or not, his failure to be reelected in 1994 is telling of his inability to retain the support of the Republican Party politicians and voters, post-Reagan. Although his foreign policy won him praise, handling both the fall of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War well, his domestic policies brought criticism from both democrats and republicans alike.¹⁰¹ His administration was typically conservative, employing several republicans from the GOP mainstream.¹⁰²

In terms of his administration's domestic policy, a key area stands out: taxes and the economy. There were doubts regarding whether or not Bush truly was a conservative at heart, given his earlier support of birth control and his criticism of Reagan's supply-side policies.¹⁰³ Despite being a dedicated tax cutter, Reagan had also agreed to a number of tax hikes during

⁹⁸ Address before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 26, 1982

⁹⁹ Address before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 25, 1988

¹⁰⁰ Schultz & Vile, 2005, p. 134

¹⁰¹ Perotti, R. (2004). *Principle Over Politics? The Domestic Policy of the George H. W. Bush Presidency*, p. 15

¹⁰² Gould, 2014, p. 311

¹⁰³ Gould, 2014, p. 312

their period, but Reagan had the leeway to do so because the Republican party had faith that he favored the opposite. The Bush administration did not have the goodwill Reagan had enjoyed. As the administration then engaged in the same flexibility regarding tax, due to the democratic-controlled legislature and the economic deficit, it lost the support of the staunchest republicans.¹⁰⁴ However, his presidency was dominated by international relations. Given Bush Sr.'s background as ambassador to the UN, chief diplomat in China, and head of the Central Intelligence agency, this is not very surprising.¹⁰⁵

George H. W. Bush's election year SUA is unquestionably influenced by the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. The first half of the address is set aside to this, where the emphasis is on the sacrifices made by Americans and what the future may hold. He then goes on to present his nine-step long-term plan to guarantee the future.¹⁰⁶ His policy suggestions are in line with the neoliberal Republican Party ideology, and his address have no noticeable departures from what a typical SUA looks like. The most important part of his address is perhaps when Bush reiterates America's role in the world after the Cold War's end: America is the leader of the West, the leader of the world, and will remain so.¹⁰⁷ This proves that the anticommunist element of modern Republican Party ideology, the defense of freedom and security everywhere, lingered beyond the fall of the Soviet Union.

International relations and the emphasis on foreign policy remains consistent within all of Bush Sr.'s SUAs. His 1990 SUA was informed by the fall of the Berlin wall and formation of new democracies in eastern Europe.¹⁰⁸ The SUA of 1991 was concerned with Operation Desert Storm, which had been kicked off just twelve days prior to the SUA was delivered.¹⁰⁹ Although Bush Sr. was popular in his handling of foreign policy, his political fortunes were deteriorating. The main issue was his promise of "no tax raising" from his election campaign, a promise he broke in 1990. Lastly, his addresses were not especially partisan, evident by the heavy emphasis on bipartisanship.

¹⁰⁴ Gould, 2014, p. 312

¹⁰⁵ Kalb et al., 2007, p. 941

¹⁰⁶ Address before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 28, 1992

¹⁰⁷ Address before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 28, 1992, p. 3

¹⁰⁸ Kalb et al., 2007, p. 940

¹⁰⁹ Kalb et al., 2007, p. 948

2.3.5. George W. Bush (2001-2009): The War on Terror

As a “compassionate conservative”, the younger Bush naturally draws comparisons to his father’s wish for a “kinder, gentler” nation. However, his actual approach to social issues, taxes, and national defense rather resembles a “Reagan Redux” more than “Bush Jr.”.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, what has defined the legacy of George W. Bush are the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In the wake of the attacks, the focus of his administration shifted from domestic education and economic reforms to foreign policy and national defense. Osama bin Laden had to be pursued and killed, but more importantly Saddam Hussein and Iraq were the major threats to American goals and values in the Middle East.¹¹¹ Under the rubric of “War on terror”, the Bush White House would direct military aggressiveness towards Afghanistan and Iraq, whilst engaging in militant patriotism domestically.¹¹² Though the quick and firm military response post-9/11 initially garnered the support of Americans, the lack of actual weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and the inability to assassinate Osama bin Laden would soon make the American involvement in the Middle East an undesired one. The subsequent mishandling of hurricane Katrina and the fiscal policies that led to the 2008 recession would ensure an unfavorable legacy.¹¹³

George W. Bush’s election year SUA is clearly heavily influenced by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the subsequent war on terror. Although presidents tend to emphasize policy recommendations on defense and foreign relations in the SUAs during the second term of their presidency, Bush does the opposite. He spends sizable chunks of the SUA to speak of US-led military actions in the war on terror: the fighting in Iraq, the political progress in Afghanistan, as well as addressing the criticism these military actions have faced. Bush does not neglect domestic issues, however. For example, he spoke of the massive tax cuts implemented thus far in his presidency, how the tax cuts should be permanent, and education-reform.¹¹⁴ The issues and solutions that Bush proposes to these issues are in line with Republican Party tradition.

The emphasis on foreign relations is a common denominator within all of Bush’s SUAs held post-9/11, though he never neglected domestic issues to the same extent as his father.

¹¹⁰ Harris & Bailey, 2014, p. 28

¹¹¹ Gould, 2014, p. 335

¹¹² Gould, 2014, p. 334

¹¹³ Gould, 2014, p. 348

¹¹⁴ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 20, 2004

However, the support for his foreign policies was waning during his second term. Weapons of mass destruction were never found in Iraq, and progress was slow. However, Bush would defend the Iraq policies by saying “[...] our nation has only one option: We must keep our words, defeat our enemies, and stand behind the American military in this vital mission”.¹¹⁵ Bush would consistently argue that the American military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan was necessary to ensure that terrorists and enemies of the U.S. did not become in charge. This notion of defending threats to America and American values wherever it exists is reminiscent of Republican anticommunism. On the domestic side, Bush remained firm in his Republican beliefs. It is summarized in his last SUA, where he concludes: “The strength – the secret of our strength, the miracle of America, is that our greatness lies not in our Government, but in the spirit and determination of our people.”¹¹⁶ The solutions to the domestic issues that Bush Jr. presents are in line with conservative and Republican ideas.

2.4. Concluding remarks

Ideology has an important role in American party politics, despite arguments for the opposite. Starting in the 1960s, the Republican party became considerably more conservative after the right-wing movement became the dominant force within the party. The shift to the right represented the start of a republican resurgence, which saw its peak during the presidency of Ronald Reagan. More ideologically driven, the Republican party leaned on the conservative dichotomy of the individual versus the government. The core dichotomy is reflected in several different ways, with the most significant ones being small business, equal opportunity, individual freedom, antistatism, right-wing populism and anticommunism. All Republican presidents since Richard Nixon have adhered to the republican party ideology, though some more than others.

Regarding the State of the Union, the form and function of the address has changed in many ways since its conception. However, since 1967 the address has been televised to the American public in prime time. The tradition and ceremony associated with the SUA has ensured a sense of consistency in terms of common elements and sequence of arguments across the various presidencies, both Republican and Democratic. The usual sequence of arguments is especially helpful for the purpose of this thesis, as the policy suggestions the

¹¹⁵ Kalb et al., 2007, p. 1115

¹¹⁶ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 28, 2008

President proposes are explained and justified through public meditations on American values and ideas – as well as the problems they are facing. Exactly what these values and problems entail are decided by the president's party affiliation. Thus, we can gain insight into what aspects of the Republican party ideology the various presidents have emphasized and promoted through the SUA. Now, the next step is to look at Donald Trump, his ideology, and how it specifically reflected in his election year SUA.

3. Donald Trump

Ideological political beliefs beget political action and rhetoric. Throughout his presidency, Donald Trump vilified the Democratic Party and his critics, his administration engaged in a trade- and tech war with China, the US withdrew from the Paris Climate Accords, construction began on the infamous wall along the Southern border, and widespread damage was done to the administrative capabilities of the Federal Government. Behind all these decisions lie the political ideology of the Trump administration: Trumpism. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyze the core ideological elements of Trumpism, and how they are reflected in the SUA. Before this, however, there is a need to provide an overview of Donald Trump's career as a businessman and public figure before he turned towards politics.

Trumpism is not the product of Trump alone, but rather his entire political entourage of political strategists and advisors. Still, Donald Trump affects Trumpism beyond just its name. Therefore, the first subchapter provides a brief overview of Trump's personal beliefs and world view, and how it has been exhibited throughout his life as a public and political figure. The next chapter provides a description of the core elements of Trumpism, and what areas of politics they affect. Finally, the last subchapter analyzes his election year SUA with the intention of proving how Trumpism is reflected within it. This is necessary to the thesis in two significant ways. First, it proves how political ideology is reflected within the SUA. Second, the analysis of Trumpism provides the basis for later comparison with Trump's predecessors. Summarized, this chapter will answer the following research question: "*What are the core elements of Trumpism, and how are they reflected in his election year SUA?*".

3.1. Who is Donald Trump?

There are several reasons for why Donald Trump's election represents a watershed event in the history of American politics, but they all relate to who Donald Trump is as an individual and as a politician. At the onset of his election campaign, libertarian Peter Thiel claimed that supporters of Donald Trump took him "seriously, but not literally", and implied that those who opposed his candidacy took him "literally, but not seriously".¹¹⁷ In hindsight, this quote carries with it an eery sense of foreshadowing. Two years after this was said, President Trump had tried to eviscerate Obamacare, passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, withdrawn

¹¹⁷ Mollan & Geesin, 2020, p. 406

USA from the Paris Climate Accord, started a trade war with China, and elected conservatives Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. Trump should clearly have been taken seriously.¹¹⁸

The reason Donald Trump was not taken seriously by his opposition is likely due to his career and personal life before entering the political stage. This thesis will not provide an in-depth analysis of Donald Trump's career before he turned politician, but a brief context is necessary. Clearly, his performance as a politician was informed by his career as a businessman and reality star. Or more specifically, his own narrative of his business "success" was actively used to appeal to his electoral base, and to legitimize his leadership of the United States.¹¹⁹ Throughout his business career, Trump would exhibit interest in economic opportunities spurred by economic decline. An example of this is his investments in run-down casinos in Atlantic City in the 1980s.¹²⁰ His intention was undoubtedly to turn these investments profitable, though they rarely turned out so. Due to financial overextension, Trump reportedly owed \$3.2 billion by 1990. However, Trump would remind his debtors that "unless they gave him relief, they would all suffer together".¹²¹ As such, Trump would manage to retain management of his financial affairs, despite consistent failures.

However, his financial fortunes improved significantly in the early 2000s. This is due to his Reality TV show *The Apprentice*, which cemented his image as a decisive and successful businessman within the minds of the American public.¹²² As a consequence, Trump was able to develop the Trump brand, which he branded on more than over 500 assets in more than 20 different countries with. However, many of these instances were purely licensing arrangements, allowing Trump to take credit for all successful endeavours whilst walking away with little to no personal liability should the assets fail financially. This explains why he was able to survive the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. This narrative, American decline against which Trump had managed to be successful purely through his expertise in turn-around and excellent leadership, was central in his 2016 election campaign.¹²³ This brings us to the ideas and worldviews of Donald Trump, the politician.

¹¹⁸ Mollan & Geesin, 2020, p. 406

¹¹⁹ Mollan & Geesin, 2020, p. 407

¹²⁰ Mollan & Geesin, 2020, p. 408

¹²¹ Mollan & Geesin, 2020, p. 408

¹²² Kranish, M. & Fisher M. (2016). *Trump Revealed: An American Journey of Ambition, Ego, Money, and Power* p. 210–39

¹²³ Mollan & Geesin, 2020, p. 410

Donald Trump is both a capitalist and a politician, and he clearly lets the former affect the latter. As an individual, Trump has expressed a certain form of political ideology that differs from the political ideology that his administration has pursued. His personal ideology and political style reflects continuity from his days as a businessman. That ideology has been nicknamed ‘Trumpology’ and contains five main elements: possessive hyper-individualism, hard work, leadership, the friend/enemy scheme, and social Darwinism.¹²⁴ These elements define how Trump views both the world and politics.

Possessive hyper-individualism refers to Trump’s consistent emphasis on wealth and ownership, where his worldview assigns individual value purely on material accumulation.¹²⁵ The ideology of hard work is defined by the idea that working hard will result in more wealth, carrying clear connotations to the ‘American dream’. Trump has consistently expressed the view that his wealth and value is a result of his own hard labour, despite evidence to the contrary.¹²⁶ This worldview implies that poor people are poor due to their own idleness. Trump’s idea of leadership is defined by two central aspects. He emphasizes the need to establish America as the leader of the world, as well as America’s need for a strong leader for this to happen. Furthermore, Trump says “Leadership is not a group effort. If you’re in charge, then be in charge”, which suggests a sense of leadership based on not caring for what others think. He argues that politicians are weak leaders, and that he can be the true strong leader that the American people needs.¹²⁷ The final two elements, social Darwinism and the friend/enemy scheme are closely related. Trump consistently expresses how he views politics, both foreign and domestic, as ‘survival of the fittest’. Everyone is either a friend or an enemy, and enemies need to be crushed whilst friends need to be beneficial to America.¹²⁸ Summarized, ‘Trumpology’ reflects a worldview of ‘survival of the fittest’, where survival is success measured by accumulation of capital made possible through hard work and authoritarian leadership, at the expense of your enemies.

¹²⁴ Fuchs, 2018, p. 166

¹²⁵ Fuchs, 2018, p. 168

¹²⁶ Fuchs, 2018, p. 168

¹²⁷ Fuchs, 2018, p. 169

¹²⁸ Fuchs, 2018, p. 170, 171

3.2. The Ideology of the Trump Administration

However, this thesis concerns itself with the political ideology as expressed in the election year SUA. This piece of communication, and the political ambitions it represents, are not the products of Trump alone, but rather his entire political entourage of advisors and strategists. As a highly curated and carefully designed piece of communication, the SUA limits the influence of Trump's own personal ideology, whilst emphasizing the political ambitions and ideology of the presidential administration, nicknamed 'Trumpism'. Of course, 'Trumpology' and 'Trumpism' share some similarities seeing as Donald Trump functions as the catalyst of both. However, they also differ in other significant ways. This subchapter will present these differences and the core elements of the political ideology promoted by the Trump administration.

Now, although Trump was chief legislator during his tenure as President, the foreign and domestic policies he pursued were not entirely his own. He relied on the assistance of his advisors and strategists, the two most central of which were Steve Bannon and Stephen Miller. Steve Bannon has been credited with orchestrating the election of Donald Trump and dubbed 'The great manipulator' by Time magazine.¹²⁹ Jeff Green, a senior national correspondent for Bloomsberg Businessweek, has written a book about the intertwining paths of Bannon and Trump and argued "I think Bannon really brought the idea of illegal immigration and understood its power as a political issue, and Trump really became the vessel for those ideas [...]"¹³⁰ Bannon and Trump's relationship soured during the first year of the presidency, and since then Stephen Miller was highlighted as Trump's top senior advisor. Miller was named "the true driving force behind his (Trump's) Administration's racist agenda." in an article written by Jonathan Blitzer in an article from the New Yorker.¹³¹ Illegal immigration is an area of politics where 'Trumpism' is highly evident, and as such these articles illustrate how the political ideology is not only the product of Trump himself, but perhaps rather by a political administration with the face of Donald Trump. And just what does 'Trumpism' entail as a political ideology?

¹²⁹ Von Drehle, 2016

¹³⁰ Morgan, D., 2017, July 17

¹³¹ Blitzer, J., 2021, February 21

There are three major elements that provide the ideological make-up of Trumpism: nationalism, populism, and conservatism. These concepts are not entirely foreign to Republican Party ideology; what makes Trumpism its own distinct ideology is in the details of each element. Nationalism can take many forms, populism is context-dependent, and conservatism is a broad political philosophy that has many different subcomponents. We can find indications of the specific types of nationalism, populism, and conservatism Trumpism represents from Donald Trump's 2020 election website:

President Trump is working hard to implement his 'America first' platform, continuing his promise to the American people to lower taxes, repeal and replace Obamacare, end stifling regulations, protect our borders, keep jobs in our country, take care of our veterans, strengthen our military and law enforcement, and renegotiating bad trade deals, creating a government of, by and for the people. He is making America First, again, restoring our nation's faith, ushering in a bright, new future now and for generations to come.¹³²

Trumpism espouses an isolationist and nativist form of nationalism, and a conservative approach to government regulation, all framed within a populist narrative that makes out the Democratic Party and 'radical left' as the enemy of Trump and the American people.

The nationalist element of Trumpism is expressed by the concept 'America First' and represents a twofold agenda: the first being the restoration of USA as the hegemonic world power without international rivals through the opposition to globalization, and the other being the restoration of the well-being of Americans.¹³³ The first agenda is generally manifested in the Trump administration's approach to international trade and foreign relations. For example, in his first in office, Donald Trump withdrew the US from the Trans Pacific Partnership. It marked a break from a string of trade deals dating all the way back to the 1930s that had reduced tariffs and promoted global trade.¹³⁴ This a typical protectionist economic policy that reflects the nationalist element of Trumpism. Furthermore, Trumpism

¹³² <https://web.archive.org/web/20200930210451/https://www.donaldjtrump.com/about>

¹³³ Campani et al., 2022, p. 18

¹³⁴ Lachmann, 2019, p. 15

blames other nations for the loss of US manufacturing jobs instead of the structural conditions for capitalism.¹³⁵

The second agenda of ‘America First’ is the restoration of the well-being of Americans. This is translated to a nationalist movement with the purpose of attaining and maintaining the autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of the American people. And exactly who fits beneath the rubric of ‘American’ is key. There is an ethnic component to the nationalist element of Trumpism, where Mexican migrants and Muslims are presented as dangers to the autonomy, unity, and identity of the American people.¹³⁶ For example, Trump has expressed nativist views in some of his speeches at the United Nations, where he presents migration as a threat of “replacement of the natives”.¹³⁷ Trump constructs a sense of unity by the negative positioning of other social groups, which brings us to populism.

Populism is context dependent. The populist movements, ideas, and politics are defined and dependent on the context in which they reside. Within the larger framework of ‘Trumpism’, the populist elements are defined by who constitutes the “people”, and more importantly who represents the “enemy”. We have already touched upon the ethnic groups of Muslims and Mexican migrants, but within the populist narrative of ‘Trumpism’ the Democratic Party is vilified alongside them, presenting them as the defenders of these groups. Both constitute enemies of the people on the basis that they represent dangers to the American values of liberty, freedom, and faith. Simply put, the “empty heart” of Trumpism-style populism is filled with the nationalist element as described above.

Donald Trump became the face of the conservative party in 2016. It would be natural to assume that conservatism is an easily identified element within the political ideology of the conservative party-leader. However, that is not the case with Donald Trump. As said, many other Republicans did not take him seriously early in his campaign and justified this by stating that Trump was not a conservative.¹³⁸ As it became increasingly clear that Trump was a political force to be reckoned with, an increasing number of Republicans endorsed Trump,

¹³⁵ Fuchs, 2018, p. 146

¹³⁶ Schertzer R. & Woods, E. (2019). Nationalism: the ethno-nationalist populism of Donald Trump's Twitter communication. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44(7), p. 1168

¹³⁷ Campani et al., 2022, p. 19

¹³⁸ Barber & Pope, 2019A, p. 720

and some argued he represented a new form of conservatism. This begs the question of exactly what type of conservatism ‘Trumpism’ does or does not contain.

On some areas, Trumpism espouses a typical conservative approach, especially in the field of taxes, deregulation, and the appointment of right-wing judges to the Supreme Court.¹³⁹ Furthermore, Trump’s core supporters, the majority of the Republican Party, strongly label themselves as conservatives and are relatively committed to holding conservative positions on policy. This is also the group least likely to be able to explain exactly what it means to be conservative.¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, the existence of conservative “Never Trumpers”, conservatives who argue Trump is no real conservative, prove that there exists a disparity regarding Trump’s conservatism within the Republican Party. Nevertheless, these “Never Trumpers” are the smallest portion of the party and tend to support liberal policies as well, which suggests that Donald Trump may be conservative after all.

If those who are most likely to identify themselves as conservatist also are those least likely to explain exactly what this means, then the existing conservative framework may easily be modified and altered with new ideas, issues, and policies.¹⁴¹ Although altering the conservative framework would be an enormous alteration to the American political landscape, it may be exactly what Trump has begun. The conservatist policies of Trump have been packaged within an antagonistic and negative populist nationalist package. A possibility is that conservatism is in the process of a symbolic and operational framework change, moving from “individual versus government” -framing to a “negative ideology” one, where the most defining feature of conservatism is simply “not liberal”.¹⁴² This makes sense within the nationalist and populist elements of Trumpism, and is also reflected in how Trump presents conservative policies in his election year SUA.

3.3. Trumpism and the 2020 State of the Union

On February 4th, 2020, Trump held what, as of yet, would be his final Address before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union. It is characterized by certain familiar rhetorical tools that have been used by previous presidents. Most notably, Donald Trump

¹³⁹ Lachmann, 2019, p. 9

¹⁴⁰ Barber & Pope, 2019A, p. 733

¹⁴¹ Barber & Pope, 2019A p. 733

¹⁴² Barber & Pope, 2019A, p. 733

spent considerable time presenting “Lenny Skutniks”: guests whom embody American values or are symbolic victims of issues Trump concerned himself with. Throughout his address, Trump presented twelve vastly different guests, ranging from conservative radio-speaker Rush Limbaugh to the earliest premature born baby to survive, and the grieving brother of a man murdered by a “criminal alien” whom the local state authorities in California had provided “sanctuary”.¹⁴³ This last example brings us to the populist aspect of Trumpism.

1.2.1. Populism and ‘Trumpism’

Within the populist narrative of ‘Trumpism’, the enemy is split between the democratic career politicians and immigrants from the Southern border. Both constitute enemies of the people on the basis that they represent dangers to the American values of liberty, freedom, and faith. With this in mind, there should be policy issues represented within the SUA of Trump that reflect this stance. In fact, there are two key policy areas in which Trump’s populist narrative presents itself: health care and immigration.

After presenting his promises of saving families massive amounts of money and substantially better health care, Donald Trump directly called out the 130 lawmakers in the room who have endorsed a “socialist takeover of our health care system”. He went on to say: “To those watching at home tonight, I want you to know: We will never let socialism destroy American health care”.¹⁴⁴ Trump continued by tying the “socialist takeover” to his signature issue of Immigration, arguing that the “Radical left” wishes to “bankrupt our Nation” by “forcing taxpayers to subsidize free care for anyone in the world who unlawfully crosses our border.”¹⁴⁵ This is in reference to the Medicare for all bill that would provide universal government-funded health care system, regardless of immigration status. Trump conceptualized the bill within an antagonistic opposition between an American “We”, and the radical left. He hammered home this message by saying the following:

If forcing American taxpayers to provide unlimited health care to illegal aliens sounds fair to you, then stand with the radical left. But if you believe that we should defend

¹⁴³ Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, February 4 2020

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

American patients and American seniors, then stand with me and pass legislation to prohibit free Government health care for illegal aliens.¹⁴⁶

Donald Trump presented it as an ‘either/or’ scenario, where you are either with him and the American “We”, or you are against them, in collaboration with the radical left and illegal aliens.

The populist aspect of Trumpism is also evident in the negative positioning of earlier Democratic administrations. Trump consistently reminded the audience of the address of the failed policies of the previous administration, and consistently does so right before, or right after presenting the successes of his own administration. For example, Trump said “If we hadn’t reversed the failing economic policies of the previous administration, the world would not be witnessing this great economic success.”¹⁴⁷ Trump used this style of argument seven different times in his address. The negative positioning of the previous administration does not only paint Trump’s administration in a more positive light, but it also reenforces the idea that the Democratic Party has and continues to oppose American values and symbols. For example, Trump stated “[...] we are once again standing up for freedom in our hemisphere. That’s why my administration reversed the failing policies of the previous administration on Cuba.”¹⁴⁸

There is also a comparable lack of bipartisanship themes within the SUA, which is unquestionably connected to the populist aspect of Trumpism. Trump did mention the passing of two bipartisan pieces of legislation, but he did not place any emphasis on reaching across the aisle. He did not call for unity; he simply defined the acts as “bipartisan”. Only once did Trump explicitly call for bipartisanship, claiming “Whether we are Republican, Democrat, or Independent, surely we must all agree that every human life is a sacred gift from God.”¹⁴⁹ This was said in a call for Congress to pass legislation banning the late-term abortion of babies, which is a divisive political topic in America. In comparison, Ronald Reagan, the epitome of a conservative Republican president, called for bipartisan cooperation seven times in his election year SUA.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 25th, 1984

3.3.1. Nationalism and ‘Trumpism’

Compared to populism, nationalism is less context-driven and easier to define and identify. In essence, the nationalistic element of ‘Trumpism’ is the idea of an isolationist “America first” attitude. However, it is closely associated with the populist element, due to populism’s “empty heart”, which nationalism party fills.¹⁵¹ As such, the many policy issues where populism is visible, so is nationalism. An example is immigration. Trumpism’s stance on the immigration issue is both populist and nationalistic. It is populist in framing: an antagonistic opposition between the American people and illegal immigrants. It is nationalistic in purpose: attaining and maintaining the autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of the American population. And when speaking of Donald Trump’s idea of what the American population is, it is an American population bereft of the “radical left”, illegal immigrants, or anyone who stands against him.¹⁵² However, nationalistic policies apply to foreign policy as well, which translates to an isolationist “America first” attitude.

With this in mind, we can argue that the evidence of populism mentioned above also contains elements of nationalism. However, there are other policy issues that also carries with it a sense of an “America first” attitude. The best example is relation to foreign relations, especially to China. Trump said the following in his election year SUA: “For decades, China has taken advantage of the United States. Now we have changed that [...]”.¹⁵³ Trump refers to China’s “theft of America’s jobs” and how U.S. intellectual properties need to be protected.¹⁵⁴ Instead of tackling the international division of labor as the structural condition of capitalism that it is, Trump frames it as an issue of nations and nationalism.¹⁵⁵ Instead of American corporations taking advantage of cheap labor in China, it is “China’s massive theft of America’s jobs”.¹⁵⁶ Clearly, Donald Trump views international politics through the lenses of nationalism’s ‘core doctrine’: a world of individual, autonomous nations.¹⁵⁷ And in this case, one nation had stolen the property (jobs) of another.

¹⁵¹ Taggart, 2000, p. 4

¹⁵² Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, February 4th 2020

¹⁵³ Ibid

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

¹⁵⁵ Fuchs, 2018, p. 146

¹⁵⁶ Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, February 4th 2020, p. 2

¹⁵⁷ Smith, A. (2010). *Nationalism*, p. 25

3.3.2. Conservatism and ‘Trumpism’

We have already discussed the rather ambiguous role, or purpose, that neoliberal conservatism has within Trumpism. Some clarity may be gained through analyzing the conservative policies that the Trump administration chooses to highlight, and especially how Trump frames them. One core element of conservatism present within Trump’s SUA has already been covered extensively: right-wing populism. This subchapter will mainly focus on two traditionally conservative areas of interest: antistatism and equal opportunity.

Antistatism is identifiable within Trump’s SUA in several ways. Trump boasted several times of his revival of the U.S. economy by “[...] slashing a number of job-killing regulations” and “[...] enacting historic and record-setting tax cuts”.¹⁵⁸ Clearly, the Trump administration argued that the solution to reviving the U.S. economy was removing and limiting government influences, for example regulations and taxes. Republican antistatism, which views any political phenomenon that tend to the aggrandizement of the state as a danger to individual freedom¹⁵⁹, revealed itself when Trump sets aside time to bash the “socialist dictator of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro.”¹⁶⁰ He warned against the dangers of powerful governments, and perhaps reminded of the importance of individual freedom in the following quote: “Socialism destroys nations. But always remember: Freedom unifies the soul”.¹⁶¹

The Trump administration also devoted considerable time to the concept of equal opportunity. It is expressed most explicitly through policy issues regarding education. Trump speaks of the importance of making sure that every young American gets a great education and the opportunity to achieve the American dream.¹⁶² However, this is not something the government can ensure as “[...] for too long, countless American children have been trapped in failing government schools.”¹⁶³ Trump calls for Congress to pass the Education Freedom Scholarships and Opportunity Act (EFSO), which would establish tax credits to encourage individual and corporate taxpayers to contribute to scholarships for students through eligible scholarship-granting organizations and eligible workforce training organizations.¹⁶⁴ The emphasis on education as a means of providing equal opportunity echoes the words of

¹⁵⁸ Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, February 4th 2020

¹⁵⁹ Himmelstein, 1990, p. 30

¹⁶⁰ Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, February 4th 2020

¹⁶¹ Ibid

¹⁶² Ibid

¹⁶³ Ibid

¹⁶⁴ S.43 – Education and Freedom Scholarships and Opportunities Act

Herbert Hoover's 1928 acceptance speech. However, whereas Hoover intended the government to provide free education, the Trump administration intends for this equal opportunity to be granted through individual and corporate investment, which places Trump closer to modern Republican Party ideology.¹⁶⁵

These policy issues exhibit how several of the policy issues promoted by the Trump administration are typically conservative. However, the question remains as to whether they are justified through conservative values or just because the policies are "not liberal". This is not easily answered, but there are certain indications present within Trump's SUA. The most important fact to keep in mind, is that the three core elements of Trumpism are not separate entities. They all flow into each other in various ways, but in general it appears as though populism and nationalism frame how the operationally conservative policies are presented and justified. It is evident in the SUA rhetorical argument sequence of Trump. We can reexamine Trump's presentation of the EFSO act to show this.

Firstly, Trump presents his view of American values, which are to reject the limits on the children's future and to put America first.¹⁶⁶ Putting America first reflects the nationalistic traits of Trumpism. These American values can be achieved through the following: making sure every young American gets a great education and the opportunity to achieve the American dream. Trump then moves on to identify the policy standing in the way of this: children are trapped in failing government schools but can reach a better education and future through Opportunity scholarships. However, Pennsylvania's Governor put this future further out of reach by vetoing legislation to expand Opportunity scholarships.¹⁶⁷ This problem can be read as the government, personified by Democrat Governor Tom Wolf, placing limits on the children's future by inhibiting equal opportunity, thus not putting America first. At first, this may not appear directly populist. But, at this point Trump has already called out the 130 democratic legislators who stand against him and America.¹⁶⁸ Besides, the SUA is not held in a political vacuum. This is made all the more evident when looking at the Democratic Party response to Trump's 2020 SUA, where the concluding remark is "Remember, listen to what people say but watch what they do".¹⁶⁹ Clearly, the ceremonial, carefully designed, and

¹⁶⁵ Hoover, acceptance speech, 11.08.1928

¹⁶⁶ Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, February 4, 2020

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ Democratic Response to President Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address, 2020

constrained content of the SUA is understood with the otherwise unconstrained nature of Donald Trump in mind.

3.4. How about 2018 and 2019?

How does the election year SUA of Trump compare to his two earlier addresses? As a matter of fact, they paint a picture of continuity, evolution, and devolution. Firstly, Donald Trump stands out from his predecessors in terms of how many guests he invites to the SUA. In 2017 he presented 18 different guests, 13 guests in 2019, before presenting 12 guests in 2020. Ronald Reagan, who founded the tradition of including guests, never brought more than four guests.

The aspect where Trump exhibits the most continuity across his addresses is the operationally conservative element of Trumpism. He consistently spoke of reducing taxes, praised private investments and economic growth, and proclaimed how family and faith are the center of American life – not government and bureaucracy, and deregulation.¹⁷⁰ Trump was also rather consistent in his nationalist sentiments, though mainly in terms of foreign trade and relations. For example, Trump stated “We will work to fix bad trade deals and negotiate new ones. [...] And we will protect American workers and American intellectual property through strong enforcement of our trade rules.”¹⁷¹ Trump also sat aside considerable portions of his SUAs to speak of the dangers of illegal immigration, though in his first address he was mainly concerned with the dangers that illegal immigrants represented themselves and the outdated reforms that allow them to happen: “In recent weeks, two terrorist attack in New York were made possible due to the visa lottery and chain migration. In the age of terrorism, these programs present risks we can no longer afford.”¹⁷² Noticeably, he is not framing immigration as a populist issue in his SUA by placing illegal immigrants and their dangers as an extension of special interest groups and the Democratic party. Yet.

This brings us to the evolutions and devolutions of Trump’s SUAs, as they are intertwined. Over the course of the three SUAs that Donald Trump held, he used increasingly populist language where he vilified the Democratic Party and the ‘radical left’. He started out with a noticeable lack of it in his first SUA, never mentioning the Democratic Party as standing

¹⁷⁰ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 30, 2018

¹⁷¹ Ibid

¹⁷² Ibid

against Trump and the American people. In his second SUA, this changed. He explicitly stated that no other issue illustrates the divide between the American working class and the American political class better than illegal immigration.¹⁷³ He went on to say that wealthy politicians and donors push for open borders while hiding walls, gates, and doors, while working-class Americans are left to pay the price. He concluded: “Tolerance for illegal immigration is not compassionate; it is actually very cruel”.¹⁷⁴ In other words, he stated that those who did not agree with his policies regarding the Southern border were cruel to the American working-class. This was accompanied with a devolution of bipartisan language in his SUAs. The first SUA lacked populist language and rhetoric, all while Trump reached across the aisle multiple times. He expressed that the need to set aside differences and working together was key. He even approached the immigration issue by “extending an open hand to work with both parties, to Democrats and Republicans, to protect our citizens of every color, religion, and creed.”¹⁷⁵ There was bipartisan rhetoric in his second SUA as well, though it was less believable given the populist rhetoric that directly opposed it.

3.5. Concluding remarks

It is now clear what ideological elements Trumpism consists of, and what policy areas they manifest themselves within. The nationalist element is manifested in isolationist and protectionist approaches to foreign policy, whereas it begets a nativist approach to the domestic issue of immigration. Trumpism frames these nationalist policies, especially the domestic ones, within a populist framework. Over the course of his three SUAs, we find that Trump increasingly vilified those who opposed his view of illegal immigration. At the same time, Trump devoted less and less time on bipartisanship. It culminated in Trump directly calling out the Democratic Party for their ‘socialist takeover’ in his election year SUA. However, the most important drawback from this chapter is the fact that Trumpism is clearly reflected in the SUA. It proves that the policymaking rhetoric reflects both the symbolic and operational ideology of the President delivering the address. As such, it is now possible to analyze and compare the SUAs of Trump with his five Republican predecessors.

¹⁷³ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, February 5, 2019

¹⁷⁴ Ibid

¹⁷⁵ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 30, 2018

4. Prefiguring Trumpism

This chapter will provide the needed data to answer the thesis statement: *To what degree does Trumpism represent an ideological break from Republican Party tradition?* Over the course of three subchapters, Trumpism will be compared and analyzed against the backdrop of the election year SUAs held by the former Republican President. Each subchapter is dedicated to one of the core elements of Trumpism and provides different insights to Trumpism's position in relation to the Republican Party tradition.

4.1. Populism

Populism, as both an ideology and a movement, is characterized by its “empty heart”. As a consequence, populist ideologies and movements are defined by their immediate context.¹⁷⁶ This suggests that comparing the populist rhetoric of presidents 16, 28, 36, and 48 years apart is perhaps a futile idea, seeing as they all governed in unique historical and political contexts. However, there is much to learn if we examine and compare how the presidents addressed their political opposition, and how populist language has been used across the SUAs.

4.1.1. Republican Presidents and their populist tendencies

We can begin with former Republican President Richard M. Nixon. Out of all the SUAs in this analysis, Nixon's is one of the addresses with the least amount populist language and rhetoric. This statement accounts for both traditional Republican populism and the populism of Trumpism. In fact, there is a clear and overarching emphasis on bipartisanship and optimism. These are both themes that are traditionally present in SUAs¹⁷⁷, but in the case of Nixon, these themes stand in opposition to populist themes and rhetoric that Trump employs. There is but one statement in the SUA that is reminiscent of Republican populism, where Nixon asserted: “Let us join in making sure that legislation the Nation needs does not become hostage to the political interests of any party or any person.”¹⁷⁸ Nixon stated this when discussing the need to set aside partisanship in order to keep the national interests first. Modern Republicans adopted a strident populism in which they attack special interests, special privileges, and other symbols of elite control.¹⁷⁹ Nixon emphasized the need to set

¹⁷⁶ Taggart, 2000, p. 4

¹⁷⁷ Shogan, 2015, p. 7

¹⁷⁸ Address on the State of the Union Delivered Before a Joint Session of Congress, January 20, 1972

¹⁷⁹ Gerring, 1997, p. 143

aside such special interests, which aligns him with Republican tradition. However, the otherwise lack of such rhetoric makes it difficult to define his SUA as populist.

Any similarities between Nixon and Trump in regard to populism would have been found in how Nixon addressed political opposition, either between himself and Congress, or in between the parties themselves. As such, Nixon shares no similarity to Trumpism-style populism. He did address the issue of partisanship, but only indirectly through the call to cooperation and “high statesmanship” for the greater good of all Americans.¹⁸⁰ In other words, Nixon presented the issues of partisanship as something both parties needed to address. This is the major difference from Trumpism. Nixon reported that partisanship itself is the issue America is facing. Trump instead expressed that partisanship was a hinderance to his administration’s policies.

Gerald R. Ford appears a rather uninteresting case when looking at populism in his election year SUA. The entire SUA is seemingly devoid of explicit populist rhetoric, and Ford did not speak of the issue of partisanship at all. What few symbolic values he brought up are without doubt conservative, and conservative only. Furthermore, he devoted most of his address to the specific policy suggestions that his administration was proposing. Yet, none of them were delivered with any sense of populist rhetoric behind them. This would drastically change with his Republican successor, Ronald Reagan.

The Watergate scandal had ensured that the Nixon administration would be synonymous with a government that abused presidential powers and violated the individual constitutional rights of American citizens. In other words, the Nixon administration would be remembered as a government that, in the words of Ronald Reagan: “[...] had grown beyond the consent of the governed.”¹⁸¹ As such, it is unsurprising that Ronald Reagan’s SUA reads as a clear deviation from Nixon in terms of emphasis, seeing as Reagan would likely want to distance himself from the last elected Republican president. Whereas Nixon mostly addressed the “leadership of America” who held the future and the conscience of the Nation in their hands, Reagan shifted the address towards the American public that watched the address. This shift towards

¹⁸⁰ Address on the State of the Union Delivered Before a Joint Session of Congress, January 20, 1972

¹⁸¹ Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, January 25, 1984

the American public was also accompanied by an increase of populist language and rhetoric.

Ronald Reagan deviated from his predecessors and prefigures Trumpism by separating the American government into “You” and “I”. He did so in the third sentence of his SUA, stating the following: “You and I have had some honest and open differences in the year past.”¹⁸² . It was said in the context of praising the bipartisan efforts to stop a long decline that had drained the nation’s spirit and eroded its health, which does not prefigure Trumpism. However, Reagan set a precedent of speaking of the leadership of America in terms of opposition. This is reinforced later on when Reagan offered “If the congressional leadership is willing, my representatives will be prepared to meet with theirs at the earliest possible time”¹⁸³ . Once again, Reagan emphasized a willingness and a necessity to work together, yet he did so with the acknowledgement of different and opposing leaderships. Trump took the idea of opposing leaderships one step further and presented it as the “wrong” leadership and the “right” leadership, which is one of the ways the populist element of Trumpism is manifested.

Like Trump, Reagan also presented economic troubles as resulting from the failed policies of former administrations. Trump did this explicitly seven times, and Reagan implied something similar only once. He said: “The last decade saw domestic spending surge literally out of control. But the basis for such spending has been laid in previous years. A pattern of overspending has been in place for half a century.”¹⁸⁴ Whereas Trump would explicitly blame the last Democratic administration, Reagan presented the overspending as a pattern that has been in place for half a century. Yet, for that half a century the Democratic Party occupied the oval office 4 out of five times. That does not make Reagan’s statement populist, but it does indicate a Republican precedent, or style of argument, that Trump would eventually utilize ceaselessly in his populist rhetoric.

Eight years later, President Bush held an SUA with a noticeable lack of populism in general. Not once did Bush present himself, his administration, or the Republican Party as the defenders of the people versus the encroachment of government, nor did he vilify the

¹⁸² Ibid

¹⁸³ Ibid

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

Democratic Party in any sense. Bush did in fact speak of the need to limit the size and scope of government, but not with the intention of protecting the people from a dangerous government. The entirety of the SUA is summarized in this statement from Bush:

The power of America rests in a stirring but simple idea, that people will do great things if only you set them free. Well, we're going to set the economy free. For if this age of miracles and wonders has taught us anything, it's that if we can change the world we can change America. We must encourage investment. We must make it easier for people to invest money and create new products, new industries, and new jobs. We must clear away the obstacles to growth: high taxes, high regulation, red tape, and yes, wasteful Government spending.¹⁸⁵

This paragraph contains some of the core elements of conservative Republican Party ideology: the idea of individual freedom versus the government, economic growth, and antistatism. However, government is not presented as a danger to the people and their individual freedom; it is presented as obstacles to growth. This is as close Bush Sr. ever came to employing populist rhetoric in his SUA, which means that he did not prefigure the populist element of Trumpism to any degree.

But what of his son? As a matter of fact, George W. Bush's SUA resembles more that of Reagan's than Bush Senior's. Firstly, there is no doubt that Bush Jr. exhibited signs of populism. An example of this is his stance on same-sex marriage. At the time of his address, several judges had begun approving same-sex marriage, despite the Defense of Marriage Act saying otherwise. Bush Jr. responded:

Activist judges, however, have begun redefining marriage by court order, without regard for the will of the people and their elected representatives. On an issue of such great consequence, the people's voice must be heard. If judges insist on forcing their arbitrary will upon the people, the only alternative left to the people would be the constitutional process. Our Nation must defend the sanctity of marriage.¹⁸⁶

This statement can be confirmed as a populist statement in several ways. First, Bush spoke of "the people" in every sentence but the last. He spoke of the judges' disregard for the will of

¹⁸⁵ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 28, 1992

¹⁸⁶ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 20, 2004

the people, the need to hear the people, and the arbitrary imposition of a different will upon the people. Second, Bush Jr. identified a special interest group in opposition: the activist judges. Bush Jr. attacked this special interest group on behalf of the people. Clearly, Bush Jr. assumed the role of leader and representative of the American people, which is the core framing of populism.

Bush Jr. delivered his SUA before a Congress where the Republican Party held the majority in both houses, which is an important structural condition that affects how the presidents addressed Congress. This is important when analyzing how Bush Jr. acknowledged his opposition in the SUA. Because, like Reagan, Bush Jr. addressed his opposition in the chamber. Reagan spoke to a Democrat-controlled Congress, which is why he addressed Congress as an opposing “you”. When speaking of the Iraq War, Bush Jr. said “Some in this chamber and in our country did not support the liberation of Iraq.”, which references the Democratic opposition to the war. After providing several examples as to why the liberation of Iraq was necessary, he summarized: “For all who love freedom and peace, the world without Saddam Hussein’s regime is a better and safer place”.¹⁸⁷

Explicitly, this is not similar to Trumpism. Implicitly however, we can draw some comparisons. Bush Jr. consistently aligned himself with the American people and sought defend their freedom and voice. By justifying the liberation of Iraq in core values such as freedom and peace, he equates opposition to the war as opposition to these symbols. Freedom and peace are two of the core values in America that both Republicans and Democrats use in their rhetoric.¹⁸⁸ As such, opposition against these symbols can be understood as opposition against America and its people. Furthermore, Bush had no trouble addressing Congress directly with “You” when praising its actions.¹⁸⁹ But when he addressed criticisms against his administration and their policies, he spoke of “some”: “Some want to undermine the No Child Left Behind Act by weakening standards and accountability”.¹⁹⁰ What Bush Jr. did similarly to Trump is to equate opposition to his administration and its policies, as opposition to fundamental values to all Americans. This is what the populist element of Trumpism is built upon, though Trump is far more explicit in his vilification of the Democratic Party.

¹⁸⁷ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 20, 2004

¹⁸⁸ Gerring, 1997, p. 8

¹⁸⁹ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 20, 2004

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

4.2. Nationalism

When comparing the nationalist element of Trumpism with Republican Party tradition, there are three major areas of policy that are relevant to analyze: foreign relations with friends and foes, approaches to international trade, and the issue of immigration. The two first areas are very much present within the SUAs of the former Republican presidents, but the issue of immigration is not really discussed in any significant way. Matter of fact, Bush Jr. is the only president to even mention the issue of immigration in his SUA but does so only in passing. Trumpism defines the mold of ‘true’ and ‘proper’ Americans by negatively positioning other significant groups, of which illegal immigrants is the most frequent.¹⁹¹ In other words, despite the former Republican presidents not devoting time to the issue of immigration in their SUAs, they still present their own molds of ‘true’ and ‘proper’ Americans in other areas beyond immigration.

4.2.1. America’s role in the globalized world

Trumpism-style nationalism has manifested itself in foreign policies that represent the clearest break from Republican Party tradition. The major difference is how Trump views America’s role in the world versus his predecessors. ‘Responsibility’ is the key word here. The former Republican presidents all share the idea that America has a responsibility to the rest of the world: to lead the world in pursuit of freedom and peace. This was accompanied by an approach to foreign politics that favored international trade and globalization. Trumpism’s ‘America First’ opposes globalization and restricts international trade with the intention of restoring USA as the hegemonic world power. Nevertheless, Trump utilized language and symbols in the nationalist rhetoric of his SUA that bears similarities to the rhetoric of his predecessors. Specifically, the nationalist rhetoric was rooted in the return to ‘greatness’, which is not something Donald Trump invented.

The Cold War is a deciding factor when looking at American greatness before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. As the leader of the Western bloc, Nixon argued that the Statue of Liberty is a symbol of what America has meant to the rest of the world:

¹⁹¹ Schertzer & Woods, 2019, p. 1168

It (Statue of Liberty) reminds us that what America has meant is not its wealth, and not its power, but its spirit and purpose – a land that enshrines liberty and opportunity, and that has held out a hand of welcome to millions in search of a better and a fuller and, above all, a freer life.¹⁹²

In the mind of Nixon, America's purpose in the world was to ensure the protection and respect of liberty and opportunity. The hopes of the world, and its people, had poured into America, and now America would hold that hope back out towards the world. Responsibility stands out as the core element; America's greatness derives from the God-given responsibility and ability to lead the world towards liberty and opportunity. This is different from Trump, who saw America's greatness as its intrinsic merit. "America has lost its God-given power and status" implies a different relation to the rest of the world.

Gerald R. Ford also viewed America as a leader to the rest of the world. He did not utilize the idea of American greatness to any significant degree. In fact, he did say that America was the world's greatest democracy, but did not utter any other similar phrases.¹⁹³ Perhaps a consequence of his honesty, or perhaps a result of the circumstance of his presidency: Ford tended to not root his policies in ideas of greatness like the other Republican presidents of this thesis. He did address what role he believed America held in the globalized world:

America has had a unique role in the world since the day of our independence 200 years ago. And ever since the end of World War II, we have borne – successfully – a heavy responsibility for ensuring a stable world order and hope for human progress.¹⁹⁴

Clearly, Ford aligns with the Republican tradition of believing the US has a responsibility to lead the rest of the world. And he believed the road to this is through international cooperation and improving foreign relations. As such, Ford does not prefigure Trumpism in this sense.

Early on in his address, Ronald Reagan said: "On the international scene, we had an uncomfortable feeling that we'd lost the respect of friend and foe. Some questioned whether

¹⁹² Address on the State of the Union Before a Joint Session of the Congress, January 20, 1972

¹⁹³ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 19, 1976

¹⁹⁴ Ibid

we had the will to defend peace and freedom. But America is too great for small dreams”.¹⁹⁵ This statement summarizes Reagan’s main view of America’s international role. America has lost respect but will regain it through spiritual renewal. Here, Reagan prefigures Trump to a degree, especially through the sentiment that America needs to regain the respect and reputation it had lost. Or “Make America Great Again”. But in the details, there are significant differences between Reagan and Trump. Reagan spoke of losing the respect of friend and foe; Trump spoke of other nations that have used, taken advantage and scorned America.¹⁹⁶ Although they both referenced a loss of respect internationally, the source of that loss sets them apart. Reagan argued that the loss of respect from friend and foe led to a hunger in the land for spiritual renewal.¹⁹⁷ In other words, Reagan identified the solution, and by implication the problem, as something within America itself. In contrast, Trump identified America’s globally diminished position as a consequence of other nations’ actions. As a consequence, America need not change itself but rather its relation to the other nations.

When speaking of America’s role in the world, George H. W. Bush inadvertently declares himself as the antithesis of Trump. In the following statement, it almost appears as if Bush spoke directly to Trump:

There are those who say now we can turn away from the world, that we have no special role, no special place. But we are the United States of America, the leader of the West that has become the leader of the world. And as long as I am President, I will continue to lead in support of freedom everywhere, not out of arrogance, not out of altruism, but for the safety and security of our children. This is a fact: Strength in the pursuit of peace is no vice; isolationism in the pursuit of security is no virtue.¹⁹⁸

Bush Sr. doubled down on the US’ role as leader of the world, and supporter of freedom everywhere. He presented strength in the pursuit of peace as an American value, and isolationism in pursuit of security as the opposite. In contrast, Trump pursued an isolationist approach to international relations with the intention of improving American power and

¹⁹⁵ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 25, 1984

¹⁹⁶ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, February 04, 2020

¹⁹⁷ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 25, 1984

¹⁹⁸ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 28, 1992

domestic conditions. It is safe to say that Trump does not echo Bush Sr. in his nationalist sentiments.

There is an observable change in the address of his son, however. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, resulted in the American-led war on terror. Naturally, the war on terror is a topic that Bush Jr. spent a considerable share of his address on. As a result of the 9/11-attacks, the character of the nation that Bush portrays is different from his predecessors. Perhaps it is not surprising, given that the terrorist attacks were the deadliest attack on US soil since the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. This is important to keep in mind: none of the previous Republican presidents experienced an attack directly on the USA while in office. Whereas the other former Presidents emphasize America's prime responsibility of leading the world and maintaining peace, Bush Jr. says: "Our greatest responsibility is the active defense of American people."¹⁹⁹ However, the greatest similarity to Trump appears when addressing the criticisms that the US faced in the wake of the war on terror. When speaking of the call for internationalization of the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Bush said the following:

From the beginning, America has sought international support for our operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we have gained much support. There is a difference, however, between leading a coalition of many nations and submitting to the objections of the few. America will never seek a permission slip to defend our country.²⁰⁰

This statement reads as a clarification of how America intends to operate internationally. They will seek the support of their allies but at the end of the day, America will prioritize America. Of course, this is said in the context of self-defense. However, Trump's idea of how America should behave internationally can be understood as an extension of this sentiment, prioritizing America in every international context beyond just self-defense.

4.2.2. Who are the 'Americans'?

Trumpism defines the American people by bashing the groups who are 'unamerican'. There are insights to be gained by comparing how the Republican predecessors of Donald Trump

¹⁹⁹ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 20, 2004

²⁰⁰ Ibid

compare in how they define the American people. Gerald Ford did not devote any time to addressing what characterizes the Americans and is therefore not brought forth in this subchapter.

However, Nixon did. I revert back to Nixon's emphasis on the State of Liberty. Nixon did not only present it as a symbol of America's purpose in the world, but also as a symbol of America as a nation of immigrants: "The world's hopes poured into America, along with its people. And those hopes, those dreams, that have been brought here from every corner of the world, have become part of the hope we now hold out to the world."²⁰¹ In other words, America is the leader of the world, because it is a nation of people from all over the world. This is a rather positive view of immigration, which contrasts with Trumpism.

Reagan did not root his idea of the American people as a people of immigrants, but instead argued that what makes Americans American are the bedrock conservative values. He stated it clearly: "For us, faith, work, family, neighborhood, freedom and peace are not just words; they're expressions of what America means, definitions of what makes us a good and loving people."²⁰² In a way, Reagan represents a mirror image of Trump in how they define Americans. Reagan constructed unity behind American conservative symbols, which made it easy to define unamerican people as groups who don't share those values. Trump constructed unity by vilifying groups who he deemed unamerican, which makes it easy to define and value American people as everyone else.

Bush Sr. did not devote a lot of time to defining what makes Americans American. The little time he did devote to defining Americans, once again presents Bush Sr. as Trump's opposite. At the very end he stated:

If you read the papers and watch TV, you know there's been a rise these days in a certain kind of ugliness: racist comments, antisemitism, an increased sense of division. Really, this is not us. This is not who we are. And this is not acceptable.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Address on the State of the Union Before a Joint Session of Congress, January 20, 1972

²⁰² Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 25, 1984

²⁰³ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 28, 1992

Once again, Bush Sr. appeared to speak to Trump directly, this time criticizing his way of defining the American people through the process of exclusion and division.

Bush Jr. is the only other Republican to address the issue of immigration in his address, although he did not come close to Trump in terms of time devoted to the issue. Furthermore, the issue of immigration is not used as a way of defining what Americans are, instead presented as a distraction to the real threats to national security.²⁰⁴ His idea of the American people is, like Reagan, rooted in the conservative bedrock values, which begets courage and compassion, reverence and integrity, and respect for differences of faith and race.²⁰⁵ This sets Trump apart from Bush Jr., as Trumpism espouses that Americans share only a specific set of faith and race.

4.3. Conservatism

There is little need to analyze the policy suggestions of the former Republican presidents with the intention of judging how conservative they are, as they all presented conservative policy recommendations. With regard to Trumpism, it has already been established that Trump presents policy suggestions that align with modern American conservatism, though in some areas more than others. The key question that was asked in the preceding chapter was whether Trump represented a new type of conservatism or if he was a typical modern conservative Republican. Purely based off of his own election year SUA, Trump does appear to signal a new conservative movement based on being “not liberal”. However, to make such a statement without looking back and comparing Trump with his Republican predecessors would be futile. By examining the conservative policy suggestions of the former Republican presidents and the values they associate them with, I will further nuance the argument that Trump represents a different kind of conservative movement. As will be shown, every President exhibit variation in their conservative beliefs and how they present them.

4.3.1. Just how conservative?

In terms of conservatism, Richard Nixon governed at a peculiar time. The “Goldwater Phenomenon” exposed a divide within the Republican Party, a divide that was mended through a party-wide unification behind the conservative movement. This process was

²⁰⁴ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 20, 2004

²⁰⁵ Ibid

ongoing at the time of Nixon's SUA, which is evident. I have already established Nixon as the lesser populist, and a strong advocator of bipartisanship. However, an unusually strong emphasis on bipartisanship is indicative of an existing divide. Nixon directly addressed this: "And there is an honest difference of opinion, not only between the parties, but within the parties, on some foreign policy issues and on some domestic policy issues."²⁰⁶ This is the very first issue that Nixon spoke of, and this "honest difference of opinion" seemingly sets the tone of the rest his address.

Nixon stated that there is ample precedent for him to let the election year affect his SUA by including a huge list of new proposals that would never pass, in an appeal to the American people.²⁰⁷ But he chose not to; Nixon intended only to present the most vital programs that are within the capacity of Congress to pass. This could be understood as Nixon setting a bipartisan example of putting aside his own ambitions for the betterment of the Nation. However, I read it differently. Nixon spoke to two parties in opposition, but more importantly he spoke to his own torn Republican Party. In 1972, Nixon was the party leader of a party torn between the conservative movement and more liberal Republicans. At this point in time, the Conservative movement was a force to be reckoned with, but it was not dominating the party as it would do by the 1980s. The bipartisan tone is indicative of this, as it would not make sense to present an entirely conservative take on the State of the Union address yet.

That is not to say that Nixon was not conservative at all. During his SUA, Nixon argued that the "secret to mastering change in today's world is to reach back to old and proven principles [...]".²⁰⁸ This idea of returning to old principles when faced with change is undoubtedly a conservative one. This is made more obvious when looking at the principles he spoke of: protection of individual rights and liberties, family as the keystone of civilization, the creative value of competition, amongst others.²⁰⁹ Interestingly though, Nixon stands out from his successors in his view of the federal government. There are instances in his address that I wish to bring up. The first is when Nixon spoke of the Nation's progress in reducing crime rates. He stated "[...] and here in the district of Columbia, the one city where Federal

²⁰⁶ Address on the State of the Union Delivered Before a Joint Session of Congress, January 20, 1972

²⁰⁷ Ibid

²⁰⁸ Ibid

²⁰⁹ Ibid

Government has direct jurisdiction, serious crime in 1971 was actually reduced by 13 percent from the year before.”²¹⁰

Later, Nixon stated his intention of “ [...] a sweeping reorganization of the executive branch of the Federal Government so that it will be more efficient, more responsive, and able to meet the challenges of the decades ahead”.²¹¹ In the first example, Nixon linked the lowered crime rates in the District of Columbia with the direct jurisdiction of the Federal Government. And in the second, Nixon stated the need for, and the intention to reorganize the executive branch of the Federal Government in a way that makes it more effective, and more responsive. Both these examples contradict the idea of limiting government influence and power, a significant element within modern American conservatism and Republican Party ideology. There are possible explanations for this. The first explanation may be the ideological divide that Nixon was maneuvering at the time. The second relates to the Watergate scandal that was yet to happen. Watergate exposed Nixon’s illicit and secretive use of government power to rig elections and block investigations.²¹² In other words, Nixon was personally inclined to increase and use government power. Of course, this would go on to topple his presidency, and send Gerald R. Ford into the oval office.

Ford represents a consistent, yet moderate conservative Republican ideology, best reflected the idea of ‘New Realism’. The aspect of his conservative ideology that sets him apart from the others, is the fact that he is more operationally oriented, than symbolically. In other words, he was more concerned with delivering policy proposals to Congress and to report on the rather unfortunate state of the union he had inherited. However, his operational ideological beliefs are unquestionably conservative. It is evident in his idea of ‘New Realism’: he presented new balances between the individual and the government that favored the individual, and a new balance in the system of federalism that favored state- and local government.²¹³ However, his emphasis on the fact that Federal Government had an important purpose in American society is suggestive of his moderate nature.

²¹⁰ Ibid

²¹¹ Ibid

²¹² Schultz & Vile, 2005, p. 663

²¹³ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress Reporting on the State of the Union, January 19, 1976

Six years after Nixon's resignation in 1974, Ronald Reagan won the election as the Republican presidential candidate. The election of Ronald Reagan, the epitome of an American conservative, is synonymous with the conservative movement achieving control of the Republican Party. Unsurprisingly then, Reagan leaned into conservative values and beliefs in his SUA. However, Reagan's conservatism is not evenly divided into the different core aspects. Out of the core elements, antistatism and religious populism are the most dominant in Reagan's address. Populism has already been covered earlier in this chapter, so I will mainly address the element of antistatism here. And Reagan did not mince his words when it came to his view of the government and its dangers in his address.

Though we do not know if Reagan said the following with the intention of distancing himself from Nixon or from his own personal beliefs, he did state very explicitly that the problems America was facing were "[...] just the tendency of government to grow, for practices and programs to become the nearest thing to eternal life we'll see on this Earth." Shortly afterwards, he further reiterated this point: "For a time we forgot that the American dream isn't one of making government bigger; it's keeping faith with the mighty spirit of free people under God."²¹⁴ This restatement summarizes and reflects what makes Ronald Reagan a conservative. Regarding variations to Reagan's conservative beliefs, he really did not exhibit any major variations. What is interesting is that Reagan presented these conservative ideas and values as answers to "[...] a hunger in the land for spiritual revival; if you will, a crusade for renewal."²¹⁵ Trump may have exhibited a "not liberal" idea of conservatism, but he also presented it as a necessary return to greatness. A greatness that had been removed by the previous administrations. In other words, Trump framed his idea of conservatism as a necessary return to previous greatness. And so does Reagan.

Bush Sr.'s wish for a "kinder, gentler" nation is indicative of a more moderate conservative Republican, at least compared to his predecessor. And this is reflected in his SUA. This sense of "moderate" mostly derives from his lack of populist rhetoric within his address, which we have already covered. He did speak of "[...] a home truth that the American people have never forgotten: This Government is too big and spends too much.", which is a classically conservative idea.²¹⁶ And as exemplified in the populism-subchapter, he held a clearly

²¹⁴ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 25, 1984

²¹⁵ Ibid

²¹⁶ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 28, 1992

conservative view of the economy as well.²¹⁷ Nevertheless, Bush Sr. is more moderate and less stalwart in his conservative attitude, at least compared to Reagan. And there is an important discussion to be had as to why he appears this way.

First, the seemingly less conservative attitude can be explained by the overwhelming emphasis on the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Many core elements of Conservatism are predominantly centered on domestic affairs, with some exceptions. By simple logic, an emphasis on foreign affairs would lessen the sense of staunch conservatism. For example, Bush Sr. gave a “rollcall of honor”, which is no more than praise for the efforts of Americans during the Cold War.²¹⁸ Second, though Bush Sr. was deemed a worthy successor to Reagan, “the transition from Reagan to Bush was more like a transfer of power to the opposition than a baton pass from one Republican president to another.”²¹⁹ From an ideological point of view, the presidential campaign of Bush Sr. was empty.²²⁰ And when comparing Bush Sr.’s SUA to that of his predecessor, this is seemingly the case and may then be explained simply by Bush Sr. being a less ideologically driven man.

Whereas George H. W. Bush’s SUA reads more like a cautionary warning, George W. Bush’s SUA reads more like a rallying cry. And whether or not this rallying cry is decidedly conservative is not that easy to say. As a matter of fact, Bush Jr.’s address is seemingly void of the central dichotomy of modern American conservatism: limiting the size, scope, and influence of Government. This is likely a consequence of Bush Jr.’s “War on terror”, which is without doubt the central theme of his address. The greatest responsibility was suddenly the active defense of the American people, which is the Federal Government’s constitutional responsibility.²²¹ Bush stated: “Inside the United States, where the war began, we must continue to give our homeland security and law enforcement personnel every tool they need to defend us.”²²² In other words, Bush declared the need to increase the government’s power in order to defend its citizens. Therefore, it would not make sense to justify other conservative policy suggestions, of which he had many, with the dangers of a big government.

²¹⁷ Ibid

²¹⁸ Ibid

²¹⁹ Gould, 2012, p. 459

²²⁰ Gould, 2012, p. 457

²²¹ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 20, 2004

²²² Ibid

There are still several instances where Bush Jr. made visible his conservative beliefs and intentions. The first is regarding the economy. At a certain point, Bush praised Congress for stimulating the economy with tax relief. After reciting some of the positive economic effects this had garnered, Bush stated that “these numbers confirm that the American people are using their money far better than Government would have [...]”.²²³ The central dichotomy of conservatism, the individual versus the Government, is clearly stated here. Later on, Bush spoke of great change in the world, but: “The values we try to live by never change, and are instilled in us by fundamental institutions as families and schools and religious congregations.”²²⁴ Once again, we see the conservative mindset of reacting to change by reiterating and returning to old values and beliefs. This mindset is a common denominator between all five elected Republican presidents that are relevant in this thesis. Ford did not do this.

²²³ Ibid

²²⁴ Ibid

5. Conclusion

Per the findings of this thesis, President Donald Trump's ideology should not be seen as a discontinuation of Republican Party ideology. However, it should not be seen as a direct continuation of it either. This thesis has shown that each of the core elements of Trumpism represents varying levels of continuity and discontinuity of Republican Party tradition. By discussing each element individually, it is possible to provide a nuanced answer to the thesis statement: *To what degree does Trumpism represent an ideological break from Republican Party tradition?*

5.1. Altered packaging, same old problem

Trumpism signals the continuity of Republican Party tradition in the action of employing populist rhetoric. For example, Nixon asserted the classically populist rhetoric of protecting the people against special interest groups, and Bush Jr. presented himself as the defender of the people's will against activist judges. However, Trumpism is different from Republican Party tradition in the consistent vilification of the Democratic Party. None of the former Republican presidents did ever present the Democratic Party as an antagonist to the people. On the other hand, the thesis portrays a Republican precedent, set by Reagan and Bush Jr., of addressing their political opposition as different leaderships and rebuking their criticisms by presenting themselves as protectors of the will of the people. Reagan only goes as far as to equal party affiliation as different party leaderships, but Bush Jr. takes it further by implicitly equating the Democratic opposition to the Iraq-war as opposition to freedom and safety. With this in mind, Trumpism's populist vilification of the Democratic Party can be seen as significant extension of a Republican Party precedent.

The second central element of Trumpism is nationalism that espouses an isolationist and protectionist approach to foreign policy, and constructs a sense of domestic unity through the negative positioning of other social groups. This element represents the clearest break from Republican Party tradition, compared to the populist and conservative elements. Trumpism-style nationalism espoused an approach to foreign policy that none of the other Republican presidents have shown an inclination to. Each Republican president, with the exception of Trump, has sought to remove restrictions on international trade, and avoided protectionism. Trumpism also places the interests of America first, and here Bush Jr. is, once more, similar to Trump. After 9/11, Bush Jr. argued that America's greatest responsibility was the active

defense of American citizens. Bush Jr. clearly stated that “America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our country”. The implication of this is that at the end of the day, America will prioritize its own security over its allies and friends. With this in mind, the nationalist ‘America First’ element of Trumpism appears as an extension of this sentiment. However, the idea of “America first” has been expanded to not only the actual security of American citizens, but also the American economy, the American social order, and foreign relations.

The most disputed element of Trumpism is the conservative one; both scholars and Republicans disagree on whether or not Trump is a conservative. This thesis has identified a pattern of variation in conservative beliefs and emphasis between the last six Republican presidents. Nixon promoted the idea of federal jurisdiction over law enforcement in a state, Ford never leaned on symbolic conservative values, Reagan embodied conservatism, Bush Sr. has been accused being ideologically empty and is moderately conservative, and Bush Jr. viewed the government as protector of individual rights and not a danger to them. However, although they all have considerable variation in expressed conservative beliefs and ideas, they all recommend policy suggestions that align with the modern conservative Republican Party ideology. With this in mind, Trumpism is similar in its dissimilarity. Despite the ardent vilification of the Democratic Party, and despite his overwhelming emphasis on immigration, Trump still recommended policies that were mostly conservative, with the exception of foreign trade.

According to the findings of this thesis, Trumpism should not be seen as a clear ideological break, nor continuation, from Republican Party tradition. This thesis has proven a consistent sense of variation across all the presidencies and the existence of an ideological ‘wiggle room’, which Trumpism exists within, to an extent. The most significant departure that Trumpism represents is the isolationist and protectionist approach to foreign policy. However, the nationalist element of Trumpism is a response to America’s loss of greatness. The feeling of lost greatness is not a departure from Republican Party tradition, as every president of this thesis has acknowledged such a problem. However, whereas the previous presidents consistently expressed domestic, spiritual renewal as the solution, Trumpism argues that America does not need to change itself but rather its relation to the rest of the globalized world. In this way, Trumpism represents a slightly new packaging for a problem that has been recognized time and time again in Republican Party tradition.

This is all indicative of a Republican Party that was, and still is transforming. Donald J. Trump is, once again, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee for the 2024 election. When you visit his campaign website, the first message you see is “They’re not after me, they’re after you ... I’m just standing in the way!”.²²⁵ At the bottom left of the website, you appear to have an unread message from Trump himself, where he asks you to “chip in” to “help win back the White House from crooked Biden”. As long as Donald Trump remains the face of the Republican Party, the conservative policies appear to be packaged within an antagonistic and nationalistic framework. It does not necessarily mean that conservatism itself is transforming, but it does indicate that the symbolic ideology of the Republican Party is transforming away from traditional conservative values, and towards simply being “not the left”.

5.2. Suggestions for further research

This analysis of this thesis has also brought forth interesting questions that, although they were not directly relevant to this thesis, can provide important insights if researched further. Firstly, the potential of the SUA as an indication of Party ideology has been proven by this thesis. As such, it would be interesting to analyze the SUAs of Democratic presidents. The Democratic Party is said to be less ideologically coherent than the Republican Party, but this statement could be further nuanced by analyzing the SUAs delivered by Democratic presidents. Another possible angle of research would simply be going further back in time and analyzing how the policymaking rhetoric has changed alongside the form and function of the SUA.

Considering how all elements of Trumpism manifest themselves within the issue of immigration, the SUAs of the former Republican presidents have devoted an unfortunately little amount of attention to it in their SUAs. However, there is no doubt that immigration has been a fairly central policy priority for past Republican presidents. The thesis statement would be further nuanced by looking beyond the SUA and acknowledging more forms of presidential communication. Such an approach would ensure more data to further nuance the similarities and differences between Trumpism’s approach to immigration and the Republican tradition.

²²⁵ <https://www.donaldjtrump.com>

5.3. Didactic relevance

As a future history- and English teacher, this thesis is didactically relevant in several ways. First of all, it is important that a history teacher has experience in historical practice. After all, a competency aim after VG3 is “explore the past by formulating research questions, assessing and using different material and presenting one’s own conclusions”.²²⁶ Furthermore, the thematic field of the thesis is relevant to a number of competency aims. The orientation towards ideological continuity and discontinuity is relevant to the following competency aim: “Discuss the degree to which developments in different periods have been influenced by upheaval or continuity and consider what makes an event in the past meaningful.”.²²⁷ Furthermore, the Presidents consistently use history as a tool in their rhetoric. This makes the following competency aim relevant: “reflect on how the past is used by different stakeholders and discuss the purpose of this use of history.”.²²⁸ Lastly, this thesis is a helpful source that can be used in my teaching to achieve these competency aims.

²²⁶ Ministry of Education and Research (2019). *Curriculum for History*, p. 7

²²⁷ Ministry of Education and Research (2019). *Curriculum for History*, p. 7

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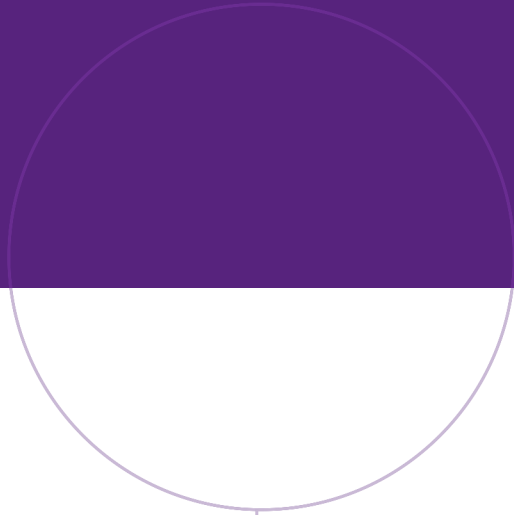
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Norwegian University of
Science and Technology