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Populists: Radical Agents of Change or the Return of Statesmen? A Comparative Study of Populism and Foreign Policy in the United States and Greece

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Submitted in fulfilment for the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This study challenges the prevailing narrative surrounding populism by asserting that populists, regardless of their political affiliation, are not merely radical agents of change. Instead, they reflect a resurgence of statesmanship and signal a shift towards unilateralism and bilateralism in international relations. While populists are often portrayed as disruptors threatening democratic norms and stability, this view tends to overlook the complexities and variations inherent within populist movements.

Focusing on the central question—to what extent does populist leadership shape diplomatic strategies, alliances, and global engagements in the realm of foreign policy?—this research aims to fill a significant gap in existing literature. Previous studies have primarily concentrated on the policies of individual populist leaders; however, comprehensive analyses of populism's impact on foreign affairs remain limited. By examining how populist leaders redefine traditional foreign policy paradigms, this study seeks to determine whether their governance leads to substantial shifts in diplomatic strategies and international relations.

Additionally, this research emphasizes the necessity of understanding the interplay between populism and foreign policy dynamics. It challenges oversimplified narratives that depict populist leaders as mere threats to democracy, instead highlighting their potential role in reshaping international relations by prioritizing state sovereignty and national interests. Through a nuanced exploration of populist leadership and its implications for foreign affairs, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the complexities of populism and its significance in today's global context.

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This thesis is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you all for being a part of this journey.

Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Michelle Cook

Signature:

Chapter 1- Introduction

1.1 Overview

The ascent of populism has ignited significant scholarly debate, primarily focusing on whether these movements represent a threat to democratic institutions. While much of the discourse to date has examined how figures such as Hugo Chávez, Viktor Orbán, or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan influence domestic political landscapes, there remains a notable gap in scholarly understanding regarding populism's influence on international relations. This scarcity of research is concerning, as populist leaders often challenge established global norms, disrupt international alliances, and introduce new dynamics into the multilateral system. As international cooperation continues to shape the modern world, understanding the transnational ripple effects of populist leadership is essential for assessing how it might redefine global political landscapes.

This study moves beyond identifying common traits like anti-elitism to assess the broader implications of populist leadership for global engagement. Specifically, it challenges the notion that populist foreign policy is merely an acceleration of existing trends. By focusing on the modalities of leadership, particularly the personalization of diplomacy (or "leaderisation") and strategies such as "permanent destabilization", this research identifies a radical rupture in *how* foreign policy is conducted, even when the *outcomes* appear to follow historical trajectories (Aggestam and Hedling, 2020; Goldberg, 2018). This allows for a distinction between a state's routine strategic evolution and a substantive ideological reorientation driven by populist leadership.

For the purposes of this study, populism is understood as a thin-centered ideology that juxtaposes "the pure people" against "the corrupt elite". This study examines how leaders utilize identical nodal signifiers, such as "sovereignty," "national dignity," and the "people vs. the elite", to justify disparate actions, proving that the style of governance is ideological even when material outcomes are dictated by systemic power (Mudde, 2004; Laclau, 2005).

To evaluate these shifts, the study adopts a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD), comparing the left-wing populism of Alexis Tsipras in Greece and the right-wing populism of Donald Trump in the United States. By examining a peripheral state and a global hegemon, the research treats state power as a contextual mediator that shapes, amplifies, or limits the range of possibility, while populist ideology provides the specific roadmap for action. Understanding these trajectories requires a comparative baseline, the policies of non-populist predecessors, to accurately distinguish routine foreign policy evolution from the substantive reorientations unique to populist leadership. Ultimately, this research aims to determine to what extent populist leadership reshapes diplomatic strategies, alliances, and global engagements, providing insights into the future of international relations in an increasingly polarized world.

1.2 Patterns and Gaps in Research

To effectively assess the influence of populism on foreign policy, it is important to establish a clear analytical framework. This includes not only defining foreign policy but also identifying the key elements for examination. Despite its significance in international relations, the concept of foreign policy has at times been under-theorized in academic discourse. Charles Hermann notes that this relative neglect can limit our ability to explain state behavior comprehensively (Hermann, 1990). Traditionally, foreign policy

has been understood as the strategies and actions employed by a state in its interactions with other global actors. Foundational work by scholars such as George Modelski (1962), Bruce Russett (1985), and Harvey Starr (1997) frames foreign policy as a strategic and evolving set of decisions shaped by both domestic and international considerations.

For the purposes of this study, the definition advanced by Deborah Gerner and Laura Neack (2004) is adopted. Their approach emphasizes the intentions, actions, and responses of both state and non-state actors within the global arena. This definition is particularly useful in analyzing foreign policy under populist leadership, where an emphasis on national sovereignty and skepticism of multilateralism often leads to a restructuring of traditional practices. Applying this definition allows for a more nuanced understanding of how domestic and international dynamics interact under populist leadership. Recent literature increasingly emphasizes the role of individual decision-makers in shaping foreign policy outcomes. This study draws on an actor-centered approach that considers the leadership styles of populist figures while also accounting for institutional constraints, small group dynamics, and domestic political pressures (Neack, 2004). This focus supports a deeper exploration of how populist leaders may recalibrate foreign policy priorities in ways that depart from established patterns. This study specifically challenges the notion that populist foreign policy is merely an acceleration of existing trends. By focusing on the modalities of leadership, specifically the personalization of diplomacy (or 'leaderisation') and the doctrine of 'permanent destabilization', this research identifies a radical rupture in *how* foreign policy is conducted, even when the *outcomes* appear to follow historical trajectories (Aggestam and Hedling, 2020; Goldberg, 2018). This allows for a distinction between a state's routine strategic evolution and a substantive ideological reorientation driven by populist leadership.

While foreign policy is frequently associated with security and defense, this study concentrates on three specific domains: international trade and economic negotiations, diplomacy, and immigration. These areas have been notably impacted by populist movements, which often prioritize national interests and adopt

unilateral or bilateral approaches over multilateral cooperation. This focus enables the examination of how populist rhetoric and policies reshape these policy areas, particularly in their efforts to 'protect the people' from perceived external threats. To help structure this analysis, the study applies John B. Taylor's tripartite framework, which divides foreign policy into economic, political, and security dimensions (Taylor, 2000). Taylor's framework offers a practical way to assess the multidimensional character of foreign policy. When applied to the case studies of Greece under Alexis Tsipras and the United States under Donald Trump, it allows for comparative insights into how different populist governments approach foreign policy across key domains. While this comparative approach does not seek to generalize broadly across all populist cases, it offers useful perspectives on how specific populist leaders navigate foreign policy in differing contexts. Foreign policy, as a dynamic domain of statecraft, is influenced by various domestic and international pressures. Theoretical models of foreign policy change offer tools to assess these shifts. Hermann's (1969) framework, which classifies foreign policy issues based on their change processes, is particularly relevant for analyzing foreign policy under political transitions. His approach provides a structured lens to assess the magnitude and type of changes associated with populist leadership, which often emerges in periods of political or economic instability.

Rosenau's (1966) "value-oriented" framework, while influential, presents challenges in identifying causal mechanisms due to its "pre-theory" status. Critics such as Potter (1980) and Greenberg (1977) have noted its limitations in distinguishing between input variables and policy outcomes. Rosenau's later work (1995) on governance introduces a more systemic perspective, incorporating the influence of non-state actors and global governance institutions. While this systemic lens is valuable, especially for understanding populist resistance to global governance structures, it is less focused on the role of individual leaders in shaping specific foreign policy decisions.

This tension is particularly relevant in the context of populist foreign policy, where national sovereignty and opposition to international institutions are central. Populist leaders often frame foreign policy

decisions as efforts to defend the nation from external threats. Donald Trump's withdrawal from multilateral agreements such as the Paris Climate Accord and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and Alexis Tsipras' outreach to non-traditional partners during economic negotiations, illustrate these tendencies. Rational Choice Theory, as articulated by Bueno de Mesquita (1981), offers another lens by positing that states act based on cost-benefit analyses to maximize national interests. While this is helpful for examining strategic calculations, it tends to underplay the ideational and normative drivers that are especially prominent in populist discourse. Wendt's (1999) Constructivism addresses this gap by emphasizing identity, norms, and ideas in foreign policy formulation. This theoretical lens highlights how populist leaders may construct foreign policy around narratives of national identity and sovereignty, although it does not fully account for strategic utility. Putnam's (1988) two-level game theory contributes to understanding the interaction between domestic political pressures and international negotiations. This is especially relevant to populist leaders, who often capitalize on domestic dissatisfaction with elites or institutions. However, Putnam's model primarily focuses on internal political structures and may not sufficiently capture the international dynamics and systemic constraints that also shape populist foreign policy. Holsti's (1972) work on decision-making emphasizes the cognitive and organizational dimensions of foreign policy shifts. His framework is useful for examining how populist leadership styles disrupt established processes within governments. However, it may not fully account for how populists navigate or resist broader international norms and institutions. Hermann's (1990) four levels of foreign policy change offer a particularly suitable model for this study, allowing for the categorization of policy shifts ranging from minor adjustments to complete reorientations. Applying this framework to the cases of Tsipras and Trump enables an assessment of how populist leadership interacts with various levels of foreign policy transformation.

Despite the contributions of these theoretical models, certain gaps persist in the literature. While Hermann's model is robust in categorizing foreign policy changes, it does not fully integrate systemic and domestic considerations emphasized by Rosenau, Wendt, Putnam, and others. Additionally, existing

studies often emphasize populism's rhetorical style without systematically examining its policy impacts across multiple domains. Some analyses treat populism as a singular phenomenon, overlooking ideological diversity within populist movements. This study builds on existing literature by conducting a comparative case analysis of foreign policy under Tsipras and Trump, using Hermann's framework to evaluate the scope and nature of policy change. While it does not claim to offer a comprehensive or universal model of populist foreign policy, it contributes to ongoing scholarly efforts by placing the foreign policy consequences of both left- and right-wing populism in comparative perspective.
Another area underexplored in current literature is the impact of populist movements on diplomacy and alliance-building beyond rhetorical positioning. This study aims to address this gap by examining how Tsipras and Trump engaged with traditional and non-traditional partners, contributing to a deeper understanding of populist foreign policy in diplomatic terms. Finally, by comparing different types of populism, Tsipras' left-wing approach and Trump's right-wing governance, the study offers insights into how ideological variation shapes foreign policy decisions. Rather than making broad generalizations, it focuses on the unique but comparable ways populist leaders challenge conventional foreign policy norms.

With these research gaps in mind, the thesis poses its central question: *To what extent does populist leadership shape diplomatic strategies, alliances, and global engagements in foreign policy?* This question is addressed through two main steps: situating contemporary populism within its historical and political context, and applying a structured framework for analyzing foreign policy under populist leadership. While limited to two case studies, this approach contributes to a more refined understanding of populism's implications for global engagement, diplomacy, and alliance strategies.

1.3 Research Design and Case Study Selection

This research employs a three-step methodological design that integrates inductive and deductive reasoning to assess the extent to which populist leadership shapes foreign policy. The aim is not only to

contribute to the understanding of populist leadership but also to provide a rigorous analytical framework that can be applied to future studies on the intersection of populism and international relations.

The first step involves a comprehensive review of the existing literature on populism, focusing on the history, characteristics, and theoretical underpinnings of populist leaders in power. The goal is to identify recurring patterns in the behavior of populist leaders, drawing on the foundational works of scholars such as Mudde (2017), Moffitt (2016), and Weyland (2017). By synthesizing these theories, it becomes possible to discern the mechanisms through which populist leaders engage with international institutions and reconfigure alliances. This research specifically applies Mudde's (2017) conceptualization of populism as a "thin-centered ideology" and Weyland's (2017) framework of populism as a political strategy to identify the unique features of populist foreign policy. In doing so, it accounts for the variations between left-wing and right-wing frameworks as identified by Albertazzi and McDonnell (2015). From this synthesis, an analytical framework emerges focusing on three primary dimensions: economic, diplomatic, and immigration policies.

In the second step, the thesis applies this framework through a single-case study analysis of Donald Trump and Alexis Tsipras. The selection of the United States and Greece is intentionally designed to test how populist leadership influences foreign policy across markedly different geopolitical contexts. While these countries differ significantly in terms of global power and economic size, this divergence is a feature, not a flaw, of the research design. Rather than comparing countries as unitary actors, this thesis treats state power as an intervening variable, a contextual mediator that shapes or limits the range of possibility for a leader.

Structural power alone does not account for the ideological roadmap used by these leaders. For example, Donald Trump utilized the U.S.'s structural autonomy to challenge the existing global order through the dismantling of multilateral agreements like the TPP, a move framed by Norrlof (2021) as a rejection of

traditional global trade governance. Conversely, Greece's peripheral status materially bounded Alexis Tsipras's agency, forcing him to navigate a debt crisis shaped by external financial elites. As Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014) argue, Tsipras's left-wing populism functioned as a critique of neoliberal impositions, asserting national sovereignty despite structural constraints.

The third step employs deductive reasoning to conduct a comparative analysis using the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). MDSD, as established by Przeworski and Teune (1970), is utilized to identify patterns and causal mechanisms across cases that differ significantly in their contexts. The validity of this comparison rests on the discovery that if both leaders use identical nodal signifiers, such as "sovereignty" and "the people" versus "the elite", despite their vast power difference, it proves that the style and logic of governance are ideological, even if material outcomes are dictated by systemic capacity (Laclau, 2005; Glynos and Howarth, 2007). By comparing the themes that emerge, the thesis evaluates the extent to which populist leadership produces consistent outcomes across different settings. This step ultimately tests the validity of the analytical framework and sheds light on how populist leadership redefines global engagements. By triangulating these three steps, literature synthesis, case study analysis, and MDSD comparison, this thesis enhances the validity of its findings and addresses the limited exploration of populism's influence on international relations.

Critically, this study compares the governing modalities of leaders rather than the unitary behavior of countries. By treating the U.S. and Greece as the 'containers' of populist agency, the research can isolate the 'Jacksonian' or 'left-nationalist' roadmap from the baseline trends established by their respective non-populist predecessors.

1.4 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework devised for this research delves into the effects of populist leaders on foreign policy, drawing upon the contributions of several prominent scholars, including Mudde (2017), Moffit (2015), Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2019), Pappas (2019), Albertazzi and McDonnell (2015), Giurlando (2021), Magcamit (2017), and Weyland (2017). Collectively, these works form a robust foundation for comprehending the intersection of populism and foreign policy.

The initial step in this framework is to define the concept of populism. As Mudde (2017) articulates, populism can be understood as a thin-centered ideology that establishes a dichotomy between a "pure people" and a "corrupt elite." This conceptualization underscores the anti-elitist and anti-pluralist tendencies inherent in populist discourse, emphasizing the primacy of the general will over elite interests (Mudde, 2017). Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2019) expand upon this definition by asserting that populism frequently positions itself in opposition to established democratic norms and institutions, which are perceived as tools wielded by elites to manipulate the populace. Additionally, Moffit (2015) characterizes populism not merely as an ideology but also as a political style. He posits that populist leaders actively engage in the performance of politics, often constructing crises and appealing directly to the sentiments of the common people. This perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of how populist leaders frame foreign policy as an extension of their domestic struggles against both internal elites and perceived external threats, thus linking their domestic agendas with their international actions (Moffit, 2015).

The subsequent component of the framework examines the ramifications of populist leadership on foreign policy. Pappas (2019) and Weyland (2017) argue that populist leaders typically diverge from conventional multilateral approaches, favoring unilateral or bilateral strategies instead. This pivot reflects a broader skepticism toward multilateral diplomacy, which populist leaders often associate with elite interests and, by extension, a betrayal of the will of the people (Pappas, 2019; Weyland, 2017). Building

on this analysis, Albertazzi and McDonnell (2015) and Giurlando (2021) investigate the implications of such shifts, noting that populist leaders may realign international alliances and partnerships based on ideological affinities. Their scholarship highlights the potential challenges populism poses to established international institutions and norms, as populist leaders may seek to dismantle or renegotiate agreements that they perceive as infringing on national sovereignty (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015; Giurlando, 2021).

An additional dimension of the framework identifies specific mechanisms through which populist leaders exert influence over foreign policy. Moffit (2015) and Magcamit (2017) emphasize the critical roles of crisis construction and threat perception in legitimizing foreign policy decisions. Populist leaders often employ rhetoric that constructs external threats and crises, serving to galvanize domestic support and justify international actions that might otherwise be controversial or unpopular (Moffit, 2015; Magcamit, 2017). Moreover, Mudde (2017) and Magcamit (2017) underline the significance of economic nationalism and sovereignty in the foreign policies of populist leaders. These leaders tend to prioritize protectionist measures and national autonomy, frequently rejecting supranational entities or agreements that they believe undermine national sovereignty. This focus on economic nationalism can lead to substantial shifts in trade policy and international economic relations (Mudde, 2017; Magcamit, 2017).

The framework also underscores the necessity for comparative analysis of populist foreign policy across various ideological spectrums. Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2019) and Weyland (2017) suggest that both similarities and differences exist in the foreign policy approaches of right-wing and left-wing populist leaders. By scrutinizing case studies of diverse populist leaders, scholars can discern the extent to which ideology informs foreign policy decisions and strategies, thus providing a more nuanced understanding of populist leadership on the international stage (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2019; Weyland, 2017).

Lastly, the framework contemplates the broader consequences and implications of populist foreign policy. Pappas (2019) and Giurlando (2021) argue that while the immediate impacts of populist foreign policy decisions may be readily observable, the long-term consequences for global stability, alliances, and the international order are often more intricate and far-reaching. This analysis is pivotal for comprehending the enduring effects of populist leadership on the global stage (Pappas, 2019; Giurlando, 2021). Furthermore, Albertazzi and McDonnell (2015) and Weyland (2017) explore how populist leaders challenge or reshape global norms and institutions. Their findings suggest that the ascent of populism may engender a more fragmented international system, as populist leaders endeavor to undermine or circumvent established norms in favor of policies that prioritize national sovereignty and self-interest (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015; Weyland, 2017).

Finally, to operationalize the study of leader agency, the framework integrates the concept of 'leaderisation'. This denotes the centralization of foreign policy decision-making within a tight inner circle, effectively bypassing traditional bureaucratic protocols and the professional diplomatic corps. This process is analyzed alongside the use of nodal signifiers—such as 'sovereignty' and 'the people'—which serve as anchoring concepts for constructing populist foreign policy narratives. By identifying these signifiers, the framework distinguishes between the material capacity of a state (dictated by power) and the ideological logic of its governance (dictated by populism).

This analytical framework provides a structured and comprehensive approach to examining the effects of populist leaders on foreign policy. By integrating theoretical perspectives with practical mechanisms and case studies, the framework enhances our understanding of the intricate interplay between populism and international relations, facilitating a deeper exploration of how populist leadership shapes diplomatic strategies, alliances, and global engagements.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured into nine chapters, each contributing to the overarching analysis of how populist leadership shapes foreign policy. Below are brief summaries of Chapters 2 through 9.

Chapter 2 – A History of Populism and Foreign Policy: This chapter provides a historical context for the rise of populism in Greece and the United States, examining the socio-political conditions that have led to the prominence of populist movements. It explores the evolution of foreign policy approaches in both countries, setting the stage for more in-depth analyses in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical Framework: This chapter outlines the theoretical framework that guides the study, drawing on the works of key scholars in the field of populism and international relations. It introduces the analytical tools necessary to understand the impact of populist leadership on foreign policy, including the concepts of national sovereignty, economic nationalism, and crisis politics.

Chapter 4 – Methodology: The methodology chapter details the qualitative approach employed to explore the influence of populist leadership on foreign policy. It describes the data collection techniques, including document analysis, discourse analysis, and elite interviews, which are used to gain insights into the foreign policy strategies of Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump.

Chapter 5 – Economic Foreign Policy in Populist leadership: This chapter delves into the economic dimensions of foreign policy under populist leadership, focusing on how populist leaders like Alexis Tsipras in Greece and Donald Trump in the United States have reshaped their nations' global economic engagements. It begins with a theoretical framework grounded in neoclassical realism, which helps to understand the interplay between domestic pressures and international economic strategies. The chapter then examines the economic policies of Tsipras and Trump, highlighting their use of economic nationalism and protectionist measures.

Chapter 6 – Diplomacy in Populist leadership: This chapter explores the diplomatic dimension of foreign policy under populist leadership, analyzing how populist leaders navigate international relations. It discusses how diplomacy is influenced by populist ideologies that often prioritize nationalism and skepticism of multilateral institutions. The chapter examines the strategies employed by Tsipras and Trump in their diplomatic engagements, revealing how their leadership styles and ideologies have led to strategic realignments and new forms of international engagement. It also considers the potential for a renewed emphasis on statesmanship in foreign policy decision-making, suggesting that populism may lead to a reevaluation of traditional diplomatic practices.

Chapter 7 – Immigration Foreign Policy in Populist leadership: This chapter investigates the immigration policies of Tsipras and Trump, exploring the implications of these policies for national identity and international relations. It applies a theoretical framework that considers the interplay of domestic pressures, public sentiment, and international obligations. The chapter examines the case studies of Greece and the United States, analyzing the domestic and international responses to the immigration policies of Tsipras and Trump.

Chapter 8 – Discussion and Theoretical Implications: This chapter revisits the study's theoretical propositions in light of the empirical findings. It utilizes the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) to evaluate how state power serves as a contextual mediator for populist agency. A significant portion of the chapter is dedicated to redefining statesmanship under populism, arguing that statesmanship emerges when leaders like Tsipras or Trump reconcile populist imperatives with systemic constraints through strategic adaptation. Finally, it reconciles the findings with Neoclassical Realist theory, offering a refined framework for understanding how domestic ideological drivers filter systemic pressures.

Chapter 9 – Conclusions: The final chapter synthesizes the empirical findings, theoretical insights, and methodological contributions of the thesis. It reflects on the impact of populist leadership on the international stage and acknowledges the limitations of the study, suggesting directions for future

research. The chapter also discusses the challenges in isolating the influence of populism from other factors shaping foreign policy decisions.

Chapter 2 – A History of Populism and Foreign Policy

2.1 Introduction

The examination of Greece and the United States as case studies provides a unique and valuable lens through which to analyze the impact of populist leadership on foreign policy. Greece, with its tumultuous political history and the rise of populist movements, offers insights into the ways in which economic crises and socio-political upheaval can influence a nation's foreign relations. The United States, particularly in the post-Cold War era, presents a contrasting yet complementary case, where the emergence of populism has challenged established foreign policy norms on a global scale. By studying these two countries, this chapter aims to elucidate the dynamics between populist leaders and their respective foreign policy agendas, highlighting both the similarities and differences in their approaches.

This chapter is focused on providing a comprehensive historical context that is crucial for understanding the extent to which populist leaders have altered or reinforced traditional foreign policy strategies. By exploring the socio-political and economic conditions that gave rise to populism in Greece and the United States, as well as the established foreign policy doctrines prior to the leadership of Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump, this analysis will lay the groundwork for understanding the unique contributions of these leaders to their countries' foreign policies. This historical context is essential for situating the subsequent analysis of specific foreign policy decisions and their broader implications for international relations.

As established in the previous chapter, the central research question guiding this thesis is: *To what extent does populist leadership shape diplomatic strategies, alliances, and global engagements in the realm of foreign policy?* This question is particularly pertinent in the context of the contemporary global order, where the rise of populist leaders has increasingly challenged the status quo of international diplomacy and cooperation.

The specific objectives of this chapter are threefold. First, it aims to provide a detailed historical overview of the rise of populism in Greece and the United States, focusing on the periods leading up to the leadership of Tsipras and Trump. Second, the chapter seeks to analyze the general approaches to foreign policy in both countries before the advent of these populist leaders, establishing a baseline against which the impact of their governance can be measured. Third, the chapter intends to set the stage for a comparative analysis of the foreign policy strategies employed by Tsipras and Trump, offering insights into the ways in which populism has influenced their diplomatic, strategic, and global engagement decisions. Through these objectives, this chapter will contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between populism and foreign policy, providing a foundation for the subsequent chapters' more detailed analyses.

By establishing this historical grounding, the chapter facilitates a clear distinction between routine foreign policy evolution—the incremental, pragmatic shifts of non-populist predecessors—and the substantive ideological reorientations or radical ruptures unique to the governance of Tsipras and Trump. This comparative baseline is essential for proving that populist foreign policy is not merely a continuation of existing trends, but a fundamental change in the modalities of leadership and global engagement.

2.2 Historical Overview of Greece

The establishment of the Third Hellenic Republic in 1974, following the fall of the military junta, marked a pivotal moment in Greek political history. This transition from authoritarianism to democracy was rooted in the political turbulence of the post-World War II era, which had been significantly shaped by the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). The defeat of communist insurgents by government forces, with backing from Western powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom, left a deeply polarized political landscape where right-wing forces dominated well into the 1970s (Kalyvas, 2006; Mazower, 2000). The

left was systematically marginalized, and this ideological schism would continue to influence Greek politics for decades.

In 1974, the conservative New Democracy (ND) party under Konstantinos Karamanlis led Greece into a new political era. Karamanlis, who had previously served as prime minister before the junta, sought to stabilize Greece's fragile democracy and align the country more closely with Europe. His most notable achievement was Greece's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1981, a strategic decision aimed at securing economic modernization and political stability through European integration (Featherstone & Papadimitriou, 2008). This period of alignment with Europe, while offering substantial economic benefits, also triggered ongoing debates about Greek sovereignty and its relationship with external powers, particularly in the context of Greece's longstanding regional tensions with Turkey.

The political landscape shifted significantly with the rise of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) under Andreas Papandreou in 1981. Papandreou, a charismatic leader with populist leanings, successfully capitalized on public discontent with the conservative elites. His administration promoted a platform of social justice, economic redistribution, and national sovereignty, framed within a discourse that frequently challenged Western influence, particularly from the United States and the EEC (Lyrintzis, 2005; Tsoukalas, 1987). Despite his populist rhetoric, Papandreou's foreign policy remained pragmatic, as Greece continued to benefit from EEC membership and financial assistance, even while he publicly criticized aspects of European integration.

Under Papandreou's leadership, Greece also confronted significant foreign policy challenges, including its relationship with Turkey, especially in light of the unresolved Cyprus issue and disputes over territorial rights in the Aegean Sea. These tensions brought Greece and Turkey to the brink of military conflict on several occasions, most notably in 1987, underscoring the delicate balance between nationalism and diplomacy in Greek foreign policy (Tsakonas, 2010; Veremis & Couloumbis, 2004). Another significant foreign policy issue was the naming dispute with the newly independent state of the former Yugoslav

Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), which emerged in 1991. The use of the name "Macedonia" by the new state sparked outrage in Greece, as it was seen as a claim to the cultural and historical legacy of the northern Greek region of the same name (Kofos, 1999). This dispute would continue to strain Greece's regional relationships and became a central issue in its foreign policy.

2.2.2 Socio-Political Conditions Leading to Populism

Greece's socio-political landscape in the late 20th century was marked by economic crises, social upheavals, and political realignments, which paved the way for the rise of populist movements. The global oil crises of the 1970s, combined with Greece's internal economic vulnerabilities, resulted in widespread dissatisfaction and rising inequality (Featherstone & Kazamias, 2001). In this context, PASOK emerged as a powerful political force, with Papandreou advocating for a platform of redistributive economic policies, expanded social welfare, and greater state intervention. His rhetoric of defending the marginalized—workers, farmers, and the lower classes—against external pressures and domestic elites resonated with a large segment of the population (Lyrintzis, 1987).

Although Papandreou criticized European institutions and the perceived infringement of Greek sovereignty by foreign powers, his government benefited substantially from EEC funds, which helped modernize Greece's infrastructure and industry. This created a complex relationship where anti-European rhetoric was often paired with reliance on European financial support (Karamouzi, 2015). This paradox would become a recurring theme in Greek politics, as successive governments sought to maintain sovereignty while securing the economic benefits of European integration.

In the early 21st century, Greece faced a new set of challenges. The global financial crisis of 2008 had devastating effects on the Greek economy, eventually leading to the Eurozone debt crisis. Greece's reliance on international bailouts, primarily from the European Union (EU) and the International

Monetary Fund (IMF), came at the cost of harsh austerity measures. These policies caused widespread social unrest and disillusionment with the traditional political elites (Pappas, 2014; Sotiropoulos, 2015). Mass protests and strikes became common, and political radicalization increased, providing fertile ground for populist movements across the political spectrum. SYRIZA, a coalition of left-wing movements, emerged as the leading anti-austerity force, promising to restore Greek sovereignty and end external economic control (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014).

2.2.3 Influence of Populism on Greek Foreign Policy

Populism has played a crucial role in shaping Greek foreign policy throughout the Third Hellenic Republic (1974-present), influencing diplomatic strategies, national identity, and the country's engagement with international actors. This section explores the manifestations of populism in the foreign policy approaches of key political figures and parties prior to Tsipras, particularly focusing on the policies of Andreas Papandreou and other leaders within the context of regional tensions and economic dependencies.

2.2.4 Populism and National Identity

The populist rhetoric in Greece has often been intertwined with notions of national identity, particularly in the post-junta era. Andreas Papandreou, leader of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), exemplified this trend during his time in office from 1981 to 1989 and again from 1993 to 1996. Papandreou's administration capitalized on widespread discontent with the established political elites, advocating for a vision of a sovereign Greece that could assert its interests against external pressures from Western powers and financial institutions (Lyrintzis, 2005). His populist discourse emphasized the defense of national dignity and social justice, framing foreign policy issues through the lens of protecting the Greek populace from perceived exploitation by foreign elites.

This emphasis on national identity was particularly pronounced in relation to the ongoing tensions with Turkey over Cyprus and territorial disputes in the Aegean Sea. Papandreou's government utilized nationalist rhetoric to garner domestic support while adopting a confrontational stance towards Turkey. His approach often manifested in calls for solidarity among the Greek populace against external adversaries, fostering a collective national identity that transcended party lines (Tsoukalas, 1987).

2.2.5 Economic Populism and Foreign Policy

Economic populism also significantly influenced Greek foreign policy, particularly during the 1980s. Papandreou's administration focused on redistributive economic policies aimed at reducing inequality and expanding the welfare state, positioning itself against the austerity measures advocated by international institutions (Featherstone & Kazamias, 2001). While promoting social justice domestically, the government sought to leverage Greece's geopolitical position to secure favorable terms in its dealings with the European Economic Community (EEC) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Despite its populist leanings, PASOK's government recognized the importance of foreign aid and financial support from the EEC for economic modernization. This created a paradox where anti-Western rhetoric coexisted with reliance on foreign funds for domestic development (Karamouzi, 2015). Consequently, Greece's foreign policy was characterized by a delicate balance between asserting national interests and engaging with international partners.

2.2.6 Populism and Foreign Relations

The influence of populism extended to Greece's relationships with its regional neighbors. The naming dispute with the newly independent Republic of North Macedonia (formerly FYROM) emerged as a significant foreign policy challenge in the early 1990s, igniting nationalist sentiments within Greece. The

claim to the name "Macedonia" was perceived as an encroachment on Greek heritage and identity, leading to widespread public protests and demands for a strong governmental response (Kofos, 1999). Populist narratives were utilized to mobilize the populace against perceived threats to national identity, framing the dispute as a struggle between Greek interests and external claims.

The foreign policy challenges posed by Turkey and the Cyprus issue also exemplified the intersection of populism and national interests. Nationalist populism often fueled a more assertive foreign policy stance during moments of crisis, as leaders sought to demonstrate their commitment to protecting Greek sovereignty. For instance, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Greece faced military tensions with Turkey, leading to a surge in nationalistic sentiment and calls for military preparedness (Veremis & Couloumbis, 2004). Leaders from both the New Democracy party and PASOK capitalized on these sentiments to reinforce their political standing, framing their foreign policy actions as essential for national security.

2.2.7 Foreign Policies of Prime Ministers Before Tsipras

The foreign policies of Greek prime ministers leading up to Alexis Tsipras reflected a careful balance between national interests, regional security, and international alliances. This balance was shaped by Greece's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, the Balkans, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Konstantinos Karamanlis, during his tenure as the leader of New Democracy from 1974 to 1980, prioritized Greece’s integration into the European community, culminating in its accession to the EEC in 1981. Karamanlis’ foreign policy aimed at ensuring Greece's political stability and economic modernization through European alignment, particularly with Western European nations. He viewed EEC membership as a means of securing long-term economic prosperity and solidifying Greece’s position within the broader Western alliance (Ioakimidis, 1999).

Andreas Papandreou, who served as prime minister under PASOK from 1981 to 1989 and again from 1993 to 1996, adopted a more populist approach to foreign policy. His administration combined strong nationalist rhetoric with pragmatic diplomacy. Despite his frequent criticisms of NATO and the EEC, Papandreou maintained Greece's memberships in both organizations, recognizing their importance for Greece's strategic security and economic interests. However, his foreign policy was marked by tensions with Turkey over the Aegean Sea and Cyprus, as well as the ongoing Macedonian naming dispute (Lyrintzis, 1987; Tsakatika, 2012).

Constantine Mitsotakis, prime minister from 1990 to 1993 under New Democracy, pursued a more pro-Western foreign policy, seeking to strengthen Greece's relations with its NATO allies and improve its standing within the EU. Mitsotakis focused on managing the escalating conflict with FYROM over its name, a highly sensitive issue domestically, and worked to stabilize relations with Turkey, although his efforts faced significant opposition (Kofos, 1999).

Costas Simitis, who led PASOK from 1996 to 2004, is often credited with modernizing Greece's economy and securing its entry into the Eurozone. His foreign policy emphasized regional cooperation, especially in the Balkans, and a policy of rapprochement with Turkey. Simitis' tenure was marked by the 1999 Helsinki Agreement, which allowed for Turkey's EU candidacy, a significant step in Greek-Turkish relations (Papadimitriou, 2008; Featherstone, 2015). Simitis also sought to enhance Greece's role as a regional actor by promoting stability in Southeast Europe through multilateral diplomacy.

Kostas Karamanlis, the nephew of Konstantinos Karamanlis, served as prime minister from 2004 to 2009 under New Democracy. His government continued to emphasize Greece's EU membership while navigating the global financial crisis. Karamanlis also worked to strengthen Greece's energy diplomacy, notably through agreements with Russia on pipeline projects that aimed to position Greece as an energy hub in the Eastern Mediterranean (Triantaphyllou, 2005).

George Papandreou, son of Andreas Papandreou, leader of PASOK from 2009 to 2011, took office at the height of the financial crisis. His administration was forced to shift its foreign policy focus towards securing international financial assistance, primarily from the EU and the IMF. Papandreou's tenure was dominated by the imposition of austerity measures, which severely constrained Greece's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy (Chryssogelos, 2015; Tsakatika, 2012). The resulting economic and political crisis caused widespread disillusionment and weakened Greece's position within the EU.

Antonis Samaras, who served as prime minister from 2012 to 2015 under New Democracy, inherited a Greece deeply embroiled in economic crisis. His foreign policy was dominated by efforts to restore Greece's credibility within the EU and secure continued financial support for the country's bailout program. Samaras adopted a pro-EU stance, aligning his government's policies with the austerity measures demanded by international lenders. Domestically, his administration faced strong opposition from both the left and the far right. In foreign policy, Samaras worked to maintain Greece's strategic alliances within NATO and the EU while managing the fallout from the Eurozone crisis (Featherstone, 2015). His tenure, much like his predecessors during the financial crisis, was constrained by economic challenges, leaving limited room for significant foreign policy initiatives beyond economic stabilization and bailout negotiations.

This historical context provides the necessary background for understanding the foreign policy challenges faced by Alexis Tsipras. The tensions between national sovereignty, populism, and external economic dependency that characterized previous administrations would play a crucial role in shaping Tsipras' diplomatic strategies and his approach to international alliances.

2.3 Historical Background of U.S. Foreign Policy Prior to the Post-Cold War Era

The trajectory of U.S. foreign policy prior to the post-Cold War era reflects a significant evolution from isolationism to an assertive global presence. Early American foreign policy was largely shaped by

isolationist principles, which sought to avoid entanglement in European conflicts. Central to this approach was the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, which declared that European powers should refrain from interfering in the Western Hemisphere. This doctrine epitomized the United States' intent to remain disengaged from European affairs while simultaneously asserting its influence over the Americas (Smith, 1994). The Spanish-American War of 1898 marked a pivotal shift in American foreign policy. The conflict, driven by both strategic and economic motivations, led to American intervention in the Caribbean and the Pacific. This period witnessed the U.S. adopting an imperialistic stance, with the acquisition of territories such as Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. Theodore Roosevelt's "Big Stick" diplomacy, which advocated for a robust military presence to support American interests abroad, further exemplified this shift toward a more interventionist policy (Kissinger, 1994). The impact of the two World Wars in the first half of the 20th century was profound, reshaping U.S. foreign policy significantly. Following World War I, the U.S. initially returned to isolationism, albeit with continued economic and political influence on the global stage. However, the outbreak of World War II heralded a dramatic shift as the U.S. emerged as a global superpower. This transition was characterized by active participation in international affairs and the establishment of a leadership role in the post-war order (Gaddis, 2005).

The Cold War period, commencing after World War II, dominated the latter half of the 20th century and was marked by a strategic focus on containing Soviet influence and promoting democratic values worldwide. The U.S. engaged in a range of diplomatic, economic, and military strategies aimed at countering Soviet expansionism and maintaining global stability (Kennan, 1947). This era was defined by significant geopolitical and ideological confrontations, including the Korean and Vietnam Wars, which were emblematic of the broader struggle between capitalist and communist ideologies (Herring, 2008). The end of the Cold War in 1991 resulted in a notable power vacuum in international relations, as the Soviet Union's collapse redefined the global order. The dissolution of the Soviet Union left the U.S. as the predominant global power, initiating a unipolar world where American influence was paramount. This new era shifted the focus of U.S. foreign policy towards addressing emerging global issues such as

economic multilateralism and regional conflicts, setting the stage for the complex international dynamics that would follow (Fukuyama, 1992; Ikenberry, 2001).

2.3.1 Historical Overview of Populism in the United States

Populism in the United States has manifested through various movements and leaders, consistently surfacing during periods of significant economic or political upheaval. Its trajectory reflects a dynamic political tradition that critiques the establishment and seeks to address perceived economic and social injustices.

In the late 19th century, the rise of the People's Party, commonly known as the Populist Party, embodied early American populism. Formed in response to the economic struggles of farmers and laborers, the Populist Party advocated for agrarian interests, direct democracy, and systemic reform aimed at alleviating economic inequalities and political corruption (Hofstadter, 1955). Its platform, which included calls for the direct election of senators, government control of monopolies, and the regulation of railroads, represented a direct challenge to the established political elite. The populist critique during this period was deeply embedded in the context of rapid industrialization, which had marginalized rural and working-class Americans, creating fertile ground for anti-establishment sentiment (Goodwyn, 1976). The Populist Party's influence, while short-lived, left a lasting impact on U.S. political discourse, as many of its ideas were later adopted by the progressive movement of the early 20th century.

The 20th century witnessed the resurgence of populist rhetoric, albeit in different forms. Ross Perot's 1992 presidential campaign is a prominent example of contemporary populism, marked by his focus on fiscal responsibility, opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and critiques of government inefficiency (Perot, 1996). Perot's appeal to middle-class voters, particularly those disillusioned with the two-party system, highlighted a growing dissatisfaction with the political status quo. His emphasis on government reform, including the reduction of national debt and fiscal

mismanagement, resonated with a broad swath of the electorate, underscoring the enduring relevance of populist critiques of economic policy.

In the late 2000s, the Tea Party movement emerged as another significant populist force, catalyzed by the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent government response, including the bailout of financial institutions and rising national debt (Skocpol & Williamson, 2011). The Tea Party's platform focused on reduced government spending, lower taxes, and a strict interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, presenting a populist backlash against what its supporters perceived as excessive government intervention. The movement's critique of economic policies, alongside its opposition to federal healthcare reforms, demonstrated how populism can be both a grassroots reaction to economic crises and a political force capable of reshaping national policy debates.

2.3.2 Socio-Political Conditions Leading to Populism

The early 21st century has been particularly fertile for the resurgence of populism in the United States, driven by several socio-political and economic factors. The 2008 financial crisis, in particular, played a pivotal role in reigniting populist sentiment. The collapse of major financial institutions and the resulting economic downturn exposed deep-rooted inequalities and eroded public trust in both financial and political elites (Stiglitz, 2012). The uneven recovery from the crisis, which disproportionately benefited the wealthiest Americans, exacerbated public grievances, creating an environment in which populist leaders could effectively mobilize discontent.

Moreover, the increasing polarization of American politics has provided further fuel for populist movements. Scholars such as Inglehart and Norris (2016) have argued that political polarization, combined with anxieties over rapid demographic and economic changes, has contributed to a growing sense of alienation among segments of the population. Populist rhetoric, which often targets these fears, has capitalized on concerns related to immigration, trade, and national sovereignty (Mudde & Kaltwasser,

2017). The rise of protectionist trade policies and stricter immigration controls, frequently advocated by populist leaders, reflects a broader critique of economic liberalization and international cooperation, which some segments of the population view as undermining national interests.

The socio-political conditions that fostered the resurgence of populism in the 21st century also reflect broader global trends. While populist movements in the U.S. have their unique historical and cultural characteristics, they are part of a wider global pattern in which economic insecurity, political polarization, and distrust in elites have contributed to the rise of populist leaders across various countries (Rodrik, 2018). In the U.S., these conditions have manifested in a heightened critique of global engagement and a shift toward a more inward-looking political agenda.

2.3.3 Influence of Populism on U.S. Foreign Policy

Throughout its history, populism has played a significant role in shaping U.S. foreign policy by challenging the political establishment and redirecting national priorities. The People's Party of the late 19th century, though primarily concerned with domestic issues, advocated for systemic reforms that also had implications for U.S. engagement in the global economy. The party's opposition to monopolies and support for economic equity laid the groundwork for future critiques of free-market policies, which have resurfaced in contemporary populist movements (Hofstadter, 1955).

In more recent history, the populist influence on foreign policy can be seen in the campaigns of figures like Ross Perot, whose opposition to NAFTA was rooted in concerns over the impact of trade agreements on American workers. Perot's campaign brought the issue of trade policy to the forefront of national discourse, influencing the broader debate on the role of free trade in U.S. foreign policy (Perot, 1996). Similarly, the Tea Party movement, with its emphasis on fiscal conservatism, indirectly impacted foreign policy by promoting a more restrained approach to government spending, including military expenditures and foreign aid (Skocpol & Williamson, 2011).

Populism's critique of international engagement has been particularly potent in shaping debates on trade and immigration. The populist rhetoric of protecting national sovereignty and prioritizing domestic interests has contributed to a more protectionist and isolationist orientation in U.S. foreign policy. This shift has been particularly pronounced in the 21st century, as economic multilateralism and immigration have become central issues in political campaigns (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

2.3.4 Overview of U.S. Presidential Foreign Policies Before Trump

The evolution of U.S. foreign policy leading up to the Trump administration reflects a diverse range of strategies and priorities across different presidencies, each shaping the domains of economics/trade, diplomacy, and immigration.

Ronald Reagan's foreign policy was shaped by a staunch anti-communist ideology, positioning military power as a central instrument of U.S. diplomacy. His administration's aggressive stance toward the Soviet Union, epitomized by the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), was balanced by strategic arms control agreements, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty (Gaddis, 2005). Reagan's policies also emphasized free trade, as seen in efforts to liberalize global markets through initiatives like the Trade and Tariff Act of 1984 (Bergsten, 1992). Regarding immigration, his administration reflected a complex balance of enforcement and legalization, exemplified by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which provided a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants while tightening border controls (Martin, 2009). This approach highlighted the tension between economic needs and political pressures surrounding immigration.

Following Reagan, Bill Clinton's administration marked a significant shift towards multilateralism, underscored by the implementation of NAFTA in 1994. Clinton's foreign policy prioritized economic integration and free trade, reflecting a broader belief in the benefits of global interdependence (Woods, 2007). This approach was not without controversy, as critics argued that such policies contributed to job

losses in specific sectors of the U.S. economy. Clinton's foreign policy also included significant diplomatic efforts, notably in the Balkans, where U.S. intervention sought to promote stability and peace through NATO (Walt, 2005). Clinton's administration further advanced immigration policy through the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which enhanced border security and established stricter penalties for illegal immigration (Chiswick, 1999).

George W. Bush's presidency introduced a marked shift in U.S. foreign policy following the events of September 11, 2001. His administration's foreign policy, rooted in the doctrine of preemption, sought to combat terrorism through military intervention, notably in Afghanistan and Iraq (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003). This approach emphasized a unilateralist stance, with the administration often sidelining traditional diplomatic avenues. Economically, Bush pushed for free trade agreements, notably the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which aimed to deepen trade ties with Central American nations (Meyer, 2006). Immigration policy during this period was characterized by heightened security measures, with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and increased enforcement of immigration laws, reflecting the post-9/11 national security priorities (Capps et al., 2005).

Obama, in contrast to his predecessor, pursued a foreign policy that emphasized multilateral diplomacy and sought to restore America's reputation on the global stage. One of the key diplomatic successes of his administration was the Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Negotiated with the P5+1 nations (the U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China, and Germany), the deal aimed to limit Iran's nuclear capabilities in exchange for sanctions relief, representing a major step towards non-proliferation and a shift away from unilateral military action (Pillar, 2016; Rhodes, 2018). Additionally, Obama took the historic step of reestablishing diplomatic relations with Cuba after decades of isolation, marking a significant change in U.S. policy towards the island nation. This rapprochement included the reopening of embassies in Havana and Washington, along with a series of negotiations aimed at easing travel restrictions and improving economic relations (LeoGrande & Kornbluh, 2014). By promoting dialogue over confrontation, Obama sought to recalibrate U.S. foreign policy towards a more

cooperative and less interventionist stance on the international stage. Another key example of this was the 2015 Paris Agreement, which the United States, under Obama, formally joined alongside China in 2016. This agreement, aimed at combating climate change, was the most ambitious climate accord in history, and U.S.-China cooperation played a central role in its formation and success (Obama White House, 2016). Additionally, Obama's foreign policy aimed to reorient the U.S. towards the Asia-Pacific region, underscoring the strategic importance of this region as part of his administration's "Pivot to Asia" initiative (Clinton, 2011). Economically, Obama sought to bolster free trade through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which, despite facing significant domestic opposition, was intended to deepen economic ties within the Asia-Pacific (Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, 2016). Immigration reforms under Obama included the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), an executive action designed to provide temporary relief for undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children (López, 2017). These actions reflect Obama's broader foreign policy approach, which combined diplomatic engagement, trade liberalization, and strategic shifts in focus.

Throughout these presidencies, foreign policy decisions were profoundly shaped by domestic political contexts and public sentiment, including the rise of populist critiques of free trade, immigration, and international engagement. This historical overview sets the stage for understanding the transitions in U.S. foreign policy leading up to and during Trump's presidency, which would catalyze a notable departure from previous strategies. The historical context of U.S. foreign policy prior to the post-Cold War era and the evolution of populism in American politics are crucial to understanding the shifts in foreign policy that have occurred in recent decades. This overview illustrates the complex interplay between domestic and international dynamics that have shaped American foreign policy, particularly in the realms of economics/trade, diplomacy, and immigration. The emergence of populism as a political force has consistently challenged the status quo, advocating for a reevaluation of U.S. engagement on the global stage. As such, this historical backdrop provides essential context for examining the significant changes

that characterized U.S. foreign policy during the Trump administration, which will be analyzed in subsequent empirical chapters

2.4 Conclusion

2.4.1 Summary of Key Findings

The historical comparative analysis of Greece and the United States highlights significant insights into the evolution of foreign policy approaches in both countries. In Greece, the transition from isolationism to active involvement in European integration shaped a foreign policy characterized by a balancing act between national sovereignty and European obligations. While the Third Hellenic Republic committed to EU alignment, populist rhetoric often emphasized the need for economic autonomy and national pride (Pelagidis, 2019; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014).

In the United States, the post-Cold War period presented a contrasting dynamic, where U.S. leaders navigated the complexities of global hegemony and domestic pressures. The emphasis on nationalism and critique of international organizations underscored a desire to recalibrate America's role on the world stage while addressing pressing domestic concerns (Moffitt, 2015; Kagan, 2018). Both Greece and the U.S. displayed tendencies to challenge the prevailing norms of international relations, albeit through lenses shaped by their unique historical and geopolitical contexts.

2.4.2 Implications for Understanding Foreign Policy Dynamics

The historical contexts of Greece and the U.S. offer valuable insights into how domestic political considerations intersect with international strategies. The emphasis on national interests and skepticism toward international frameworks illustrates a broader trend where foreign policy is increasingly influenced by domestic pressures and nationalist sentiments. This understanding is crucial for analyzing

how future foreign policy decisions might be shaped by similar dynamics, especially in an era marked by rising populism and shifting global power structures.

2.4.3 Historical Comparative Analysis of Populist leadership

The historical comparative analysis of foreign policy approaches in Greece and the United States, prior to the leadership of Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump, reveals the shifting dynamics that set the stage for the populist leadership that followed. In Greece, the administrations of George Papandreou and Antonis Samaras navigated the tumultuous waters of the financial crisis, which significantly impacted their foreign policy strategies. Papandreou initially aimed to diversify Greece's diplomatic engagements but was ultimately constrained by the economic realities that demanded immediate attention from traditional Western partners. Samaras, on the other hand, continued the course of seeking support from the EU and the IMF, while also attempting to balance Greece's interests with the obligations of EU membership.

In the United States, the foreign policy landscape was shaped by the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Bush's administration was marked by the global War on Terror, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and a unilateral approach to international relations that often strained alliances. Obama, in contrast, sought to restore America's standing in the world through multilateral diplomacy, engaging in nuclear negotiations with Iran, reestablishing relations with Cuba, and reaffirming commitments to international agreements such as the Paris Climate Accord.

This historical context is crucial for understanding the foreign policy trajectories that Tsipras and Trump inherited. It highlights the systemic constraints and opportunities that their predecessors faced, illustrating how traditional leaders primarily managed routine strategic evolution within established global norms. The analysis of these predecessors provides the necessary comparative baseline to evaluate how populist leadership later utilized identical nodal signifiers—such as sovereignty and national dignity—to filter these same systemic pressures through a distinct ideological roadmap. This sets the stage for measuring

the extent to which Tsipras and Trump acted as radical agents of change or as unconventional practitioners of statesmanship.

2.4.4 Link to Subsequent Chapters

The socio-political conditions that preceded the rise of populist leadership in Greece and the United States were marked by a confluence of economic, social, and political factors that created a fertile ground for the ascendance of populist leaders. In Greece, the financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath led to widespread disillusionment with the established political parties, which were seen as ineffective in addressing the economic hardships faced by the Greek people. The austerity measures imposed by international lenders further exacerbated public discontent, fueling a sense of national humiliation and a desire for a political alternative that promised to restore national pride and economic sovereignty.

In the United States, the economic downturn of 2008, coupled with the slow recovery that followed, contributed to a growing sense of economic insecurity among the middle and working classes. The political establishment was increasingly viewed as out of touch with the concerns of ordinary Americans, leading to a deep-seated frustration with the status quo. The issue of immigration, particularly in the context of security concerns and economic competition, became a focal point for those seeking a change in leadership.

These conditions, in both Greece and the United States, laid the groundwork for the electoral success of populist leaders like Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump. Their campaigns tapped into the prevailing sentiments of discontent and offered a narrative of change that resonated with voters who felt marginalized by the existing political system. The populist appeal, which emphasized national sovereignty, economic protectionism, and a critique of multilateralism, found a receptive audience in societies that were experiencing profound economic and social transformations. Having established the historical status quo, the following chapter provides the theoretical framework necessary to analyze how

the personalization of diplomacy (leaderisation) and the strategy of permanent destabilization allowed these populist leaders to navigate, and at times disrupt, the historical continuities identified here.

Chapter 3: Framework of Analysis: Operationalizing the Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

Understanding how populist leadership influences foreign policy requires a structured theoretical framework that captures both the systemic and domestic drivers of state behavior. This chapter lays out the analytical foundations for the thesis by integrating insights from neoclassical realism and foreign policy analysis. These frameworks provide the conceptual tools needed to investigate the research question: *To what extent does populist leadership shape diplomatic strategies, alliances, and global engagements in foreign policy?*

At the core of this analysis is neoclassical realism, which offers a two-level framework for foreign policy explanation. It asserts that while the international structure constrains and enables state behavior, domestic political variables, including leader beliefs, institutional capacity, societal interests, and elite cohesion, mediate how states respond to systemic pressures (Rose, 1998; Schweller, 2006; Ripsman et al., 2009). This approach is especially suited to studying populist leadership, as populist leaders often embody strong personalistic authority and operate in contexts where institutional constraints are weakened, making their domestic preferences especially influential in foreign policy formulation. To complement neoclassical realism's explanatory power, this chapter also draws on Hermann's (1990) typology of foreign policy change. Hermann's framework provides a descriptive typology for measuring the degree and nature of foreign policy change. While not a theory in itself, Hermann's categories: adjustment, program, goal/problem, and international orientation change, offer a diagnostic tool to assess whether populist leadership leads to minor tactical adjustments or fundamental strategic shifts in foreign policy as seen in **Figure 1.** The typology serves to operationalize foreign policy change within the broader explanatory model of neoclassical realism by offering observable manifestations of domestic-level filtering processes.

Figure 1

Type of Change	Definition
Adjustment Change	Minor variation in effort or scope within existing policies or alliances.
Program Change	Introduction of new instruments (e.g., sanctions, summits) to meet old goals.
Problem/Goal Change	Replacement or redefinition of core foreign policy goals or issue priorities.
International Orientation Change	A fundamental shift in a state's global strategy, including alliance patterns and multilateral commitments.

The empirical case studies, Greece under Alexis Tsipras and the United States under Donald Trump, serve as strategic sites for applying this dual framework. These cases, while situated in vastly different structural and institutional contexts, share the presence of electorally successful populist leaders whose foreign policy actions diverged from the traditional patterns of their respective countries. Neoclassical realism enables an inquiry into how both systemic constraints (such as great power status or economic dependence) and domestic populist imperatives (such as appeals to "the people" and hostility to elites or international institutions) interact to produce shifts in foreign policy. Hermann's framework will then allow us to categorize and measure the extent of those shifts across three domains: diplomatic strategy, alliance structure, and global engagements (especially in economic and immigration policy).

A working assumption in this thesis is that populist leadership, defined by its anti-elitist discourse, centralization of executive power, and emphasis on national sovereignty, reshapes the traditional foreign policy calculus of states. Populist leaders are more likely to: frame foreign policy through a moral dichotomy of the "pure people" vs. "corrupt elites," including international actors (Mudde, 2004; Laclau, 2005), challenge existing multilateral institutions and alliances, preferring bilateral or transactional arrangements (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017), and pursue short-term foreign policy gains aimed at bolstering domestic legitimacy rather than consistent strategic alignment (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). These tendencies are shaped and constrained by structural realities, such as relative power and alliance

commitments, and filtered through domestic political institutions, public opinion, and leadership capacity. Neoclassical realism captures this multi-level interaction, while Hermann's model provides the categories for observable foreign policy outcomes.

This chapter proceeds by reviewing the relevant literature on neoclassical realism, foreign policy change, and populist leadership (Section 3.2), then articulates the specific theoretical propositions guiding this study (Section 3.3). The remaining methodological elements (such as case selection and operationalization of variables) will be relocated to the methodology chapter to maintain conceptual focus here.

3.2 Theoretical Foundations

This thesis draws on **neoclassical realism** as its core theoretical framework to examine how populist leadership influences foreign policy behavior. Neoclassical realism offers a compelling explanatory model for analyzing variation in foreign policy outcomes by accounting for both international structural pressures and domestic-level intervening variables (Rose, 1998; Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2009). In contrast to classical realism, which privileges systemic anarchy and the balance of power (Waltz, 1979), neoclassical realism emphasizes how domestic factors, such as elite cohesion, institutional capacity, public opinion, and leader perceptions, filter and mediate a state's response to systemic constraints.

While classical realism focuses on systemic anarchy, neoclassical realism (NCR) is uniquely suited to this study because it treats domestic variables, such as leader beliefs and institutional capacity, as filters for systemic pressures. In the context of populist leadership, these filters are characterized by rhetorical volatility and a centralization of executive authority, which can lead to divergent foreign policy responses even when states face identical structural constraints.

To assess the *observable manifestations* of these tendencies, this thesis incorporates Hermann's (1990) typology of foreign policy change as an operational tool. While Hermann's framework is not a theory of foreign policy behavior, it offers a useful categorization of the *degree and type* of change resulting from a given leadership or contextual shift. These include: adjustment Change: Tactical shifts in intensity or scope within existing foreign policy instruments; program Change: Adoption of new tools or instruments while maintaining existing goals; problem/Goal Change: Redefinition of the objectives or issues guiding foreign policy; international Orientation Change: A fundamental rethinking of a state's global positioning, strategy, or alliance structure.

Hermann's framework serves a diagnostic role within the neoclassical realist model by helping to classify the nature of observed foreign policy behavior. For instance, if a populist leader in a minor power like Greece initiates overtures to China and Russia, we can assess whether this behavior represents a mere adjustment (e.g., tactical diversification) or an orientation shift (e.g., a fundamental redefinition of geopolitical alignment). The typology thus supports the empirical application of the thesis's theoretical propositions by offering criteria to measure degrees of foreign policy change.

Additionally, literature on diplomatic modality, multilateral, bilateral, and unilateral diplomacy, further supports this analysis. Populist leaders are widely observed to prefer bilateralism or unilateralism over multilateralism, a preference grounded in both ideational and pragmatic factors. Bilateral engagements allow populist leaders to exert personal influence, avoid compromise, and symbolically assert sovereignty (Keohane, 1984; Nye, 1990). Unilateralism, often pursued in the form of treaty withdrawals, border fortifications, or trade tariffs, serves to underscore the leader's independence from international norms. However, populist actors may also selectively engage with multilateral organizations to legitimize domestic narratives or extract concessions, indicating that populist foreign policy is not purely isolationist but strategically opportunistic (Plagemann & Destradi, 2019; Hawkins et al., 2019).

Neoclassical realism provides the causal logic for explaining foreign policy variation under populist leadership, while Hermann's typology enables the systematic categorization of foreign policy change. Taken together, these frameworks support a structured inquiry into how populist leaders operate within, and respond to, the constraints and opportunities of the international system, filtered through domestic institutions and ideological imperatives.

The next section (3.3) articulates the specific theoretical propositions that emerge from this dual framework and defines the dependent and independent variables guiding the thesis's empirical analysis.

3.3 Focus on Foreign Policy Dimensions: Economics, Diplomacy, and Immigration

This thesis concentrates on three rigorous and salient dimensions of foreign policy: economics, diplomacy, and immigration. These dimensions are not only critical for understanding the foreign policy behavior of populist governments but also constitute established areas of research that offer a robust framework for evaluating changes in international engagement. Each of these dimensions represents a key pillar of state interaction within the global order and has been subject to rigorous academic scrutiny. This section elaborates on the selection of these dimensions, providing academic support for their relevance, salience, and rigor as areas of foreign policy in the context of populist leadership.

3.31 Economic Foreign Policy

Economic foreign policy is integral to a state's ability to project influence on the global stage. It encompasses trade agreements, economic alliances, foreign direct investment, and participation in international financial institutions. For populist regimes, economic foreign policy often becomes a tool to assert national sovereignty by challenging the global economic order and, in some cases, by rejecting multilateral agreements. Populist leaders frequently criticize free trade and global capitalism, framing their opposition in terms of protecting national industries and jobs (Rodrik, 2018).

The rigor of economic foreign policy as a scholarly field is well-established, with extensive literature exploring the connections between international trade, state power, and global governance (Keohane & Nye, 1977). The salience of economic foreign policy for populist leadership lies in its centrality to national sovereignty, a key theme in populist rhetoric. For example, both the Syriza government under Alexis Tsipras and the Trump administration in the U.S. focused on economic sovereignty as a cornerstone of their foreign policy. Tsipras' outreach to China and Russia during the Greek debt crisis reflected a strategic pivot from traditional Western economic partners, while Trump's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) demonstrated his administration's rejection of multilateral trade agreements that were seen as detrimental to American workers (Baldwin, 2016). These actions underscore how economic foreign policy serves as a crucial platform for populist leaders to challenge existing economic norms and institutions.

3.3.2 Diplomatic Foreign Policy

Diplomatic foreign policy represents the means through which states manage their relationships with other actors in the international system. This dimension includes alliances, negotiations, multilateral engagements, and participation in international organizations. Populist leaders often pursue diplomacy with a nationalistic and transactional approach, emphasizing bilateral relations over multilateralism. This shift is typically driven by a desire to prioritize domestic interests over international obligations, a key feature of populist leadership (Pappas, 2019).

The salience of diplomatic foreign policy lies in its capacity to shape a state's position in the global order. For populist leaders, this often means renegotiating alliances and engaging with non-traditional partners to diversify foreign relations. Tsipras' diplomatic overtures to Russia and China during the third memorandum negotiations exemplify this strategy, while Trump's redefinition of alliances, marked by skepticism towards NATO and the European Union, illustrates how populist leadership can significantly alter traditional diplomatic engagements (Rachman, 2018).

Diplomatic foreign policy is also supported by a robust body of scholarly work, particularly in the field of international relations theory, where the importance of diplomacy as a tool for managing power, building alliances, and fostering global stability is well-documented (Morgenthau, 1948; Nye, 2004). The role of diplomacy is particularly critical in the context of populism, as it offers a means for populist leaders to operationalize their anti-elite and nationalistic rhetoric by reconfiguring international alliances in ways that reflect their nationalist agendas.

3.3.3 Immigration Foreign Policy

Immigration is a core issue for populist governments, often becoming the focal point of their efforts to "take back control" of national borders. Immigration foreign policy involves not only border control and refugee management but also broader questions about citizenship, national identity, and the integration of migrants. Populist leaders frequently frame immigration as a threat to national security, cultural integrity, and economic stability, making it a critical area of foreign policy for mobilizing domestic political support (Wodak, 2015).

The salience of immigration foreign policy in populist leadership is particularly evident in the way leaders exploit public fears about migration to justify restrictive policies. For instance, Trump's "Muslim ban" and his focus on building a border wall with Mexico were central to his populist platform, aiming to protect American citizens from perceived external threats. Similarly, Tsipras' government was forced to navigate the complex dynamics of the European refugee crisis, which saw thousands of refugees entering Greece, prompting the establishment of new governmental structures to manage the crisis (Triandafyllidou, 2018). Although Tsipras' left-wing populism did not adopt an overtly anti-immigrant stance, his government still faced pressures to secure Greece’s borders and manage migration in a way that balanced humanitarian concerns with domestic political realities. Immigration foreign policy is a deeply researched area, with scholars examining the intersection of migration, security, and international relations (Betts, 2011). The policy choices made in this domain have far-reaching implications not only for the domestic population

but also for international relations, particularly in cases where migration flows are linked to regional instability, conflict, or economic disparity. This makes immigration a salient and highly politicized aspect of foreign policy, especially in populist regimes where identity politics play a significant role in shaping governance (Mudde, 2017).

Economics, diplomacy, and immigration represent foreign policy arenas that are not only deeply researched and theoretically grounded but are also especially responsive to the pressures and logics of populist leadership. Their selection ensures that the analysis captures both the structural and ideational transformations that populist leaders attempt to enact on the international stage. Each dimension provides a critical window into how populist ideology translates into action, making them ideal fields for observing shifts in diplomatic strategies, realignment of alliances, and changes in global engagement.

3.4 Populism and Statesmanship: A Reframing of Strategic Leadership in Foreign Policy

While populist leadership is often associated with disruption, anti-elite rhetoric, and norm-breaking behavior, it does not preclude the exercise of strategic leadership in the international arena. This section introduces the concept of statesmanship as a useful analytical lens to evaluate the foreign policy conduct of populist leaders. The aim is not to rehabilitate populist foreign policy as conventionally "rational" or norm-abiding, but rather to explore the extent to which populist leaders still operate within the logic of strategic leadership, albeit often in unconventional forms.

Statesmanship, broadly defined, refers to the exercise of political leadership that balances pragmatism, long-term national interest, and the management of complex diplomatic environments (Clarke and White, 2011; Malpas and Taylor, 2020). Traditionally, statesmanship has been associated with qualities such as prudence, coalition-building, and engagement in multilateral diplomacy. However, populist leaders often operate in tension with these norms, prioritizing direct electoral mandates and claiming to speak on behalf

of the “people” against established elites (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). This raises an important question: can populist leaders still engage in statesmanship, and if so, what form does it take?

Statesmanship under populism is most visible when a leader makes a voluntary strategic choice that contradicts their own nationalist mandate to ensure regional stability. The Prespes Agreement serves as a critical test of this dynamic because it required Tsipras to break a thirty-year 'nationalist orthodoxy' and survive extreme domestic polarization and coalition ruptures, proving that populist actors can prioritize systemic containment over domestic rewards.

Empirical evidence suggests that populist leaders often adopt a form of strategic pragmatism when confronting high-stakes foreign policy decisions. Alexis Tsipras, for instance, while initially campaigning on a radically anti-austerity and anti-EU platform, ultimately negotiated Greece’s third bailout package, engaging with both EU institutions and non-traditional partners like China and Russia. This suggests a willingness to adapt rhetoric to geopolitical realities, exhibiting a recalibrated form of diplomatic pragmatism (Mavrozacharakis, 2020; Ladi and Tsarouhas, 2020). Similarly, Donald Trump’s “America First” doctrine featured rhetorical antagonism toward multilateral institutions, yet his administration continued to renegotiate key alliances and economic agreements in ways that reflected calculated strategic interests (Dueck, 2021; Kitchen and Planke, 2022).

This thesis conceptualizes statesmanship under populist leadership not as a rejection of strategic leadership but as its reconfiguration. Populist leaders may eschew traditional diplomatic decorum, but they nonetheless engage in behaviors aimed at reconfiguring alliances, leveraging bilateral relations, and maximizing national advantage, especially when constrained by international institutions or domestic political pressures. In this sense, statesmanship becomes a mediating mechanism between populist leadership and foreign policy outcomes.

This reframing contributes to the theoretical propositions of this study by positing that: populist leaders are not uniformly disruptive in foreign policy; their strategic behavior may align with long-standing national interests when electoral legitimacy or international leverage is at stake; statesmanship, when filtered through populist logic, is often characterized by unilateral or transactional diplomacy, yet it retains elements of strategic adaptation to the international order.

These propositions are operationalized in the empirical chapters, which trace whether and how the foreign policy behaviors of Tsipras and Trump reflect acts of pragmatic statesmanship within the populist paradigm. Understanding the intersection between populism and statesmanship is thus essential to capturing the nuances of foreign policy change under populist rule.

To determine the distinctiveness of populist strategy, this framework distinguishes between material capacity (power) and ideological roadmap (populism). Critics often argue that a leader's unilateralism is merely a function of their state's size; however, this study posits that power defines the range of possibilities, while populist ideology dictates the specific choice of action. By comparing Trump to non-populist predecessors who possessed the same hegemonic power but chose internationalism, we can isolate the effects of 'leaderisation' and 'permanent destabilization' as unique populist modalities.

3.5 Theoretical Propositions and Analytical Leverage

This section formalizes the theoretical propositions (TPs) that guide the empirical analysis of this thesis. The following theoretical propositions are derived from the synthesis of Neoclassical Realism and populism studies:

TP1: Propensity for Change. Derived from Mudde's (2004) conceptualization of populism as an 'ideology of rupture,' this proposition posits that populist leaders are driven by domestic mandates to pursue visible

'Program' or 'Orientation' changes (per Hermann, 1990) to demonstrate responsiveness to 'the people' against the 'elite' status quo.

TP2: Modal Preference. Derived from the populist emphasis on sovereignty (Moffitt, 2016). It predicts a rejection of multilateral constraints in favor of bilateral or unilateral actions, which allow leaders to frame diplomatic outcomes as direct national victories.

TP3: Structural Mediation. Rooted in core NCR tenets (Rose, 1998), this proposition recognizes that state power acts as a contextual mediator. While populist ideology dictates the *choice* of action, material systemic constraints and institutional robustness ultimately determine the depth and durability of policy change.

Populist leadership, with its emphasis on the centralization of executive power, the rejection of institutional constraints, and a discourse rooted in national sovereignty and anti-elitism, constitutes a particularly salient domestic variable that can intensify or redirect foreign policy shifts.

Based on the synthesis of literature in this chapter and the integration of Hermann's typology of foreign policy change with the tenets of neoclassical realism, three interrelated propositions guide this study. The first proposition concerns the likelihood and nature of foreign policy change under populist leadership. Populist leaders, propelled by electoral mandates to disrupt the status quo, are likely to initiate foreign policy change that goes beyond minor adjustments. As Hermann (1990) suggests, foreign policy change can occur along a continuum from adjustment and programmatic reform to shifts in international orientation. Populist leadership increases the propensity for change at the deeper levels of this continuum, particularly program and orientation change, because populist leaders are often unencumbered by traditional institutional norms and present themselves as agents of rupture (Mudde, 2004; Pappas, 2019). Their tendency to concentrate power in the executive and to frame existing policy frameworks as elite-

imposed or externally dictated creates political incentives to pursue visible and symbolic acts of change, particularly in the international arena (Judis, 2016).

The second proposition centers on the preferred modalities of diplomatic engagement. Populist leaders, who frequently portray international institutions as undemocratic, technocratic, or detrimental to national interests, tend to eschew multilateral diplomacy in favor of bilateralism or, in some cases, unilateralism (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2017). This orientation stems from the populist emphasis on reasserting national sovereignty, which multilateral frameworks are often seen to undermine (Rachman, 2018). Bilateral diplomacy offers populist governments greater control over the terms of engagement and allows leaders to claim direct accountability for perceived diplomatic successes. Similarly, unilateral actions may be framed as bold expressions of national will, unconstrained by external obligations or elite consensus (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). These preferences reflect not only strategic considerations, but also ideological commitments embedded in populist rhetoric and leadership style.

The third proposition focuses on foreign policy content, that is, the specific goals and narratives pursued in economic, diplomatic, and immigration domains. Populist leaders are likely to reconfigure foreign policy objectives in line with nationalist and anti-multilateralist discourses, often elevating themes such as economic protectionism, national sovereignty, and the securitization of migration (Rodrik, 2018; Wodak, 2015; Buzan et al., 1998). These orientations not only shape the substance of foreign policy but also influence the way such policies are justified domestically. In this sense, foreign policy becomes an extension of the populist logic of friend vs. enemy, with international elites, supranational institutions, or migrant populations framed as adversaries to the “authentic” people (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

These propositions collectively structure the thesis’ analytical lens and provide the foundation for the comparative analysis that follows. While the operational definitions and measurements of the dependent

and independent variables are provided in the methodology chapter, it is important here to restate their conceptual outlines. The dependent variable in this study is foreign policy change across three domains, economic, diplomatic, and immigration, manifested in observable shifts in strategies, alliances, and global engagements. The independent variable is populist leadership, conceptualized as a constellation of leadership practices, ideologies, and institutional dynamics that prioritize national sovereignty, executive centralization, anti-elitism, and direct political communication.

The theoretical framework facilitates analytical clarity. **Figure 2** below outlines the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, including the mechanisms through which populist leadership is expected to shape foreign policy outcomes. A more detailed operationalization of these variables and their indicators is presented in Chapter 4.

Figure 2

Independent Variable	**Theoretical Mechanism**	**Expected Impact on Dependent Variable**	**Foreign Policy Domain Affected**
Populist leadership (anti-elite discourse, centralized leadership, emphasis on national sovereignty)	Increased autonomy of executive, challenge to institutional norms, legitimacy through crisis narrative	Greater likelihood of program and international orientation change	All domains (economic, diplomatic, immigration)
Populist rhetoric of sovereignty and anti-multilateralism	Rejection of multilateral constraints, preference for direct or unilateral negotiation	Shift toward bilateralism or unilateralism	Diplomatic

Nationalist framing and politicization of foreign issues	Securitization of migration, economic protectionism, elite blame	Reframing of foreign policy priorities and objectives	Economic, Immigration

This theoretical scaffolding enables a comparative and multi-dimensional analysis of how populist leaders reshape foreign policy in practice. It provides the analytical leverage necessary to interpret the empirical developments explored in the case studies of Greece under Alexis Tsipras and the United States under Donald Trump, which are analyzed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This research is designed as a qualitative comparative study centered on the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). The primary objective is to operationalize the 'populist filter' by isolating leader agency from material state capacity. To achieve this, the study treats populist leadership as the independent variable—defined by nodal signifiers, leaderisation, and anti-elite rhetoric—and foreign policy change as the dependent variable, measured via Hermann's typology. By selecting a global hegemon and a peripheral state, the design tests whether the logic of populism remains consistent despite the 'range of strategic possibility' dictated by systemic power.

4.1.1 Overview

Following the theoretical framework established in Chapter 3, this chapter outlines the qualitative methodological approach used to test the three theoretical propositions (TP1–3). By employing a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD), the methodology treats state power not as the primary driver, but as a contextual mediator for populist agency.

As a qualitative study, this thesis is situated within an interpretivist epistemology, seeking to understand the meaning-making practices and strategic narratives employed by populist leaders (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015). This approach is well suited to investigating how populism, as both a style and mode of governance, manifests in foreign policy rhetoric and institutional behavior. The choice of qualitative methodology reflects the need for depth, contextual sensitivity, and interpretive richness in tracing causal mechanisms and discursive practices that might not be captured through quantitative techniques (George & Bennett, 2005).

The chapter begins with a discussion of research design and case selection, explaining the rationale for employing a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) and the logic behind comparing two ideologically opposed populist administrations. This is followed by an explanation of how the dependent and independent variables are operationalized, building on the theoretical foundations laid out in Chapter 3, particularly those informed by neoclassical realism and discourse-oriented analyses of populism. Subsequent sections describe the principal data collection methods used: document analysis, discourse analysis, and semi-structured interviews. These methods are deployed in tandem to enable both textual and experiential engagement with the research subject. Publicly available primary sources—such as political speeches, policy documents, and press releases—are analyzed to uncover recurring themes, ideological frames, and strategic positioning. This is complemented by interviews with elite actors and policy experts, which offer insider perspectives on the institutional dynamics, constraints, and strategic intentions behind foreign policy decisions. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret salient patterns across these multiple data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with findings triangulated for analytical depth and credibility (Flick, 2018).

This chapter also outlines the limitations of the research design, particularly in relation to access to interviewees, language constraints, and the political sensitivities surrounding elite participation in politically polarized contexts. Ethical considerations, including participant anonymity and informed consent, are also addressed to demonstrate compliance with academic research standards. Taken together, the methods presented in this chapter establish a rigorous and reflexive framework for exploring the core research question: to what extent does populist leadership shape diplomatic strategies, alliances, and global engagements in foreign policy? By situating the research within a theoretically grounded and methodologically transparent framework, the chapter lays the foundation for the empirical analysis to follow.

4.2 Methods of Data Collection

This thesis adopts a qualitative research methodology, reflecting the study's focus on interpreting the meanings, narratives, and political dynamics embedded in the foreign policy actions of populist leaders. Given the nature of the research question, which seeks to understand how populist leadership shapes foreign policy behavior, qualitative methods were selected for their ability to capture ideational and discursive elements as well as the socio-political context of decision-making. Specifically, the study draws on document analysis, discourse analysis, and a comparative case study design, which collectively allow for a nuanced exploration of the foreign policy strategies employed by Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump.

4.2.1 Document Analysis

Document analysis serves as a foundational component of the research, providing access to the formal articulation of foreign policy objectives and diplomatic strategies. The documents analyzed include official speeches, policy declarations, ministerial statements, press releases from heads of government and foreign ministries, and key multilateral communications involving either the Greek or U.S. government between 2015 and 2019. Additional sources included relevant parliamentary debates (particularly in Greece), executive orders (for the U.S.), and EU-level correspondence. These sources were accessed primarily through official government archives, institutional databases (e.g., European Commission, U.S. government portals), and media repositories.

The aim of the document analysis was to trace the substantive shifts in foreign policy, particularly in relation to alliances, multilateralism, and external engagements, and to assess how populist ideology may have shaped the framing and content of these decisions. The selected documents were analyzed for both content and tone, allowing for the identification of recurring themes, nationalist or anti-elite rhetoric, and

deviations from established policy norms (Bowen, 2009). The analysis paid particular attention to language that framed foreign policy in populist terms, emphasizing sovereignty, "the people," national dignity, or resistance to external imposition.

It should be noted that language limitations did impose certain constraints on this method. While primary U.S. sources were used in English, Greek documents were examined in both original Greek and in translated forms where necessary. Although I was working at understanding modern Greek, professional translations were consulted to ensure accuracy and mitigate potential misinterpretation, especially in the analysis of technical or legal content.

4.2.2 Discourse Analysis

To complement the documentary data, discourse analysis was employed to interpret the ideational and rhetorical dimensions of populist foreign policy. This method draws on the theoretical foundations of critical discourse analysis, which views language as a form of social action that both reflects and constitutes political realities (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993). Discourse, in this context, is not merely descriptive but performative, shaping how leaders construct meaning, assign blame, claim legitimacy, and communicate policy direction. Through a discursive lens, power is not only material but resides in the ability to fix meanings through nodal signifiers. Following Laclau, this study views populist discourse as a struggle to establish a 'chain of equivalence' that unites disparate grievances against a common 'elite' enemy. Consequently, the analysis focuses on how leaders use language to reconstruct national identity and constitute new political realities that justify the bypassing of traditional diplomatic protocols.

The corpus for discourse analysis comprised political speeches, media interviews, social media posts (particularly Twitter for Donald Trump), and campaign rhetoric from both leaders, focusing on the period when they held office (Tsipras: 2015–2019; Trump: 2017–2021). The discursive construction of foreign

threats, national identity, multilateral institutions, and sovereignty were central themes of interest. Special emphasis was placed on the linguistic strategies used to justify diplomatic realignments, economic nationalism, and immigration policies.

By analyzing metaphors, slogans, pronoun usage, emotional appeals, and recurring frames (e.g., “us vs. them,” or “betrayal by elites”), this method illuminated how populist leaders sought to legitimize their foreign policy choices to domestic audiences (Moffitt, 2016; Wodak, 2015). These discursive patterns also revealed how populism as a communicative style interacted with structural constraints in foreign policy.

4.3 Analytical Procedures: Interpreting Foreign Policy Discourse

This section outlines the analytical procedures used to examine the speeches, press releases, and policy documents related to the foreign policy strategies of Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump. The analysis draws on thematic and content analysis to interpret how populist rhetoric and ideology are embedded in foreign policy communication. These methods are rooted in the broader tradition of qualitative interpretivism, allowing the research to uncover both manifest and latent meanings in official discourse.

4.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis served as the primary technique for identifying patterns and recurring themes in the corpus of documents. This method was applied to a carefully curated dataset comprising over 60 official speeches, foreign policy addresses, press releases, and governmental policy statements delivered or published by the administrations of Alexis Tsipras (2015–2019) and Donald Trump (2017–2021). In the Greek case, materials were sourced from the Hellenic Parliament archives and official government websites; U.S. documents were collected from White House archives, the Department of State, and presidential libraries.

The process followed the six-phase model outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. Codes were inductively generated from the data itself rather than imposed a priori, though informed by the broader research question and theoretical framework. Recurring themes included "sovereignty," "national dignity," "multilateralism," and "economic self-determination," which were then grouped into higher-order themes reflecting populist discourse in foreign policy. Special care was taken to account for contextual factors such as crisis rhetoric (in the Greek case, during the debt and refugee crises) and nationalist positioning in global affairs. This approach enabled the identification of narrative strategies populist leaders use to frame foreign policy actions as aligned with the "will of the people."

4.3.2 Content Analysis

To complement the interpretive findings of thematic analysis, content analysis was employed to assess rhetorical frequency and emphasis. The selected documents were coded using a hybrid manual-digital approach: keywords, phrases, and themes such as "the people," "multilateralism," "elites," "sovereignty," "deal," "control," and "border" were tracked to quantify their prevalence and variation between the two leaders.

This systematic tracking allowed the research to identify differences in populist emphasis between left-wing and right-wing variants. For example, Trump's communications showed a consistently high frequency of terms linked to security and territorial integrity, while Tsipras' statements placed greater weight on themes of democratic accountability and resisting external (primarily European) control. The analysis also examined the emotional valence of the texts, and examination for expressions of urgency, anger, or pride to understand how leaders used affect to reinforce legitimacy (Wodak, 2015; Moffitt, 2016). Although the focus of this study remains qualitative, basic frequency tables were constructed to support interpretive claims and ensure analytic transparency (Krippendorff, 2018).

4.3.3 Integration of Analytical Insights

The final phase of the analysis involves a structured comparison where findings from the U.S. and Greek cases are cross-referenced. This comparative logic is not merely descriptive but functions as the primary mechanism for testing **Theoretical Proposition 3 (Structural Mediation)**. By comparing how identical signifiers like 'sovereignty' were operationalized in different material contexts, the analysis can distinguish between the ideological roadmap and the structural ceiling of policy change. While the thesis does not adopt a purely comparative methodology in the tradition of most-different systems design (MDSD), it applies structured comparison at the level of analysis. The two case studies—Greece under Alexis Tsipras and the United States under Donald Trump—were selected to reflect variation in populist ideology (left-wing vs. right-wing) and geopolitical context (small European state vs. global hegemon), while holding constant the presence of populist leadership.

The comparative logic was not applied during data collection, but rather in the analytical phase, as a way of tracing how populist leadership conditions led to convergences or divergences in foreign policy behavior. This included comparisons across three substantive dimensions: economic foreign policy, diplomatic alignments, and immigration-related foreign affairs. Rather than aiming for generalizability, this comparison aimed to reveal mechanisms of foreign policy change under populism that might otherwise be obscured in single-case analysis (George and Bennett, 2005). Thus, the use of comparison in this study serves to highlight how different forms of populist leadership interact with institutional settings, international constraints, and domestic pressures to produce distinct—but theoretically linked—foreign policy outcomes.

Findings from both thematic and content analysis were triangulated to generate robust insights into the ways populist leadership manifests in foreign policy discourse. This integration allowed for the testing of theoretical expectations about the foreign policy behaviors of populist leaders, including skepticism

toward multilateral institutions, preference for bilateralism, and the use of nationalist rhetoric in legitimating international decisions.

Furthermore, these analytical insights were cross-referenced with primary interview data (discussed in Section 4.4) to validate or nuance findings derived from textual materials. Where divergences emerged between rhetoric and action, the triangulated analysis allowed for reflection on the performative versus substantive dimensions of populist foreign policy.

4.4 Interviews

Interviews constitute a vital component of this qualitative research, providing rich, in-depth insights into the foreign policy strategies of Alexis Tsipras in Greece and Donald Trump in the United States. They complement document and discourse analysis by revealing the motivations, perceptions, and practical challenges faced by actors operating within populist leadership frameworks.

4.4.1 Participant Selection and Profile

Interview participants were deliberately selected using purposive sampling to ensure both the relevance of their expertise and a diversity of perspectives across the two case studies. The final sample comprised approximately 18 individuals, including former government officials, political advisors, diplomats, party-affiliated figures, and academic experts with direct or analytical knowledge of the foreign policy approaches of Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump. Participants were identified through professional affiliations, previous roles in national and international institutions, academic and policy publications, and referrals within scholarly and diplomatic networks.

The selection criteria prioritized individuals who had direct involvement in foreign policymaking during the Tsipras or Trump administrations or who had closely observed or studied these governments.

Particular attention was given to recruiting individuals who had also worked under or studied prior administrations. This allowed for informed comparisons that could highlight institutional change, continuity, or disruption resulting from populist leadership. Outreach included attempts to engage members of the ruling parties during the respective periods (SYRIZA in Greece and the Republican Party in the U.S.), as well as actors affiliated with governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and think tanks specializing in foreign policy, economic diplomacy, and immigration. Academics and policy researchers at institutions in both countries were also contacted to provide critical, theoretically informed perspectives on the broader implications of populist foreign policy.

The interviews were conducted over an extended fieldwork period between March and December 2022, with the majority taking place between June and September 2022. This timeline enabled retrospective insight into both administrations while still maintaining temporal proximity to the key events under investigation. Interviewees were selected to reflect a balance of supporters and critics across the political spectrum, thereby enriching the data with multiple viewpoints and helping to mitigate bias in interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The recruitment process faced notable obstacles, particularly within the U.S. context, where political polarization and anti-elite sentiment, central tenets of populist rhetoric, often fostered suspicion toward academic research (Mudde, 2017). Snowball sampling proved largely ineffective due to these trust issues, and several attempts to reach gatekeepers or intermediaries were met with non-responsiveness or rejection. The timing of the U.S. interviews during the 2022 midterm election cycle further complicated access, as many potential interviewees were preoccupied with campaign responsibilities or wary of engaging in politically sensitive discussions during a contested period (Bleich & Pekkanen, 2013). Despite these constraints, the final set of interviews produced a rich body of qualitative data, offering valuable insight into the foreign policy decision-making processes, institutional dynamics, and political pressures that shaped both administrations. These testimonies complemented the findings from document

and discourse analysis, contributing to a more comprehensive and triangulated understanding of how populist leadership affects foreign policy.

4.4.2 Interview Participants and Structure

The interviews conducted for this study served as a critical qualitative complement to the document and discourse analysis. They aimed to provide nuanced insights into how populist leadership shaped the foreign policy decisions of Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump. To capture both high-level decision-making and analytical interpretations, participants were drawn from two broad categories: elite actors—such as former government officials, political advisors, and diplomats—and experts, including scholars, policy analysts, and regional specialists with relevant expertise.

The elite participants were selected for their proximity to policy formation and implementation processes. These individuals were able to provide firsthand reflections on internal deliberations, negotiation strategies, and the real-time challenges of executing foreign policy under populist leadership (Goldstein, 2002; Richards, 1996). Meanwhile, expert participants contributed detached, analytically grounded assessments that helped contextualize the foreign policy agendas of the Tsipras and Trump administrations. Drawing on their academic or professional specialization, they offered comparative insights and theoretical reflections that helped triangulate the data gathered from elites and official documents (Bogner, Littig & Menz, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Across both groups, some participants requested anonymity, especially those with ongoing or recent government service, or who had been involved in sensitive negotiations. In politically charged contexts such as Greece during the third memorandum crisis or the U.S. under the Trump administration, anonymity enabled more candid responses and protected participants from potential political or

professional repercussions (Kaiser, 2009; Wiles et al., 2008). Anonymity was therefore granted in accordance with ethical standards and the university's research ethics protocol.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing for consistency in covering key themes across interviews while retaining the flexibility to probe deeper into particular issues based on each interviewee's expertise. Questions were framed around the core dimensions of the thesis—economic, diplomatic, and immigration foreign policy—while deliberately avoiding leading references to "populism" to encourage open and unbiased responses. This approach helped elicit deeper insights into institutional constraints, strategic considerations, and the role of political rhetoric in shaping foreign policy decisions. A copy of the interview guide is included in **Appendix 1.**

Together, the perspectives of elite and expert participants provided an essential interpretive lens through which the empirical material was analyzed. Their contributions enriched the findings and enabled a more comprehensive understanding of how populist leadership interacts with the realities of foreign policy decision-making.

4.4.3 Data Analysis and Triangulation

The interview transcripts were manually reviewed in detail using an iterative, close-reading approach to identify recurring themes and patterns relevant to the research focus. While the study did not employ formal coding software or a pre-structured codebook, the analysis followed a systematic process of interpretive reading and note-taking to draw out insights related to the core dimensions of foreign policy—economics, diplomacy, and immigration—as well as broader themes associated with populist leadership. Through multiple rounds of reading, themes were identified inductively based on the recurrence of key ideas, narrative framings, and policy justifications offered by participants. Particular attention was paid to areas where participants described tensions between populist rhetoric and

institutional constraints, as well as perceptions of national sovereignty, alliance-building, and responses to international pressures. This interpretive method, grounded in qualitative best practices, allowed for flexibility in uncovering meaning while maintaining analytical coherence (Roulston, 2010; Tracy, 2013). These thematic insights were then compared with findings from document and discourse analysis, allowing for triangulation across data sources. This methodological triangulation served to enhance the reliability of the findings by corroborating themes that emerged independently across different forms of evidence (Flick, 2018; Denzin, 2012). While this study did not adopt a formal coding framework, the combination of close textual engagement and thematic comparison across multiple data sources ensures that the analysis remains both robust and reflexive. This approach is well-suited to interpretive research on elite political actors, where the emphasis lies in understanding meaning-making, narrative construction, and policy framing in context.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are fundamental to any research process, particularly when human participants are involved. In this study, special care has been taken to ensure that all procedures align with established ethical guidelines, which serve to protect the rights and well-being of participants. The research follows the principles outlined by ethical frameworks such as the *British Sociological Association* (BSA, 2017) and the *American Psychological Association* (APA, 2017), both of which emphasize the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from participation at any point.

Informed consent is a cornerstone of ethical research, ensuring that participants are fully aware of the study's aims, methods, and potential impacts before agreeing to take part (Flick, 2018). All participants in this study were provided with detailed information sheets, which explained the purpose and scope of the research, the nature of their involvement, and any potential risks or benefits. This transparency is vital in fostering a relationship of trust between the researcher and participants, as it allows individuals to make an informed decision about their participation (Bryman, 2016).

Additionally, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point, without any penalty, and that their contributions could be retracted if requested. This right to withdraw is particularly important in research that deals with sensitive political issues, as it gives participants agency and control over their involvement (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). By providing these assurances, the study aligns with ethical standards of voluntariness and respect for participants' autonomy.

Confidentiality is another key ethical concern, especially when dealing with individuals who may hold sensitive or high-ranking positions. To mitigate any potential risks associated with participants' disclosures, all data were anonymized, and pseudonyms were used in the reporting of findings to protect participants' identities (Wiles, 2012). This anonymity is crucial in preventing any potential harm, such as professional repercussions, given the often sensitive nature of political and diplomatic discussions.

Furthermore, all recorded interviews and transcripts were securely stored, with access restricted to the research team only. This data security is essential for maintaining the confidentiality of participants' contributions, ensuring that sensitive information is not disclosed to unauthorized parties (BSA, 2017).

Given the nature of the research—focusing on the foreign policies of populist leaders such as Tsipras and Trump, it is likely that participants discussed sensitive political topics. The political context, particularly in relation to populism, can lead to polarizing viewpoints, and thus, extra care was taken to ensure that participants did not feel coerced into providing responses that could compromise their professional or personal standing (Miller & Bell, 2012).

Moreover, the research acknowledges the potential power imbalances between the researcher and participants, especially when interviewing elite figures such as former diplomats and government officials. To address this, efforts were made to conduct interviews in a manner that fostered mutual respect and encouraged open dialogue. Participants were reminded of their right to refuse to answer any

questions they felt uncomfortable with, further reinforcing their autonomy in the process (Roulston, 2010).

By adhering to these ethical considerations, the research maintains a high level of integrity. Ethical research practices not only protect participants but also enhance the credibility of the findings. Ensuring that participants feel secure in providing candid insights contributes to the richness of the data, thereby facilitating more accurate and meaningful analysis (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). In turn, this rigor enhances the overall quality of the research, aligning with academic expectations for ethical scholarship.

4.6 Shift in Focus from Security and Defense to Immigration

Initially, this study aimed to explore security and defense as the third dimensions of populist foreign policy after economic and diplomatic foreign policy. However, during the research process, the increasing importance of immigration as a foreign policy issue, particularly in the context of populist leadership, led to a significant shift in focus. Populist leaders, both in Europe and the United States, have increasingly used immigration as a key component of their political platform, framing it as an existential threat to national sovereignty and security (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Consequently, the salience of immigration policies in the broader spectrum of foreign policy became undeniable.

The interviews conducted prior to this change reflected the original emphasis on security and defense. However, as the research progressed, it became clear that immigration, especially in the context of the 2015 European migration crisis and the U.S. debates on border control, demanded more focused attention. In light of this, the scope of the study was expanded to include immigration as a critical foreign policy dimension shaped by populist leadership. This last-minute change was driven by the growing academic consensus that immigration policies are not merely domestic concerns but also significant aspects of international relations and diplomacy (Freeman, 1995; Triandafyllidou, 2018).

This pivot in focus presented a challenge, as the original interviews did not address immigration policy in the depth required. While some responses touched on the subject tangentially, the need to explore how populist leaders manipulate immigration issues to assert control over foreign policy became increasingly evident. Therefore, additional documentary analysis was conducted to complement the interview data, ensuring that this key dimension was adequately represented in the study's findings.

4.7 Conclusions

This chapter delineates the qualitative methodology employed to examine the impact of populist leadership on foreign policy through the case studies of Greece under Alexis Tsipras and the United States under Donald Trump. By elucidating the research methods and analytical frameworks, this section provides a comprehensive understanding of how these approaches are crucial to addressing the research question.

The multifaceted methods of data collection, including document analysis, discourse analysis, and comparative analysis—are integral to developing a nuanced understanding of how populist leaders articulate and implement their foreign policy strategies. Document analysis facilitates the examination of a wide range of primary and secondary sources, allowing for the identification of key themes and narratives that reflect the leaders' rhetorical strategies. Discourse analysis illuminates the ideological underpinnings and strategic objectives articulated by Tsipras and Trump, providing valuable insights into the motivations driving their foreign policy decisions. Additionally, the comparative analysis framework positions the two case studies within a systematic evaluative structure, revealing both the commonalities and divergences inherent in left-wing and right-wing populism.

The analytical framework discussed in Section 4.3 underscores the significance of thematic and content analysis techniques in deriving meaningful insights from speeches, press releases, and policy documents. This methodological rigor is complemented by the integration of qualitative interviews, which enrich the

analysis by capturing the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in the foreign policy decision-making processes. The triangulation of data from various sources enhances the reliability of findings, thus contributing to a more robust empirical foundation for the research.

Through the outlined methodology, the research aims to contribute to the academic discourse on populism and foreign policy, offering a framework for understanding how populist leadership shapes diplomatic strategies, alliances, and global engagements. The anticipated outcomes of this investigation include a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which populist rhetoric and policies influence international relations, which will be articulated in the subsequent empirical chapters of the thesis.

The methodologies adopted in this research are designed not only to answer the core thesis question but also to enrich the broader field of comparative politics and International Relations. By examining the implications of populist leadership on foreign policy through a rigorous qualitative lens, this study aspires to provide significant insights into the evolving dynamics of contemporary global politics. Such insights are vital for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners who seek to navigate the complexities of populism and its impact on international relations in an increasingly polarized world.

Chapter 5: Economic Foreign Policy in Populist leadership

5.1 Introduction

The economic dimension of foreign policy has become a critical lens through which to understand the exercise of populist leadership in the contemporary international system. This chapter investigates how populist leaders reshape economic foreign policy as a tool to advance ideological commitments, address domestic economic grievances, and reconfigure their nations' positions within the global order. In doing so, it demonstrates that economic foreign policy is not simply an extension of domestic agendas, but a dynamic arena through which populist leaders pursue both symbolic and material realignments of power, often at the expense of multilateral norms.

Populist movements frequently derive momentum from perceptions of economic injustice, inequality, or marginalization, and leaders often respond by advancing economic nationalism, protectionism, and bilateralism in their foreign policy. These strategies are not incidental but are central to the populist project of reclaiming national sovereignty, resisting elite-driven multilateralism and appealing to "the people" as a singular political subject. As such, economic foreign policy serves both performative and strategic functions, shoring up domestic legitimacy while simultaneously signaling a realignment of external alliances and trade commitments.

Following the analytical framework established in Section 3.5, this chapter applies the propositions of leaderisation and sovereignty-framing to the economic domain. By using the comparative baseline of predecessors established in Chapter 2, the following sections measure the degree of economic policy change under Tsipras and Trump through the lens of Hermann's (1990) levels of change.

The core of the chapter consists of two detailed case studies: Alexis Tsipras in Greece and Donald Trump in the United States. These leaders offer compelling contrasts and similarities, representing different ends

of the ideological spectrum but exhibiting overlapping tendencies in their deployment of economic nationalism. Through discourse analysis, document review, and interview evidence, the case studies analyze how each leader constructed and implemented foreign economic strategies under populist mandates. Special attention is given to policy instruments such as trade renegotiations, pursuit of alternative alliances, and use of executive powers (e.g., Section 232 tariffs under Trump) to disrupt institutional norms.

This is followed by a comparative analysis of the two cases, identifying convergences in populist rhetoric and economic strategy as well as key divergences driven by institutional constraints, geopolitical positioning, and domestic political contexts. To illustrate these dynamics more concretely, the chapter includes a comparative summary table of policy tools and rhetoric and applies Hermann's typology to assess the scope and depth of foreign policy change under both leaders.

Finally, the chapter considers the broader international implications of populist-led economic foreign policy, including its potential to fragment multilateral economic institutions, weaken long-standing trade alliances, and embolden other leaders to adopt similar nationalist stances. The conclusion synthesizes the key findings and suggests areas for further research, particularly the long-term effects of populist economic strategies on international cooperation and the resilience of liberal economic norms.
This chapter aims to advance our understanding of how populism, far from being a purely domestic phenomenon, reshapes global economic relations through deliberate and ideologically driven foreign policy strategies. By examining the economic dimensions of populist leadership in practice, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving nature of international political economy in the populist era.

5.2 The Foreign Policy of Alexis Tsipras: Navigating Challenges and Shifting Alliances

5.2.1 Rise to Power and Initial Expectations

Alexis Tsipras emerged as a key figure in Greek politics during a tumultuous period marked by widespread discontent over austerity measures imposed by international creditors. Leading the left-wing party SYRIZA, Tsipras campaigned on a platform of anti-austerity and social justice, promising to challenge the neoliberal policies that had led to severe economic hardship for many Greeks. His ascent to power in January 2015 was met with high expectations from a populace yearning for change and a departure from the traditional political establishment (Katsambekis, 2017; Pappas, 2019).

Tsipras's election came at a time when Greece was grappling with an unprecedented financial crisis characterized by soaring unemployment, crippling debt, and widespread poverty. The new Prime Minister initially sought to renegotiate Greece's bailout terms with the troika, comprising the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Central Bank (ECB), in hopes of securing a more favorable economic arrangement (Featherstone, 2015). This intention signaled a bold departure from Greece's historical reliance on Western allies and established norms in foreign policy. This early period embodies the populist impulse to reclaim sovereignty over economic decision-making, aligning with TP1: populist leaders are more likely to challenge multilateral constraints when they perceive them as eroding national autonomy. However, as neoclassical realism suggests, even ideologically committed leaders must operate within the boundaries of institutional and systemic constraints.

5.2.2 Governance Amidst Economic Crisis

Under Tsipras, Greece’s foreign policy experienced a notable shift as the administration sought to navigate the complexities of an interconnected global economy. Tense negotiations with the troika and the

rise of SYRIZA's anti-austerity campaigns prompted Greece to explore alternative relationships and economic alignments, particularly with non-Western states such as China and Russia. The acquisition of the Port of Piraeus by the Chinese shipping company COSCO, initiated prior to Tsipras's tenure but completed during it, exemplifies this pivot. Tsipras framed the deal not merely as a financial necessity but as a strategic partnership that would benefit Greece economically. During a 2016 visit to Beijing, he emphasized the importance of attracting foreign investment, particularly from China, declaring the agreement mutually beneficial (To Vima, 2016). Tsipras articulated a vision for an "investment shock" to combat disinvestment and unemployment, aligning the COSCO deal with a broader narrative of economic recovery.

Sotiris Serbos, an Associate Professor of International Relations, highlighted SYRIZA's strategy of seeking diverse opportunities:

"SYRIZA was in favor of more diverse opportunities. With new actors emerging, creating balance. For example, the way to work with the Chinese" (Interview, Serbos, 8 July 2022).

This outreach reflects both economic nationalism and TP2, where populist leaders pursue bilateral partnerships that symbolically and materially signal resistance to EU conditionality. However, the completion of a deal initiated before his tenure and shaped by bailout constraints also demonstrates the enduring influence of institutional path dependency. As Tsipras's government faced a politically charged relationship with the EU in early 2015, the opportunity to forge new economic partnerships became increasingly salient. Critics, such as Filis (2017), argued that Greece's pivot toward Russia was strategic, aiming to expand alliances and regain lost diplomatic capital. Tsipras's initial objection to further sanctions against Russia amid the Ukraine crisis exemplified this approach, as Energy Minister Panagiotis Lafazanis publicly opposed the embargo, asserting, "we are against the embargo that has been imposed against Russia" (Jones, Hope, and Weaver, 2015).

While some analysts interpreted Greece's outreach to Russia as a bluff to provoke U.S. interest, others regarded it as a genuine attempt to redefine Greece's foreign policy landscape. Tsipras visited Russia three times during his premiership, culminating in a €4.2 billion trade deal that included discussions on energy cooperation and investments in Greek tourism and infrastructure (Katrougalos, 2020; Chrysopoulos, 2015). However, this outreach garnered skepticism from European partners, who worried about the implications of closer ties with Russia within the EU's geopolitical dynamics.

In April 2015, during a trip to Moscow, Tsipras announced:

"*Greece is a sovereign country with an unquestionable right to implement a multi-dimensional foreign policy and exploit its geopolitical role," Tsipras said (Reuters, 2015). "We fully respect our commitments to all international organisations where we participate and want to take advantage of our potential to promote mutually beneficial agreements*."

However, Tsipras also made it clear they were not desperate:

"Greece is not a beggar going around to countries asking them to solve its economic problem, an economic crisis that doesn't only concern Greece but is a European crisis," (Reuters, 2015).

Such rhetorical framing demonstrates TP3, whereby populist leaders engage in symbolic diplomacy that reinforces narratives of national dignity and independence, even when material outcomes are limited or compromised.

Tsipras's pre-election outreach to Venezuela for financial support further reflected his strategy to secure diverse economic partnerships. His meeting in Moscow with Venezuelan officials raised eyebrows and attracted criticism from opposition parties, who perceived it as a reckless gamble during a time of economic uncertainty (Barigazzi, 2017; Kokkinidis, 2017). These maneuvers underscored the precarious balancing act Tsipras faced while navigating relationships with traditional allies and emerging powers. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Georgios Katrougalos articulated the aims of Tsipras's foreign policy agenda, asserting that geography necessitated Greece's role as an "advanced outpost" on the eastern flank of Europe. He highlighted the qualitative difference between New Democracy and SYRIZA:

"We believe in reciprocity and convergence of interest as the foundation of all bilateral and multilateral foreign policies" (Interview, Katrougalos, 1 July 2022).

Despite the ambitions behind these foreign policy shifts, Tsipras's administration was not immune to domestic and international constraints. The forced privatization of Greek assets, epitomized by the COSCO deal, was met with significant public backlash. Former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis likened this pressure to the historical Treuhandanstalt, noting that eurozone leaders demanded rapid privatizations under severe economic duress:

"*Eurozone leaders demanded that Greek public assets be transferred to a Treuhand-like fund—a fire-sale vehicle similar to the one used after the Berlin Wall to privatize quickly, at great financial loss, and with devastating effects on employment"* (Varoufakis, 2015).

The finalization of the COSCO deal in May 2015, under the pressure of financial commitments, illustrated the complexities of Tsipras's leadership. Initially, the government resisted the sale, with Lafazanis asserting, "we will not sell a majority stake in Piraeus port" (Reuters, 2015b). However, as the bidding process unfolded, COSCO emerged as the sole bidder, leading to the sale of a 51% stake in the Piraeus Port Authority, raising concerns about increasing Chinese influence in Europe and labor practices at the port (Lim, 2011; Skotiniotis, 2017).

Former Secretary General of the International Economic Relations and current SYRIZA Central Committee member Giorgos Tsipras, who is also a cousin to Alexis Tsipras, asserted that the interest in cooperation with China was purely economic:

"With the Chinese, the convergence of interests is basically economic. They want a gateway for their products, and we considered that position to play this role. We did not consider that improvement of relations would automatically mean deterioration with others" (Interview, Giorgos Tsipras, 5 July 2022).

This highlights the pragmatic approach Tsipras's administration adopted in navigating the complexities of international relations. Additionally, Tsipras' successor, former Secretary General of International Economic Investments, Iaonnis Brachos expressed,

"*we tried to bring other Chinese investments in other sectors, not necessarily strategic ones. We didn't make it. The big thing still is the politics…because you know they want to control."* (Interview, Iaonnis Brachos, 5 July 2022)

Tsipras's foreign policy also demonstrated an understanding of Greece's geographic significance, as noted by a Director-Advisor to the Bank of Greece:

"*It had a point as a bargaining chip, ok. Because you were clearly trying to introduce someone to the game […] that you're saying look, you know you're not going to control this game completely. We're going to try and look at other options. […] Greece does have a very strategic position geographically—East and West. SYRIZA's position was more subtle and sophisticated […] it's very difficult to have a subtle and sophisticated foreign policy in Greece because it's just so easy for the opposition parties to reduce everything to black and white*." (Interview, Director-Advisor to the Bank of Greece, 6 July 2022)

Despite the rhetoric of pursuing relationships outside traditional Western partners, concerns over growing relations with both China and Russia are noteworthy, especially as they have been among the top five import partners of the European Union. While these relationships may reflect an attempt to secure Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and economic agreements outside the EU, Greece's top net FDI inflows from 2012 to 2022 remained heavily centered in Western nations, suggesting that tangible alterations in foreign economic policy were limited.

While Tsipras wasn't the first to pursue economic partnerships with countries like China and Russia to promote economic stability outside the EU, the SYRIZA-ANEL government framed this strategy not simply as pragmatic changes within the EU framework, but as a way to assert Greece as a more prominent player on the international stage (Horowitz and Alderman, 2017; Chryssogelos, 2021). Ultimately, while Tsipras's tenure attempted to reframe foreign policy narratives and seek alternative partnerships, the unfolding crisis necessitated difficult compromises. By July 2015, the situation had reached a critical juncture, compelling Tsipras to accept a third bailout package that included stringent austerity measures mandated by the European Council (2019). This marked a significant pivot in his leadership and led to accusations of betrayal from within SYRIZA and the broader public, who felt he had abandoned his promises to challenge the austerity regime. The day following the referendum, Varoufakis

resigned and was replaced with Euclid Tsakalotos as finance minister. However, in 2017 in an interview with Al Jazeera's news segment 'UpFront', Varoufakis claimed:

"*the creditors did not really want their money back. They were only interested in crashing our government […] as a morality tale by which to frighten […] French voters from getting ideas that they can elect the government that will contest the powers of the troika."* (Al Jazeera, 2017)
Despite his criticisms, Varoufakis acknowledged that his successor, Euclid Tsakalotos, successfully negotiated significant concessions, such as extending the timeline for the sale of Greek assets from three years to thirty years.

Tsipras's acceptance of the Third Memorandum resulted in deep fractures within SYRIZA and their strategic partners, as key figures like Panagiotis Lafazanis resigned in protest. Tsipras attempted to frame this situation as a strategic maneuver to secure Greece's economic future, stating,

"*We have to negotiate with our creditors from a position of weakness. This is the reality we face"* (Tsipras, 2015).

However, many Greeks viewed this as a betrayal of the mandate he had received from voters who had placed their faith in his administration to challenge the austerity policies. This conclusion illustrates the paradox at the heart of populist foreign policy under economic constraints: although Tsipras mobilized populist rhetoric to assert national dignity and pursue diversified alliances, his government ultimately remained constrained by systemic pressures and institutional limitations emphasized in neoclassical realism.

5.3 Case Study: The United States under Donald Trump

5.3.1 Preceding Context: Foreign Policy Approaches of Trump's Predecessors

Understanding Donald Trump's foreign policy requires examining the approaches of preceding administrations, particularly regarding economic foreign policy. This historical context reveals continuities and shifts that underpin the grievances Trump's populist rhetoric capitalized on. The

presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama embody two paradigms that set the stage for Trump's transformative economic strategies.

George W. Bush's foreign policy was marked by pronounced unilateralism following the September 11 attacks. The 2002 National Security Strategy emphasized preemptive action and democracy promotion, often via military intervention (Bush, 2002). Economically, Bush championed free trade agreements, such as CAFTA and the continued legacy of NAFTA, to bolster U.S. competitiveness and promote stability abroad (Baker, 2016). However, this commitment faced criticism, especially from those who saw trade agreements as causing job losses in manufacturing sectors, fueling economic discontent that Trump later exploited (Rodrik, 2018). In contrast, Barack Obama sought to reestablish multilateralism through diplomacy and coalition-building, epitomized by the "Pivot to Asia" strategy designed to counter China's rise (Clinton, 2011). This included promoting the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to strengthen economic ties among Pacific Rim nations. Yet, skepticism towards free trade grew among Democrats concerned about labor and environmental protections, reinforcing a narrative that U.S. trade policies favored multinational corporations over workers (Mason & Doran, 2019). Additionally, many working-class Americans perceived Obama's policies as disconnected from their economic realities, deepening feelings of neglect in key Rust Belt demographics (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Both Bush and Obama adhered to economic multilateralism and free trade, framing these policies as essential for national security and prosperity. Yet the 2008 financial crisis and sluggish recovery amplified grievances over job losses and instability, creating fertile ground for Trump's populist appeal. As Pappas (2019) notes, dissatisfaction transcended party lines, with voters seeking candidates prioritizing domestic interests over international commitments. China's economic rise played a crucial role in this dynamic. Despite China's support of the global economy during the financial crisis, Obama expressed frustration over Beijing's repeated breaches of international trade rules (Goldberg, 2020). Under Xi Jinping, hostility towards U.S. companies intensified, fueling bipartisan congressional efforts like the 'Emergency China

Trade Act of 2010' and the 'China Fair Trade Act of 2010,' aimed at countering Chinese trade practices (Sutter, 2017; Hu, 2018). However, Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' and TPP initiatives were seen by some as insufficiently assertive, drawing criticism from across the political spectrum.

Michael Shires, Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Public Policy at Pepperdine University, contextualizes the growing upheaval in U.S.-China relations by comparing it to past U.S. concerns about Japan. He emphasizes the distinct threat posed by China's political system and potential for conflict, contributing to increasing support for disrupting prior administrations' multilateralism:

"*Between the U.S. and Japan, it was all about trade and dominance… But with China, it's a globalist perspective that America doesn't matter as a nation state anymore. Many Americans rejected that, sparking political dynamism: No. America matters*." (Interview, Shires, 23 September 2022)

Trump's election marked a break from this narrative, embracing economic nationalism and protectionism, promising to renegotiate trade deals and confront China, and framing economic foreign policy as a restoration of American dominance. This shift built on the dissatisfaction rooted in the policies of Bush and Obama, setting expectations for a dramatic reorientation of U.S. economic foreign policy.

The combination of long-standing bipartisan commitment to free trade, the perceived failure to shield American workers from multilateralist disruptions, and the political backlash to China's rise created a fertile backdrop for Trump's populism. Economic grievances, particularly among communities left behind by deindustrialization, were reframed through Trump's rhetoric as both a policy failure and a betrayal of national sovereignty, directly linking historical trends to his populist foreign policy platform.

5.3.2 Donald Trump's Rise to Power and the Implications for Economic Foreign Policy

Donald Trump's 2016 presidential victory represented a turning point in U.S. politics, propelled by populist rhetoric emphasizing nationalism, protectionism, and rejection of established norms (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). His campaign's focus on restoring American greatness appealed to voters, especially in Rust Belt states impacted by multilateralist policies, automation, and trade agreements perceived as harmful to workers (Rodrik, 2018). The slogan "Make America Great Again" encapsulated nostalgia for past economic conditions, framing Trump as a corrective to political neglect (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Trump's populism rejected elite consensus, positioning himself as the voice of "the people" against established institutions (Pappas, 2019). His skillful use of social media amplified this message (Boulianne, 2019). Campaign promises included renegotiating trade deals, withdrawing from TPP, and imposing tariffs, especially on China, to protect U.S. industries (Baker, 2016). These set expectations for a nationalist, protectionist economic foreign policy.

This narrative drew on right-wing populist parallels globally, such as Bolsonaro in Brazil and Orbán in Hungary, who similarly prioritize national interests over international commitments through economic nationalism (Waisbord, 2020; Greskovits, 2017). Historically, leaders like Berlusconi and George Wallace exploited economic grievances to consolidate power, promising revitalization through nationalist policies (Mudde, 2004). Trump's governance thus fits within this populist lineage.

A key ideological pillar of Trump's economic policy was "America First," rejecting multilateral approaches in favor of protecting American jobs and industries. At the 2017 Conservative Political Action Conference, Trump declared:

"*We will fight for every last American job. We will defend our workers, we will defend our borders, and we will defend our industries*" (Trump, 2017).

This resonated with Americans feeling marginalized by multilateral trade agreements under prior administrations.

Opposition to multilateral policies, especially concerning China, was bipartisan in the 2016 election. Candidates like Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, and Trump criticized TPP and advocated for renewed assertiveness (Turner, 2015; Sutter, 2019). Political scientist Robert Kaufman characterized Obama's approach as distancing from American exceptionalism, welcoming China in ways criticized by some:

"*Obama's real challenge goes beyond realism… his dismissal of American exceptionalism… welcomed China*" (Interview, Kaufman, 25 August 2022).

Trump's opposition to free trade agreements distinguished him, tapping into voter discontent. At a 2016 rally, he stated:

"*We can't continue to allow China to rape our country... We're going to turn it around, and we have the cards... we have a lot of power with China*" (BBC News, 2016).

Following his election, Trump withdrew from the TPP, renegotiated NAFTA into the USMCA, and launched a series of tariffs aimed at protecting American industries. One of the most significant moves was the imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum in 2018, justified under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, which authorizes the president to restrict imports deemed harmful to national security. This marked a notable assertion of executive authority, as the provision allowed Trump to bypass congressional oversight and enact sweeping economic measures with geopolitical implications. While framed as a national security issue, the move was widely interpreted as part of Trump's broader economic nationalism and populist strategy to reassert American economic dominance—particularly in the face of China's rise. The invocation of Section 232 sparked both domestic legal challenges and pushback from allies, but it exemplified the populist repurposing of institutional tools to disrupt traditional global trade norms (Kubo, 2019; Bown, 2020).

"*They are determined to make economies less free and less fair... to grow their militaries, and to control information and data...*" (National Security Strategy, 2017).

This shift concentrated power in the executive branch, diminishing congressional trade authority (Masters, 2017). Despite Obama's "Pivot to Asia," critics argue it failed to confront China's rise effectively. Former Ambassador Bruce Wharton observed:

"*Obama's administration was internationalist... Trump came in with an isolationist, nativist worldview... I don't feel like Obama's administration grappled successfully with China's rise*" (Interview, Wharton, 25 April 2022).

Michael O'Hanlon of Brookings highlights Trump's policies as a watershed moment, marking a new inward turn:

"*The decision to exit TPP... was a new philosophy... Obama failed to connect those dots... Trump seized the opportunity for a nationalistic agenda*" (Interview, O'Hanlon, 28 April 2022).

The distinctiveness of Trump's economic strategy lies not in the material power of the United States, but in his ideological roadmap. While critics argue that U.S. hegemonic size naturally leads to unilateralism, predecessors like Obama and Bush, operating with the same structural capacity, consistently chose multilateralism and free trade via the TPP and NAFTA. Trump's departure, specifically his use of 'permanent destabilization' and the repurposing of Section 232 tariffs, represents a unique populist modality that prioritized performative sovereignty over established institutional stability. Trump's tenure thus marked a clear break from past norms, emphasizing nationalist protectionism and confrontational trade policies. His presidency reveals the complexities of populist leadership and its domestic and international ramifications.

This case study illustrates how populist leaders reshape economic foreign policy to prioritize national interests at the cost of international cooperation. The implications for global economic relations and sovereignty demand continued scholarly attention as populist movements evolve.

5.4 Comparative Analysis of Economic Foreign Policy in Populist Contexts

The economic foreign policy approaches of Alexis Tsipras in Greece and Donald Trump in the United States reveal instructive parallels and contrasts that highlight how populist leaders navigate the competing demands of domestic legitimacy, institutional constraints, and international pressures. Using the theoretical and methodological tools outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, this section explores how populist leadership reframes foreign policy priorities in the economic domain, and how these shifts are shaped by structural conditions, elite discourse, and leader agency.

5.4.1 Shared Themes in Economic Populism

Both Tsipras and Trump advanced economic nationalist agendas that framed global economic integration as a threat to domestic prosperity. Their foreign policies emphasized the restoration of economic sovereignty, deploying rhetoric that cast international financial institutions or trade partners as antagonists undermining the well-being of "the people."

In Tsipras's case, the anti-austerity platform of SYRIZA was explicitly tied to a rejection of EU-imposed neoliberalism. His effort to renegotiate bailout terms was presented as a battle for economic self-determination, aligning with the populist trope of reclaiming national control from unelected elites. Similarly, Trump's "America First" policy prioritized reshoring jobs, renegotiating trade deals, and erecting tariff barriers to protect American industries, all while attacking multilateral trade frameworks as exploitative.

Both leaders thus embraced a protectionist logic, albeit for different reasons and in different rhetorical registers. Tsipras framed economic restructuring as a moral and social imperative, while Trump positioned it as a nationalist defense of economic power. See **Figure 3** for a summary of key rhetorical themes and policy instruments across the two cases. Their foreign policies reflect a broader populist pattern of

translating domestic grievances into external blame, often targeting supranational institutions or foreign governments.

Figure 3: Populist Rhetoric vs. Economic Policy Instruments – Tsipras vs. Trump

Category	Alexis Tsipras (Greece)	Donald Trump (USA)
Populist Economic Rhetoric	Reclaim national sovereignty from EU elites; reject austerity; defend Greek dignity	"America First"; restore U.S. economic power; fight foreign exploitation (esp. China)
Primary Target of Blame	EU institutions (especially the Troika), Germany	China, political elites, unfair trade deals (e.g., NAFTA, TPP)
Framing of the 'People'	Greek working and middle class suffering under austerity	Forgotten American workers, especially in manufacturing and rural areas
Protectionist Instruments Used	Attempted to renegotiate bailout conditions; explored ties with non-Western partners	Imposed tariffs (China, steel/aluminum); withdrew from TPP; renegotiated NAFTA
Institutional Constraints	Eurozone membership; ECB controls; limited fiscal autonomy	Greater executive discretion in trade; institutional support (at least early on)
Alternative Alliances Explored	Russia, China (esp. during third memorandum negotiations)	Bilateral deals (USMCA); adversarial realignment of U.S.-China relationship
Outcome/Policy Shift Type	Programmatic adjustment within limits of Eurozone	Goal and structural change in trade orientation
Rhetoric vs. Reality	Rhetoric clashed with institutional constraints; eventual policy U-turns (e.g., memoranda)	More consistency between rhetoric and action; measurable trade policy change

5.4.2 Divergent Strategies and Constraints

Despite these shared logics, the execution of economic foreign policy diverged significantly. Tsipras operated within the structural constraints of the Eurozone, limiting his capacity for unilateral economic action. His government faced intense pressure from the troika, ultimately compelling compliance with EU bailout conditions despite public resistance. While efforts to deepen ties with China and Russia signaled

an attempt to diversify economic partnerships, these maneuvers were shaped more by necessity than ideological ambition.

Trump, by contrast, operated from a position of structural power and institutional autonomy. His administration's withdrawal from the TPP and the renegotiation of NAFTA into the USMCA demonstrated a proactive attempt to reorder the global economic landscape in line with nationalist principles. The executive's broad latitude over trade policy in the U.S. context, combined with a Republican-controlled Congress for part of his term, enabled Trump to pursue a far more confrontational approach than Tsipras could feasibly consider.

This divergence, shown in **Figure 4,** illustrates how Hermann's typology of foreign policy change can be applied to distinguish between degrees of change: Tsipras's tenure involved adjustments and programmatic redirection within pre-existing frameworks, while Trump's actions reflect structural or goal changes, particularly in his efforts to reshape global economic norms.

Figure 4: Application of Hermann's Levels of Foreign Policy Change

Hermann's Level of Change	**Alexis Tsipras (Greece)**	**Donald Trump (USA)**
Adjustment Change	Tactical shifts in diplomacy and outreach (e.g., temporary alignment with Russia and China during bailout negotiations).	Imposing tariffs under existing trade laws (e.g., Section 232).
Program Change	Attempts to shift bailout terms and diversify investment sources (e.g., COSCO deal).	Renegotiation of NAFTA → USMCA; withdrawal from TPP.
Problem/Goal Change	Initial goal to restore economic sovereignty and end austerity (later compromised).	Reframing global trade as a threat to American sovereignty and jobs.
International Orientation Change	Limited due to Eurozone constraints; rhetoric of	Marked shift to economic nationalism; sidelining of multilateralism.

	“multi-dimensional” foreign policy not fully realized.	

5.4.3 Institutional and Domestic Mediators

The variation in foreign policy strategy is also attributable to differing domestic political configurations. In Greece, Tsipras led a fragile coalition government and faced significant opposition from both the public and within his own party when compromising with international creditors. These internal fractures constrained his room for maneuver and diluted the coherence of his populist message.

Trump, in contrast, benefitted from greater executive discretion and a more consolidated political base. His administration leveraged populist rhetoric in tandem with institutional authority, allowing for swift shifts in policy. Trump's ability to bypass traditional diplomatic channels, often via social media, further enabled a direct link to his base and greater personal control over foreign policy messaging. Moreover, the U.S. position in the global hierarchy allowed for economic coercion in a way that Greece’s peripheral status did not. Where Tsipras sought to mitigate dependence through diversification, Trump sought to weaponize interdependence through tariffs and trade threats, using U.S. market power as leverage.

5.4.4 Populist Economic Foreign Policy in Context

Taken together, these cases illustrate how populist foreign economic policy is not solely the product of ideology but is profoundly shaped by institutional power, international position, and domestic political incentives. While both Tsipras and Trump enacted policies that sought to reassert national control over economic policy, the tools available and the political costs associated with those tools varied dramatically. Theoretically, this supports the neoclassical realist insight that foreign policy outcomes are mediated by domestic intervening variables. Populist leaders may share a discourse of economic nationalism, but their ability to convert this into foreign policy change depends on their state's structural position and

institutional configuration. In this regard, the comparison partially confirms neoclassical realist expectations: the weaker structural position and creditor dependence of Greece significantly constrained Tsipras's scope for autonomous action, while the United States' structural advantages afforded Trump greater latitude, though not immunity, from domestic and international pushback. At the same time, the findings complicate expectations by showing that even structurally strong states may experience notable constraints when institutional fragmentation and political opposition limit a leader's ability to sustain foreign economic change.

The evidence in this chapter confirms **TP3 (Structural Mediation)**: while both leaders shared an ideology of economic nationalism, the depth of policy change was dictated by structural position. Greece's peripheral status and creditor dependence limited Tsipras to 'Programmatic Adjustments,' whereas the U.S. structural advantage allowed Trump to enact 'Goal and Structural Changes'.

This comparison raises further questions about the longevity and coherence of populist economic strategies. While both leaders framed their policies as restoring fairness and sovereignty, both also faced accusations of inconsistency or failure to deliver transformative results. The following chapter examines whether and how diplomatic engagement served to reinforce or undermine these economic strategies, tracing how each leader's international outreach shaped, and was shaped by, their economic policy agendas.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the complex and multifaceted relationship between populist leadership and economic foreign policy, highlighting the central role that economic imperatives play in shaping the international strategies of populist leaders. Through detailed case studies of Alexis Tsipras in Greece and

Donald Trump in the United States, this analysis has illuminated how populist ideologies translate into economic policies that significantly reshape their countries' engagement with the global economy. Grounded in the neoclassical realist theoretical framework introduced in Section 5.2, this chapter has demonstrated how key concepts, such as economic nationalism and trade protectionism, manifest in distinct ways that depart from established norms of multilateral cooperation. Tsipras's attempts to renegotiate Greece's position within the European Union contrast sharply with Trump's more unilateral retreat from multilateral trade agreements, illustrating a spectrum of populist economic strategies aimed at prioritizing perceived national interests in an increasingly multilateral context.

A key insight emerging from this chapter is the dual role of economic foreign policy as both a domestic political tool and an instrument of international repositioning. While both Tsipras and Trump leveraged economic nationalism to consolidate domestic support, their methods diverged considerably. Tsipras operated within constrained institutional frameworks, seeking accommodation within the existing European architecture, whereas Trump pursued a more confrontational and assertive redefinition of U.S. trade policy, emphasizing sovereignty and protectionism.

Domestic economic conditions proved to be pivotal in shaping these foreign policy orientations. Greece's protracted economic crisis forced Tsipras into negotiations from a position of vulnerability, limiting the scope of autonomous action. Conversely, Trump capitalized on domestic economic grievances and political consolidation to implement policies that reflected a broader nationalist agenda, resonating with constituents disaffected by multilateralism.

The populist economic policies of these leaders carry significant implications for international cooperation and the future of the global economic order. The turn toward bilateralism and economic nationalism risks undermining multilateral institutions and established trade regimes, potentially contributing to greater fragmentation and instability within the international system.

This chapter underscores the imperative for scholars and policymakers to critically engage with the intersection of populism and economic foreign policy. As populist movements continue to ascend worldwide, understanding how their economic strategies influence international relations is essential for anticipating and managing emerging challenges.

Building on these findings, several avenues for further research are apparent. Comparative analyses involving a broader range of populist leaders across diverse geopolitical contexts could yield deeper insights into the variability and commonalities of populist economic foreign policy. Additionally, longitudinal studies assessing the long-term impact of such policies on international trade, investment patterns, and institutional resilience would enrich current understandings of their sustainability. Finally, investigating the adaptive responses of global economic actors, including states, multinational corporations, and international organizations, to the evolving populist landscape may illuminate prospects for renewed cooperation amid rising nationalism.

The economic dimension of populist leadership presents both profound challenges and complex opportunities for global engagement. The insights developed in this chapter contribute to a more nuanced comprehension of the evolving dynamics in international economic relations, providing a foundation for future inquiry into how populism will continue to reshape economic foreign policy in an interconnected world.

Chapter 6: Diplomatic Strategies of Populist Leadership

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the diplomatic dimension of foreign policy under populist leadership, focusing on how populist leaders seek to redefine their states' roles on the international stage. Diplomacy, traditionally reliant on norms of multilateral cooperation, institutional continuity, and strategic alliance-building, can be significantly reshaped when filtered through a populist lens. Populist leaders often approach diplomacy through the prism of nationalism, anti-elitism, and a direct appeal to "the people," which may result in renegotiated alliances, personalized diplomatic styles, and new foreign policy priorities that challenge traditional protocols.

Building on the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism, this chapter examines how domestic political factors—such as populist rhetoric, public sentiment, and elite contestation, interact with systemic constraints and opportunities to influence diplomatic outcomes. It utilizes Hermann's levels of foreign policy change (adjustment, program change, problem/goal change, and international orientation change) to assess the scope and depth of diplomatic shifts under populist leadership.

The analysis centers on two comparative case studies: Greece under Alexis Tsipras and the United States under Donald Trump. These leaders, though ideologically distinct, left-wing versus right-wing populism, each engaged in substantive diplomatic shifts that reflected their populist mandates. In Tsipras's case, the resolution of the Macedonia naming dispute through the Prespes Agreement illustrated a pragmatic recalibration of nationalist rhetoric in favor of regional stability. For Trump, the pursuit of the Abraham Accords marked a reconfiguration of Middle East diplomacy, conducted through bilateralism and personalized negotiations that aligned with his "America First" ethos.

To contextualize these case studies, the chapter begins by reviewing the diplomatic strategies of each country's pre-populist leadership, establishing a baseline for identifying what changed under Tsipras and Trump. It then traces how each leader operationalized diplomacy—through institutional channels, rhetoric, elite appointments, and alternative alignments—and evaluates the domestic and international constraints they faced. Comparative analysis, including visual tables adapted from Chapter 5, will distill the key areas of convergence and divergence across cases. This chapter aims to assess the degree to which populist leadership reshapes diplomatic strategy, not only through policy shifts but also through the transformation of diplomatic norms, alliances, and methods. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of how populism interacts with global governance structures and what implications this holds for the future of international diplomacy in an era of rising nationalist and anti-global sentiment.

Following the analytical framework established in Section 3.5, this chapter applies the propositions of leaderisation and sovereignty-framing to the diplomatic domain. By using the comparative baseline of predecessors established in Chapter 2, the following sections measure the degree of diplomatic policy change under Tsipras and Trump through the lens of Hermann's (1990) levels of change.

6.2 Diplomatic Foreign Policy under Populist leadership

Diplomatic foreign policy in populist regimes exhibits a set of recurring patterns that diverge from conventional approaches to international engagement. These patterns reflect core attributes of populist leadership—namely nationalism, anti-elitism, and skepticism toward supranational institutions—and frequently result in alternative diplomatic strategies that reshape global alignments. This section outlines the principal features of populist diplomatic practice and the ideological and strategic rationales that underpin them. It sets the stage for the empirical chapters that follow by identifying how populist leaders operationalize diplomacy in ways that depart from liberal internationalist norms while navigating the constraints of the international system. Populist leaders consistently foreground national sovereignty as

the guiding principle of their foreign policy, viewing diplomacy less as a tool for collective global problem-solving and more as a means to restore perceived national greatness or economic justice (Mudde, 2004; Judis, 2016). This ideological disposition manifests in a hostile stance toward multilateralism, with populist governments often depicting international institutions such as the EU, UN, and WTO as instruments of elite rule or technocratic interference (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017). This critique of multilateralism is not merely rhetorical. It drives a strategic preference for bilateralism, which allows populist leaders to claim direct negotiation victories, personalize international relations, and frame diplomacy in transactional, zero-sum terms. Donald Trump's rejection of multilateral trade and climate frameworks in favor of bilateral renegotiations (e.g., NAFTA to USMCA) exemplifies this model (Schmidt, 2020). Likewise, Viktor Orbán and Jair Bolsonaro have similarly questioned the legitimacy of multilateral governance, portraying it as antagonistic to the national interest (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

While populist leaders frequently present multilateral institutions as obstacles to sovereignty, multilateralism is not inherently at odds with national interests. In many historical cases, states have used multilateral forums to advance strategic and economic objectives. What distinguishes populist diplomacy is not an absolute rejection of multilateralism, but a framing that casts it as an externally imposed constraint. This framing allows populist leaders to position themselves as reclaiming national agency—even when selective multilateral engagement continues behind the scenes. In populist diplomacy, style and substance frequently blur. Foreign policy becomes an extension of domestic populist performance: leaders personalize engagements, construct symbolic enemies, and seek public validation for foreign policy as part of their political branding (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). This personalization is evident in how Trump leveraged summits with adversaries like Kim Jong-un as high-stakes media spectacles and how Tsipras framed his foreign engagements as a fight to protect Greek dignity in the face of European financial domination (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2019). Rather than abiding by institutional protocol or long-term strategy, diplomacy is often framed as a confrontation between "the nation" and "foreign elites", reducing complex negotiations into moral binaries that can be leveraged domestically. These

dynamics serve not only symbolic functions but also enable short-term recalibration of alliances, sometimes with long-term geopolitical implications.

Whereas populist rhetoric frequently espouses isolationist tropes, such as calls to "withdraw," "disengage," or "protect borders," in practice, populist leaders often pursue selective international engagement—not retreat from the world, but rather realignment within it (Plagemann & Destradi, 2019). For instance, Alexis Tsipras sought to supplement Greece's constrained position within the EU by deepening ties with non-Western actors, such as China (via the Belt and Road Initiative) and Russia. These efforts aimed to diversify diplomatic and economic dependencies, though often with limited success. Similarly, Trump's outreach to authoritarian regimes (e.g., Russia, North Korea) represented an ideological break from traditional U.S. alliance structures, yet was simultaneously part of a highly proactive diplomatic agenda (Gunitsky, 2020). These actions point to a pragmatic logic of realignment—not abandoning diplomacy, but shifting its targets and modalities in pursuit of nationalist objectives. This duality—rhetorical isolationism, strategic assertiveness—is a defining feature of populist diplomacy.

Populist diplomatic behavior carries broader implications for the stability of the post-war liberal international order. By rejecting norms of consensus-building, eroding commitments to collective problem-solving, and undermining trust in supranational institutions, populist leaders accelerate fragmentation within existing alliances and create openings for alternative power structures. This is particularly evident in growing alignment between populist-led states and non-liberal or hybrid regimes, such as China, Russia, or Turkey (Greskovits, 2017). These emerging patterns of cooperation often circumvent traditional Western institutional channels and signal a gradual reconfiguration of multilateral diplomatic networks.

6.2.1 Greek Diplomacy under Tsipras: The Prespes Agreement as a Diplomatic Turning Point

This section examines the Prespes Agreement as a critical case study in the diplomatic foreign policy of Alexis Tsipras's populist government. Building upon the preceding historical overview, it assesses how Tsipras's leadership marked both continuity and rupture with earlier diplomatic traditions. The Prespes Agreement offers a unique lens through which to observe the operationalization of populist leadership in a highly sensitive foreign policy domain. Notably, the agreement was reached amidst severe domestic opposition, coalition instability, and ongoing economic negotiations related to Greece's third bailout program—raising questions about whether foreign policy compromises were shaped not only by ideological recalibration but also by the strategic imperative to gain European support during the final stages of economic supervision.

6.2.2 Precedents to the Prespes Agreement: Continuities and Constraints

To understand the shifts in Greek diplomatic strategy under Alexis Tsipras, it is essential to provide a comprehensive overview of the foreign policy orientations and significant diplomatic events that characterized Greece prior to his premiership. Greece has historically maintained a pro-European and Western-oriented foreign policy framework, firmly aligning itself with multilateral institutions such as the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the United Nations. Post-Cold War, successive Greek governments have positioned the country as a key stabilizing actor in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean, often using its EU membership as diplomatic leverage in regional affairs (Tziampiris, 2013). Within this broader multilateral context, the long-standing Macedonia naming dispute emerged as a defining and politically charged issue that deeply influenced Greece's foreign policy posture.

The Macedonia dispute stems from the early 1990s, following the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the declaration of independence by the newly formed Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

Greece opposed the use of the name "Macedonia," citing concerns about potential territorial claims over its northern region of the same name and the appropriation of Hellenic cultural heritage (Mazower, 2000; Hatzis, 2018). The issue quickly galvanized public opinion: the 1992 protest in Thessaloniki drew over one million demonstrators, making it one of the largest nationalist mobilizations in modern Greek history. This protest marked the beginning of a deeply emotive national narrative that would shape foreign policy discourse for decades (Reuters, 2018). In the diplomatic arena, successive governments adopted varying strategies to address the naming issue. Costas Simitis (1996–2004) pursued a moderate line, participating in UN-sponsored negotiations and promoting the "Composite Name" proposal that would include a geographical qualifier to distinguish the new state from Greece's own Macedonia region (Balkan Insight, 2008). However, despite this openness to compromise, public opposition and political risks hindered progress. Karamanlis (2004–2009) adopted a more assertive strategy, particularly during FYROM's bid for NATO membership. At the 2008 Bucharest Summit, Greece exercised its veto to block FYROM's accession, citing the unresolved dispute as a key obstacle. Karamanlis famously declared that "Macedonia is a Greek name, and it cannot be taken by anyone else," signaling a hardened diplomatic posture (The Guardian, 2008; Hatzopoulos, 2008).

George Papandreou's tenure (2009–2011) saw a return to dialogue and multilateral engagement, reflecting the priorities of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). Papandreou promoted the Balkan Stability Pact and initiated talks with FYROM's leadership, including Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, though no significant breakthrough was achieved (Alivizatos, 2011; Mavroudi, 2010). His foreign policy emphasized regional cooperation, though constrained by mounting domestic economic crises.

In contrast, Antonis Samaras, Prime Minister from 2012 to early 2015, adopted a firmly nationalist stance. A longstanding opponent of compromise on the Macedonia issue, Samaras declared, "We will not accept any name that contains the term Macedonia" (BBC, 2013). Under his leadership, Greece used its position in the EU and NATO to exert diplomatic pressure on FYROM, conditioning further Euro-Atlantic

integration on resolution of the naming dispute. Foreign Minister Evangelos Venizelos reinforced this policy line while participating in various diplomatic forums to ensure that Greece's strategic concerns remained central to EU engagement with the Western Balkans (Venizelos, 2013).

Throughout this period, the naming dispute remained a rare point of bipartisan agreement in Greek politics, with successive administrations—whether center-left or center-right—committed to resisting international recognition of the name "Macedonia" without a mutually acceptable resolution. Negotiations facilitated by the United Nations, led by Special Envoy Matthew Nimetz, produced a range of proposals, but none were accepted by Greek officials, who viewed them as either insufficient or compromising to national identity (Nimetz, 2014). Public discourse and parliamentary debates consistently reflected the salience of the issue, with political leaders frequently invoking the "Macedonian Issue" to reinforce nationalist credentials. Large-scale protests, such as those held in 1992 and again in 2018, underscored the enduring emotional and symbolic power of the dispute in Greek public consciousness (Balkan Insight, 2013; Reuters, 2018).

Greek diplomatic foreign policy preceding Alexis Tsipras was shaped by a strong commitment to multilateral institutions and a consistent, cross-partisan stance on the Macedonia issue. While Papandreou's and Simitis's governments leaned toward negotiated compromise, Karamanlis and Samaras adopted a more intransigent line that leveraged Greece's institutional influence in NATO and the EU. These patterns reveal the political and diplomatic risks involved in altering the status quo, setting the stage for the significance of Tsipras's later approach. The historical context of Greek foreign policy—both in terms of its multilateral commitments and entrenched nationalist pressures—offers essential insight into the ways Tsipras's strategy marked both continuity and rupture with previous diplomatic traditions.

6.2.3 Tsipras's Populist Leadership in Practice: Diplomacy and the Prespes Agreement

The Prespes Agreement, signed in June 2018 between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), stands as one of the most significant diplomatic achievements of Alexis Tsipras's tenure. This landmark accord resolved a long-standing dispute over the name "Macedonia," a central and highly emotive issue in Greek foreign policy that had persisted for nearly three decades. By officially renaming the country the Republic of North Macedonia, Tsipras demonstrated a pragmatic and conciliatory approach to diplomacy. He signaled a willingness to challenge entrenched nationalist narratives in pursuit of regional stability and European integration. Despite the fierce domestic opposition it provoked, especially from nationalist factions and parts of his governing coalition, the Prespes Agreement offers a compelling case through which to analyze the tensions and contradictions of populist leadership in the realm of foreign policy diplomacy.

The Macedonia naming dispute originated in the early 1990s after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Greece strongly opposed the use of the name "Macedonia" by its northern neighbor, asserting that it implied territorial claims over the northern Greek region of the same name and appropriated significant aspects of Hellenic cultural heritage, including its association with Alexander the Great (Katz, 2018; Koneska, 2019; Hatzis, 2018). For successive Greek governments, the issue was not only diplomatic but also existential, invoking questions of sovereignty, identity, and national pride. As noted, former Prime Minister Antonis Samaras (2012–2015) epitomized this hardline approach, declaring, "We will never allow the name Macedonia to be used by our neighbors" (Samaras, 2013), and exercising Greece's veto in NATO and EU forums to block FYROM's membership aspirations (Koneska, 2019).

Against this backdrop, Tsipras's approach marked a significant departure. Upon taking office in January 2015, Tsipras framed the dispute not merely as a nationalist grievance but as an impediment to Greece's broader strategic goals. He stated:

"*For 27 years, we had locked ourselves into a dead-end. My government was determined to find a solution based on compromise, which would ensure the dignity of both peoples involved*" (Tsipras, 2018).

His leadership reflected a recalibration of priorities, privileging regional cooperation, European alignment, and diplomatic pragmatism.

Central to Tsipras's operational strategy was direct engagement with FYROM's Prime Minister Zoran Zaev. Their personal rapport was instrumental in building trust and momentum toward a resolution. Tsipras asserted, "Dialogue is the only path to find a solution that honors both peoples" (Tsipras, 2018). Zaev echoed this sentiment: "We are ready for compromise, but it must be mutual" (Zaev, 2018). This bilateral commitment to diplomacy, supported by political synchronicity between two left-leaning governments, created a unique window of opportunity.

To support the negotiation process, Tsipras appointed a dedicated diplomatic task force led by Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias and Deputy Foreign Minister Georgios Katrougalos. Kotzias, founder of the left-nationalist Pratto movement, played a pivotal role despite not being formally affiliated with SYRIZA. His ideological proximity to SYRIZA's anti-austerity and anti-elite platform made him a politically aligned yet independent actor. Kotzias emphasized that the agreement was about "building a future based on mutual respect" (Kotzias, 2018). In June 2015, Kotzias met with FYROM Minister Nikola Poposki and stated:

"*This is the fourth time we have met to talk about the good relations we must develop between our countries... I think that we two have already gained this trust*" (Kotzias, 2015).

Kotzias' geopolitical rationale was also shaped by broader strategic concerns. As Alexis Heraclides explained in an interview, Kotzias "was absolutely convinced that Turkey is the great threat and that was the reason why he tried to reach a compromise" (Interview, Heraclides, 6 July 2022). He feared Turkish influence in the Balkans if Greece failed to normalize relations with its northern neighbor. Heraclides further noted Kotzias "had to sell it to the Greek party [SYRIZA]" and understood that despite some

Greek views, "he could not reach the point where the other side, the Macedonians, were humiliated" (Interview, Heraclides, 6 July 2022). The timing of the rapprochement, coinciding with left-wing governments in both countries, facilitated the necessary political alignment for diplomatic success.

Public communication was another key pillar of Tsipras's strategy. Understanding the high potential for nationalist backlash, he pursued an aggressive media campaign to frame the agreement not as a concession but as a strategic win. "We are not giving away our history; we are expanding our future," Tsipras insisted (Tsipras, 2018). Political analyst Dimitris Koutsoumbas observed, "Effective communication is essential in turning public sentiment toward acceptance of difficult compromises" (Koutsoumbas, 2019). Tsipras also encouraged public debate and academic participation, seeking to create a broader sense of legitimacy. As Thanos Veremis noted, "a wide-ranging discussion involving various stakeholders was crucial for legitimizing the agreement" (Veremis, 2019).

Coalition management presented one of Tsipras's most significant challenges. His junior coalition partner, Panos Kammenos of the Independent Greeks party, initially tolerated the dialogue but later withdrew support, labeling the agreement "a national capitulation" (Kammenos, 2018). This fissure exemplified the populist dilemma: reconciling nationalist expectations with pragmatic governance.

Public opposition was fierce and widespread. Protests erupted in major cities, with demonstrators asserting that the agreement represented a betrayal of Greek heritage. One protester stated,

"*We cannot allow our heritage to be stolen. Macedonia is Greek, and no government has the right to negotiate that away*" (Al Jazeera, 2018).

These demonstrations underscored the emotive power of national identity and the political risks Tsipras faced.

Despite this, Tsipras defended the agreement forcefully, arguing:

"*This is a historic step forward for both nations. It opens the door for stability in the Balkans, strengthens our position in the region, and allows us to build a more cooperative future with our neighbors*" (Tsipras, 2018).

The geopolitical benefits were also acknowledged by external observers. Chris Loukas, a reporter for Kokkino Radio, commented:

"*It was huge for Europe. They needed to unblock the whole Northern Macedonia issue... It was good for the Americans, it was good for Greece. It's just as good as it can get*" (Interview, Loukas, 24 May 2022).

Tsipras also sought international validation. He engaged European Union leaders and NATO officials, emphasizing the agreement's strategic value for regional security. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg praised the deal as "a victory for diplomacy and cooperation" (Stoltenberg, 2018). This external backing not only legitimized the agreement but also demonstrated Tsipras's capacity to align national initiatives with broader transatlantic interests.

Taken together, the Prespes Agreement illustrates the multifaceted nature of Tsipras's diplomatic strategy: bilateral negotiations, strategic communication, coalition bargaining, civil society engagement, and international coordination. The agreement offers a compelling case of how populist leaders may diverge from nationalist orthodoxy when political opportunity structures and broader strategic imperatives align. As Heraclides (2020) concludes, the Prespes Agreement "challenges traditional nationalist narratives" and represents a rare instance of conflict resolution driven by pragmatic leadership. It demonstrates that populist leadership, often associated with ideological rigidity, can also facilitate transformative diplomacy. The case of Tsipras exemplifies the tension between symbolic populist claims and the practical requirements of statecraft, particularly when national identity and regional stability are at stake.

6.2.4 Counter-Narratives, Elite Contestation, and the Rationale for Case Selection

The selection of the Prespes Agreement as a primary case study is justified by its status as a site of extreme domestic polarization, where the requirements of international statesmanship directly collided with the foundational nationalist narratives of Greek populism (Skoulariki, 2020). To appreciate the robustness of this case, it must be viewed against the baseline of the Greek nationalist orthodoxy that had dominated the naming dispute for nearly three decades. This consensus was anchored by the conservative New Democracy (ND) party. For example, former Prime Minister Antonis Samaras established a rigid position of non-compromise, explicitly stating, "We will not accept any name that contains the term Macedonia" (BBC, 2013). By breaking this long-standing bipartisan consensus, Tsipras engaged in a form of diplomatic rupture that was viewed by the political establishment not as progress, but as a fundamental betrayal of national identity (Samaras, 2013; Kofos, 1999).

The significance of this case is further underscored by the intra-coalition rupture it provoked. The junior coalition partner, Panos Kammenos of the Independent Greeks (ANEL), who had previously been credited with "saving Alexis' roller coaster from derailing," ultimately labeled the agreement a "national capitulation" (To Vima, 2015; Kammenos, 2018). The press captured this friction vividly, with the *Financial Times* reporting that the "Greek coalition spat" over the naming issue threatened to undermine the entire diplomatic effort and the stability of the government (Hope, 2018). Kammenos's eventual exit from the government and the subsequent motion of no-confidence—which Tsipras narrowly survived—demonstrate the immense political cost of this policy shift (Borrelli, 2018; Koutantou and Maltezou, 2019).

Furthermore, the scale of public resistance, evidenced by the "Macedonia is Greek" protests that drew over a million demonstrators, serves as a vital empirical indicator of the constraints on populist agency (Reuters, 2018). Opposition rhetoric in the press often reduced the complex negotiations to a moral binary, with protesters asserting through media outlets like *Al Jazeera* that "no government has the right to negotiate" away Greek heritage (Al Jazeera, 2018).

By situating the Prespes Agreement within this environment of fierce opposition, the study provides a robust test for Theoretical Proposition 3 (TP3): it illustrates a rare moment where a populist leader prioritized systemic stability and the containment of regional rivals over the immediate domestic rewards of nationalist mobilization. Unlike the economic "U-turn" of 2015, which was largely forced by external creditors, the Prespes Agreement was a voluntary strategic choice, making it an essential case for understanding how populist leadership filters systemic pressures through a sieve of intense domestic contestation.

6.3 Case Study: The U.S. and Diplomacy

6.3.1 Diplomatic Foreign Policy Preceding Donald Trump

This section examines the diplomatic strategies of U.S. presidents preceding Donald Trump, providing crucial context for understanding his distinctive approach to international relations, particularly in Middle Eastern diplomacy and initiatives such as the Abraham Accords. The analysis focuses on the foreign policy frameworks established by Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, emphasizing their roles in shaping U.S. diplomatic engagement with key Middle Eastern stakeholders.

Following the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy underwent a transformative shift characterized by a commitment to multilateralism and international cooperation. President George H.W. Bush's administration marked the transition from a bipolar to a unipolar world, establishing the United States as the dominant global power. Bush articulated a vision of a "new world order" that emphasized collective security and international coalitions (Bush, 1990). His administration played a pivotal role in building alliances, most notably during the Gulf War, when the U.S. successfully assembled a broad coalition to counter Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (Walt, 1991). Bush's foreign policy also laid foundational groundwork for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, recognizing the need for a lasting peace in the region. The 1991 Madrid Conference brought Israel, the Palestinians, and neighboring Arab states into direct negotiations, establishing a diplomatic framework that, despite its challenges and limited immediate outcomes, influenced subsequent U.S. administrations (Klein, 2006).

President Bill Clinton advanced this framework with a more hands-on engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. His administration oversaw several critical milestones, including the 1993 Oslo Accords, which established the Palestinian Authority and set parameters for ongoing negotiations (Baker, 1994). Clinton famously emphasized dialogue's importance, stating, "We must be partners in peace, not adversaries" (Clinton, 1994). However, the 2000 Camp David Summit ended without a comprehensive agreement, resulting in renewed violence and highlighting enduring issues of mistrust and misalignment among the parties (Pappé, 2006). Clinton's involvement underscored a continued U.S. commitment to diplomacy, even amid persistent complexities.

The presidency of George W. Bush represented a shift toward unilateralism and security-centric policies, especially in the wake of the September 11 attacks. The administration's "War on Terror" narrative often overshadowed diplomatic efforts in the Middle East. Nonetheless, Bush sought to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process through the 2003 "Roadmap for Peace," a phased plan aimed at resuming negotiations and achieving a two-state solution (Bush, 2003). Despite this, the security-driven military

interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq complicated U.S. neutrality in the conflict and fostered skepticism among Arab states regarding American intentions (Mearsheimer, 2005). This environment constrained diplomatic progress and strained U.S. relations with key regional actors.

President Barack Obama sought to recalibrate U.S. foreign policy with an emphasis on engagement and diplomacy, particularly in the Middle East. His 2009 Cairo speech symbolized this approach, calling for a "new beginning" in U.S.-Muslim relations by acknowledging historical grievances and promoting mutual respect (Obama, 2009). A hallmark of his administration's diplomatic efforts was the negotiation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief (Obama, 2015). While the JCPOA marked a significant diplomatic milestone, it also generated tension with key regional allies, notably Israel and Saudi Arabia. Despite these diplomatic efforts, Obama's administration grappled with persistent instability across the region, including conflicts in Syria and Libya, alongside ongoing Israeli-Palestinian tensions. Critics argue that while Obama publicly endorsed a two-state solution, his administration struggled to make substantive advances in peace negotiations, reflecting the enduring challenges of the geopolitical landscape (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Although the Abraham Accords were formalized during the Trump administration, the diplomatic groundwork for normalized relations between Israel and several Arab states was laid during these prior presidencies. Initiatives promoted by Clinton, the Bush "Roadmap for Peace," and Obama's engagement strategy contributed to an environment conducive to such breakthroughs. A shared regional concern—namely Iran's expanding influence—intensified during Obama's tenure, underscoring the strategic necessity for cooperation between Israel and Gulf states. The limitations of the JCPOA in curbing Iran's ambitions and the rise of Iranian-aligned militant groups reinforced this imperative (Al Jazeera, 2020). Former national security advisor John Bolton underscored this continuity, stating, "The Accords were the product of years of behind-the-scenes diplomacy, some of which originated in earlier administrations"

(Bolton, 2020). His observation highlights the gradual evolution of U.S. policy objectives, setting the stage for the dramatic shifts introduced by the Trump administration.

Overall, the diplomatic foreign policy approaches of Bush, Clinton, Bush Jr., and Obama reveal a complex interplay between multilateralism and unilateralism, with varying degrees of commitment to traditional alliances and international cooperation. Their collective efforts reflect a broader belief in collaborative frameworks, though their application fluctuated according to shifting political contexts. The diplomatic foundation they established is essential to understanding the transformative changes Donald Trump brought to U.S. foreign policy, especially his skepticism toward multilateral agreements and traditional alliances, which will be explored in the subsequent section.

6.3.2 Overview of Trump's Populist Leadership in Foreign Policy

Donald Trump’s foreign policy represented a radical rupture from his predecessors, not merely in outcome but through the process of "leaderisation" (Aggestam and Hedling, 2020). This involves the centralization of decision-making within a tight inner circle, effectively bypassing traditional bureaucratic protocols and the State Department. While prior presidents utilized hegemonic power to support multilateralism, Trump’s "America First" doctrine introduced a "new philosophy" of transactionalism and bilateralism (O'Hanlon, 2022).

His strategy was distinct in its embrace of "permanent destabilization," utilizing an ethos of "No friends, No enemies" to leverage American power over both adversaries and allies (Goldberg, 2018). Critics who argue his strategy was a function of U.S. size overlook that previous administrations with the same power chose internationalism. Trump’s decision to exit the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and renegotiate NAFTA into the USMCA reflects an ideological shift toward selective international engagement aimed at maximizing national advantage through coercive leverage.

The administration exhibited a marked willingness to destabilize long-standing alliances in favor of what it perceived as American advantage. Officials candidly noted that "permanent destabilization creates American advantage," signaling an approach that embraced strategic unpredictability (Goldberg, 2018). Contrasting with the multilateralism championed by leaders such as Obama and George W. Bush, Trump favored bilateral negotiations, emphasizing transactionalism over alliance-building. A staff member remarked on this shift, stating, "Obama apologized to everyone for everything… [Trump] doesn't feel like he has to apologize for anything America does" (Goldberg, 2018). This stance conveyed a focus on strength, sovereignty, and a rejection of perceived weakness in diplomacy.

Trump's economic diplomacy reflected this orientation. His withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which he dismissed as "bad deals" for the U.S., exemplified his intent to renegotiate or abandon international agreements deemed unfavorable (Noland, 2018). He pressured NATO allies to increase defense spending and recalibrated U.S. financial commitments, reflecting a broader skepticism toward multilateralism and burden-sharing (Kaufman, 2017; Benitez, 2019). The renegotiation of NAFTA into the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) further asserted the administration's insistence on securing favorable terms through tough negotiations (Alschner and Panford-Walsh, 2019). Distinctively, Trump preferred "personal diplomacy" over traditional diplomatic channels, engaging directly with world leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, and Kim Jong-un (Gearan, DeYoung, and Sonmez, 2018). This strategy circumvented established bureaucratic protocols and centralized foreign policy decision-making within a tight inner circle.

In the Middle East, Trump's administration adopted an explicitly pro-Israel stance, reversing several policies of the Obama era that had strained bilateral ties (Abdiel, 2020; Klein and Berney, 2021). The recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the embassy's relocation there underscored a symbolic and substantive commitment to Israel, signaling a recalibration of U.S. priorities in the region. Trump's

withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) highlighted a confrontational posture toward Iran and set the stage for the Abraham Accords—historic normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab states (Forgey, 2020; Trigano, 2021; Jeffrey, 2023). As former RAND doctoral fellow Dr. Michael Shires noted, "the whole world was pretending like the Iran deal was somehow going to solve the problem and all it really did was kick it down the road 5 or 10 years" (Shires, Interview, September 23, 2022).

These shared concerns over Iranian influence created an opening for Arab-Israeli reconciliation. Trump's administration reframed regional diplomacy by prioritizing security cooperation against Iran, moving away from the traditional Israel-Palestine conflict-centric approach. Former Secretary of State John Kerry presciently observed in 2016, "There will be no separate peace between Israel and the Arab world," contrasting with Trump's emphasis on forging direct relationships grounded in mutual security concerns (Kerry, 2016).

Key figures such as Jared Kushner and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo were instrumental in advancing the normalization talks. A high-ranking military officer who served under multiple administrations reflected on the difference in leadership style, stating:

"*The difference between [Obama] and Trump, Trump didn't maneuver. He put guys in place… True populist appointees… he's got an inner circle that nobody knows. No, he didn't do the traditional, they're not there for their brain power, they're not there for their political clout*" (Interview, anonymous high-ranking military officer, September 26, 2022).

Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, recognized that addressing Arab states' fears of Iranian aggression was central to regional stability (Guzansky and Marshall, 2020). This focus culminated in the UAE's announcement in August 2020 to normalize relations with Israel, followed by Bahrain in September 2020. Trump heralded these developments as historic breakthroughs, declaring, "We're here this afternoon to change the course of history" (Trump, 2020). Expert assessments of the Abraham Accords vary. Michael O'Hanlon acknowledged their importance but cautioned against overstating their novelty:

"*I would give the Trump administration credit for the Abraham Accords, but I don't think they're a huge deal in the sense that we were already working towards some degree of collaboration*" (O'Hanlon, Interview, September 18, 2022).

This view suggests the Accords were more an acceleration of ongoing trends than a radical policy departure. Trigano (2021) frames the Accords as signaling a broader geopolitical realignment in the Middle East, aligning Israel with Sunni Arab states against shared threats. Overall, Trump's diplomatic leadership reflected a break from conventional statecraft—embracing an unconventional, transactional, and bilateral style. His reliance on personal diplomacy and direct engagement sought to advance American interests outside traditional multilateral frameworks. The Abraham Accords exemplify the potential and limitations of this approach, underscoring a possible reconfiguration of U.S. diplomacy with enduring implications for the region and global order. Yet, the complexities and contradictions inherent in Trump's strategy raise critical questions about the sustainability and coherence of populist diplomacy on the world stage.

6.4 Comparative Analysis of Diplomatic Foreign Policy in Populist Contexts

The diplomatic strategies pursued by Alexis Tsipras in Greece and Donald Trump in the United States offer critical insights into how populist leadership interacts with international affairs. This section systematically compares their approaches through the lens of shared populist themes, divergent strategies, and contextual constraints. Drawing on the theoretical tools outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, it uses discourse analysis and Hermann's typology to unpack how each leader recalibrated foreign policy priorities in line with nationalist narratives and political imperatives.

6.4.1 Shared Themes in Populist Diplomacy

While both leaders utilized populist rhetoric, their diplomatic applications were context specific. Tsipras utilized the signifier of 'national dignity' to justify a pragmatic resolution of the Macedonia dispute as a means of restoring Greek regional influence. Though criticized domestically, the accord was presented as

a pragmatic solution that advanced national interest and regional stability: “We have turned a page in our relations with our neighbor” (Tsipras, 2018). In doing so, Tsipras appealed to popular sentiment while pursuing a goal with long-term diplomatic payoff. Trump’s foreign policy was dominated by the “America First” doctrine, which portrayed international institutions and traditional allies as impediments to American sovereignty. His pursuit of the Abraham Accords—a series of normalization agreements between Israel and Arab states—reflected a transactional approach that celebrated national advantage over multilateral consensus. Trump characterized these moves as a historic departure from “decades of failure” in Middle East diplomacy (Trump, 2020).

Despite differing regional focuses and institutional contexts, both leaders sought to reassert national autonomy and circumvent traditional elite-driven diplomatic processes, as summarized in **Figure 5.**

Figure 5: Comparative Dimensions of Populist Diplomacy – Tsipras vs. Trump

Category	Alexis Tsipras (Greece)	Donald Trump (USA)
Populist Diplomatic Rhetoric	Restore Greek pride and sovereignty; resist EU-imposed identity constraints; champion “people’s dignity”	“America First”; reject multilateralism; assert U.S. dominance and autonomy
Primary Target of Blame	EU elites and nationalist opposition; historical legacy of unresolved disputes (e.g., Macedonia issue)	Multilateral institutions (UN, NATO), previous administrations, traditional allies seen as exploitative
Framing of the ‘People’	Greeks misrepresented or betrayed by previous governments; nation with rightful historical claim	Forgotten Americans misled by political elites; U.S. citizens burdened by foreign entanglements
Diplomatic Tools Used	High-level bilateral negotiations; diplomatic task force; soft power; civil society engagement	Direct bilateral deals; leader-to-leader diplomacy; coercive leverage (sanctions, threats); transactional framing
Institutional Constraints	EU membership, coalition tensions (e.g., with Kammenos); pressure from nationalist protests	Greater executive leeway; weak institutional checks on foreign policy; personal control over inner circle

Alternative Alliances Explored	Outreach to North Macedonia and regional Balkans; balanced stance within EU/NATO	Strategic rapprochement between Israel and Arab Gulf states; distance from traditional partners like Germany
Outcome/Policy Shift Type	Pragmatic resolution (Prespes Agreement); national goal recalibrated toward regional stability	Structural redefinition of alliances; shift in U.S. diplomatic focus from Palestine to broader regional realignment
Rhetoric vs. Reality	Populist rhetoric softened in favor of diplomatic compromise; faced backlash but achieved resolution	Rhetoric mostly aligned with actions; reshaped U.S. diplomacy through high-profile accords without multilateral buy-in

6.5.2 Domestic Political Contexts Influencing Diplomatic Strategies

While united by populist discourse, Tsipras and Trump diverged significantly in execution, shaped by institutional constraints and geopolitical positioning. Tsipras, operating in a crisis-prone and EU-integrated Greece, had limited room for maneuver. The diplomatic breakthrough of the Prespes Agreement required careful coalition management and incurred political costs. Opposition from nationalist factions and institutional pressure from Brussels limited the transformative potential of his foreign policy. In contrast, Trump operated from a structurally powerful position with fewer institutional roadblocks. Backed by a loyal political base and wielding significant executive control over foreign policy, Trump adopted a bolder posture. His diplomatic style emphasized leader-to-leader interactions and minimized the role of professional diplomats and multilateral institutions.This divergence is further clarified using Hermann's typology (Figure 6), which illustrates that Trump's diplomacy marked goal and orientation changes, while Tsipras's strategies remained more programmatic and constrained by institutional boundaries.

Figure 6: Application of Hermann's Levels of Foreign Policy Change (Diplomatic Foreign Policy)

Hermann's Level of Change	Alexis Tsipras (Greece)	Donald Trump (USA)
Adjustment Change	Used familiar diplomatic channels but with more conciliatory tone in talks with FYROM	Maintained U.S. engagement in Middle East diplomacy while changing tone and personnel
Program Change	Created a diplomatic task force led by Kotzias to facilitate focused bilateral negotiations	Replaced multilateral diplomacy with bilateral dealmaking and personal leader-to-leader ties
Problem/Goal Change	Reframed Greece's objective from preserving symbolic national identity to achieving long-term regional stability	Shifted goal from resolving Israeli-Palestinian conflict to broader Arab-Israeli normalization based on shared threats
International Orientation Change	Did not fundamentally shift Greece's orientation; remained committed to EU/NATO frameworks	Departed from decades of U.S. policy by sidelining the Palestinian issue and reshaping regional alignments around Iran threat.

6.5.3 Institutional and Domestic Mediators

Tsipras's ability to implement diplomatic change was shaped by the fragility of his coalition government and the contentious legacy of Greek nationalism. He had to balance populist appeals with institutional credibility, particularly within the EU. The Prespes Agreement, while diplomatically significant, came at a high political cost and exposed the volatility of blending populism with international compromise.

Trump, by contrast, benefitted from a more consolidated domestic position. His combative rhetoric and disdain for multilateralism aligned with the sentiments of his political base. With limited institutional

pushback, Trump operated with high autonomy, shaping foreign policy through personal relationships and often bypassing traditional diplomatic processes. Social media and campaign rallies were used to validate diplomatic decisions to the public in real time. These mediating factors underscore the neoclassical realist insight that foreign policy is not merely an extension of international structure but is deeply conditioned by domestic institutional and political factors.

6.5.4 Populist Diplomacy in Context

Ultimately, the cases of Tsipras and Trump illustrate how populist diplomacy reflects both ideological intent and contextual constraint. Tsipras's engagement with North Macedonia, while framed as nationalist, involved concessions and institutionally bound compromise. Trump's foreign policy, by contrast, was marked by rhetorical and structural shifts that challenged post-Cold War diplomatic norms.
These differences affirm that populist foreign policy is shaped by both agency and structure. Populist leaders may share a rhetorical emphasis on sovereignty and identity, but their capacity to translate this discourse into durable diplomatic change depends on state power, institutional design, and the geopolitical environment.

This comparison also contributes to the broader literature on populism and international relations by highlighting the heterogeneity of populist foreign policy strategies. While both leaders advanced nationalist agendas, the methods and consequences of their diplomatic engagements varied sharply, raising important questions about the sustainability and coherence of populist foreign policy in a complex international system.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the nuanced relationship between populist leadership and diplomatic foreign policy, elucidating the ways in which populist ideologies inform and reshape international relations.

Through the case studies of Greece under Alexis Tsipras and the United States under Donald Trump, the analysis highlights the distinct diplomatic strategies employed by populist leaders and the broader implications for global engagements and multilateral cooperation.

The findings reveal that populist leaders often adopt a dualistic approach to diplomacy, marked by a simultaneous appeal to national sovereignty and a willingness to engage with non-traditional allies. In Tsipras's case, his attempts to diversify Greece's alliances, particularly with Russia and China, reflect a pragmatic approach to foreign policy amidst economic constraints and a desire to assert national interests (Liaras, 2018). This strategy, however, coexists with a commitment to European integration, illustrating the complexities inherent in populist leadership. As Karyotis and Gerodimos (2019) note, "the populist leader's balancing act often results in a reconfiguration of existing alliances rather than a complete departure from established norms."In stark contrast, Trump's foreign policy epitomizes a more radical departure from traditional diplomatic norms. His administration's emphasis on bilateralism over multilateralism, exemplified by withdrawals from key international agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal, underscores a profound skepticism towards established international institutions (Hoffman, 2020). Trump's rhetorical framing of foreign policy, wherein he prioritizes American interests above collective global objectives, has not only reshaped U.S. alliances but has also emboldened other nations to pursue independent and sometimes adversarial diplomatic strategies (Smith, 2019). As noted by Mounk (2018), "the retreat from multilateralism raises significant questions about the future of global governance and cooperative frameworks."

The comparative analysis further reveals that while both leaders exhibit populist tendencies, their diplomatic maneuvers yield divergent outcomes in terms of international engagement. Tsipras's outreach to non-traditional allies may be viewed as a tactical maneuver to gain leverage within the EU, whereas Trump's confrontational approach has resulted in increased tensions with traditional allies and a reconfiguration of global power dynamics (Lind, 2020). The implications of these contrasting strategies

emphasize the potential for populist leadership to lead to a fragmented global order, characterized by competing national interests and diminished collaborative efforts to address shared challenges.

In light of the findings presented in this chapter, several directions for future research are warranted. First, a deeper exploration of the long-term impacts of populist diplomacy on international institutions is necessary, particularly as populism continues to rise globally. Investigating the resilience of multilateral frameworks in adapting to these challenges could provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of global governance. Second, further studies could examine the domestic political factors that drive populist leaders' diplomatic choices, particularly how electoral pressures and public sentiment shape foreign policy decisions. The interplay between populism and diplomatic foreign policy not only affects individual countries but also reverberates across the global stage, shaping international relations in ways that demand continued scholarly attention. The evolving nature of populist diplomacy poses significant challenges for the future of global order, underscoring the necessity for adaptive strategies that foster collaboration and rebuild trust in international institutions.

Chapter 7: Immigration Policy in Populist leadership

7.1 Introduction

Immigration policy has become a central arena in contemporary political discourse, deeply entwined with questions of national identity, security, and international cooperation. In the context of rising populist leadership, leaders such as Alexis Tsipras in Greece and Donald Trump in the United States have leveraged immigration as a key issue shaping their domestic legitimacy and foreign policy agendas. Their approaches illuminate how populist narratives and institutional constraints interact to produce distinct immigration foreign policies with significant ramifications for international relations.

During Tsipras's tenure, Greece confronted the acute challenges of the European migrant crisis, positioning the country as both a frontline state and a humanitarian actor. His government's immigration strategy reflected a complex balancing act: managing the practical demands of border control and refugee processing while responding to EU mandates and growing domestic anti-immigrant sentiment. Measures such as maintaining the border fence and establishing a dedicated immigration ministry underscored this tension, as Tsipras sought to uphold humanitarian commitments without ceding national sovereignty (Dinas & Gemenis, 2019; Rygiel, 2018). In contrast, Donald Trump's immigration policy marked a pronounced shift toward securitization and exclusion. Grounded in the "America First" populist doctrine, Trump's administration pursued aggressive border enforcement, including the construction of a border wall, implementation of the "zero tolerance" family separation policy, and restrictive travel bans targeting specific countries. These policies reflected a nativist framing of immigration as a threat to national security and cultural identity, resonating strongly with his political base and reshaping U.S. immigration foreign policy (Cisneros, 2020; Dyer, 2021).

This chapter investigates the immigration foreign policies of Tsipras and Trump, focusing on how their populist leadership shaped policy objectives, strategies, and outcomes. It explores the interplay between domestic political pressures, institutional capacities, and international frameworks that conditioned their policy choices. Through a comparative lens, the chapter analyzes the implications of their immigration policies for national identity construction and international cooperation. The chapter is structured to first outline the theoretical framework guiding the analysis of immigration policy under populist regimes. It then situates the cases within their respective historical and political contexts before presenting detailed comparative analysis of their approaches to immigration crises. Finally, the chapter concludes with reflections on the broader implications of populist immigration policies for global engagement and the evolving norms of international relations. By unpacking these themes, this chapter contributes to a nuanced understanding of how populist ideologies not only shape domestic immigration agendas but also

redefine foreign policy priorities and international interactions in an era of heightened migration and geopolitical flux.

Building upon the analytical framework established in Section 3.5, this chapter applies the propositions of leaderisation and sovereignty-framing to the immigration domain. By utilizing the comparative baseline of predecessors established in Chapter 2 and expanded upon in Section 7.4.1, the following sections measure the degree of immigration policy change under Tsipras and Trump. While both leaders faced systemic pressures—such as the 2015 refugee crisis and regional instability—their specific strategic choices were dictated by their populist ideological roadmaps rather than material capacity alone.

7.2 Immigration Policy under Populist leadership

Immigration policy under populist leadership displays notable variations, shaped by nationalist rhetoric, securitization strategies, and reactive policymaking. However, as the cases of Alexis Tsipras in Greece and Donald Trump in the United States illustrate, populist approaches to immigration diverge significantly, shaped by distinct domestic political realities and international commitments. A defining feature of populist immigration discourse is the framing of migrants as threats to national identity, security, and social cohesion (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Populist leaders construct a dichotomy between “the pure people” and external “others,” portraying immigration as a challenge to cultural integrity and economic stability (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). While both Tsipras and Trump employed securitizing rhetoric to varying degrees, their policy responses reveal contrasting priorities shaped by institutional and geopolitical contexts.

In Greece, Tsipras’s government adopted a relatively open rhetorical stance toward migration, reflecting Greece’s frontline position during the 2015 refugee crisis and its obligations within the European Union. Although Tsipras maintained and reinforced the border fence along the Greek-Turkish frontier, this action

was framed primarily as compliance with EU border security requirements rather than outright exclusion (Karyotis, 2019). The establishment of the Ministry of Migration Policy in 2016 signaled a structured institutional response, balancing the exigencies of migration management with adherence to humanitarian principles (Papageorgiou, 2018). Tsipras's approach thus navigated the tension between asserting national sovereignty and fulfilling international responsibilities. By contrast, Trump's immigration policy was marked by a more explicit and exclusionary securitization, emblematic of his "America First" agenda (Norrander, 2020). The U.S.-Mexico border wall emerged as a potent symbol of this approach, coupled with aggressive policies such as the "zero tolerance" family separation policy, asylum restrictions, and travel bans targeting specific countries (Schneider, 2019; Bhabha, 2018). Trump's immigration strategy prioritized domestic political consolidation and nationalist electoral appeal over compliance with international legal frameworks, reflecting a unilateralist posture in immigration governance.

Populist leaders often respond to migration surges with reactive policies designed to project control and respond to public anxieties. In Greece, the refugee influx catalyzed institutional reforms and enhanced border enforcement measures, yet did not result in wholesale rejection of asylum seekers. In contrast, the Trump administration frequently leveraged migration crises to justify stringent deterrence policies, reinforcing securitized narratives that framed migrants as existential threats. Media and political rhetoric under populist regimes play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of immigration. Both Tsipras and Trump harnessed narratives that mobilized fears of cultural and economic displacement, portraying restrictive policies as defenses of the "authentic people" against external threats (Zaslove, 2008). However, while Trump's rhetoric significantly polarized public opinion and justified exclusionary measures, Tsipras's discourse reflected the complex balancing act of migration management within a supranational framework demanding both security and humanitarian responsiveness.

Immigration policy under populist leadership is not monolithic but varies according to domestic political imperatives and international constraints. Tsipras's approach exemplifies a populist leadership style that

combines sovereignty assertions with pragmatic institutional engagement and humanitarian considerations. In contrast, Trump's policy reflects a confrontational, exclusionary populism characterized by unilateralism and hardline securitization. This divergence underscores the importance of contextualizing populist immigration policies within their specific political and international environments.

7.4.1 Immigration Policy Preceding Alexis Tsipras

To understand the immigration policies enacted by Alexis Tsipras during his tenure, it is crucial to contextualize Greece's immigration landscape shaped by both domestic political developments and European Union (EU) frameworks. Historically a country of emigration, Greece transitioned over recent decades into a primary entry point for migrants and refugees, a transformation driven by geopolitical upheavals and its strategic location at the nexus between Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (Triandafyllidou, 2014; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008).

Prior to Tsipras, Greek immigration policy was shaped by key political figures navigating increasing migration flows amid severe economic constraints and evolving EU obligations. Under Prime Minister George Papandreou (2009–2011), early efforts focused on reforming asylum processes, including plans to establish a new asylum service to better manage rising refugee applications, as outlined in the 2011 Greek National Action Plan for Asylum and Migration Policy (Papandreou, 2011). However, the government's capacity to implement these reforms was severely limited by the intensifying financial crisis and associated austerity measures.

The subsequent administration of Antonis Samaras (2012–2015) marked a decisive shift toward securitization and stricter immigration controls. Samaras's government launched Operation Xenios Zeus in 2012, a police-led initiative aimed at expelling undocumented migrants and reinforcing border security

(Karyotis & Tazreiter, 2018). The construction of a border fence along the Evros River further exemplified this securitarian turn, eliciting criticism from human rights organizations concerned about the humanitarian impact on vulnerable populations (European Parliament, 2014). During this period, Nikos Dendias, as Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection, was a vocal proponent of tougher immigration policies, emphasizing cooperation with Turkey to curb irregular migration and framing immigration increasingly as a national security issue (Dendias, 2013). Simultaneously, Greece's immigration policy was shaped and constrained by EU regulations and agreements. The Dublin Regulation, which designates the first EU member state of entry as responsible for processing asylum claims, disproportionately burdened Greece, which lacked sufficient infrastructure and resources to manage the influx (European Commission, 2015). The 2015 European refugee crisis further exacerbated these pressures, with over 850,000 arrivals recorded in Greece that year alone (UNHCR, 2016). This surge exposed systemic weaknesses in Greece's immigration management and highlighted the limitations of EU solidarity mechanisms.

In June 2015, the European Council Summit underscored these challenges by urging Greece to improve its asylum system and enhance cooperation with other member states. However, tangible support to alleviate the strain on Greece was limited, intensifying domestic political tensions (European Council, 2015). Concurrently, groundwork was laid for the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, which institutionalized externalization of border controls by enabling Greece to return irregular migrants to Turkey in exchange for financial assistance and resettlement commitments (Fargues & Bonnet, 2018). This marked a critical turning point in EU migration policy, further complicating Greece's domestic governance of migration.

The refugee crisis exposed profound humanitarian challenges. Overcrowded and under-resourced camps, inadequate access to services, and persistent delays in asylum processing drew widespread international criticism (Hatzopoulos, 2016). The Samaras administration's focus on border enforcement coexisted with

calls from NGOs and international bodies for more robust humanitarian responses (Karyotis & Tazreiter, 2018). These tensions between security imperatives and humanitarian obligations framed the difficult policy environment inherited by Tsipras. The immigration policy landscape preceding Alexis Tsipras was characterized by Greece's evolving role from a country of emigration to a frontline migration gateway, shaped by domestic securitization efforts and significant EU policy constraints. The political legacies of Papandreou and Samaras established a framework of reactive and securitized immigration governance amid escalating refugee flows and institutional pressures. This context is indispensable for analyzing Tsipras's subsequent attempts to reconcile Greece's humanitarian responsibilities with domestic political and international pressures.

7.2.2 Tsipras's Immigration Policy: Promises, Challenges, and Realities

During the 2015 electoral campaign, Alexis Tsipras and the Syriza party positioned themselves as champions of the people, pledging to challenge the austerity measures imposed by the European Union (EU) and to foster a more inclusive society. Central to Tsipras's platform was a commitment to human rights, particularly regarding the humane treatment of migrants and refugees. He articulated a vision for Greece that rejected the prevailing narrative of exclusion, stating, *"We are all Europeans, and our history is one of hospitality"* (Tsipras, 2015). This rhetoric resonated deeply amid the European migration crisis, which saw over one million refugees and migrants arrive in Greece in 2015 alone, primarily fleeing conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. However, Tsipras's promises must be understood within Greece's complex historical relationship with immigration—a nation long serving as a gateway for migrants entering Europe, particularly from conflict-ridden regions. These demographic shifts and accompanying economic challenges prompted a multifaceted policy approach balancing integration and control (Niemann & Schreiber, 2018). Syriza's campaign positioned itself as a progressive alternative to prior governments that had often adopted restrictive responses to rising anti-immigrant sentiment.

To contextualize Tsipras's approach, it is essential to consider the immigration policies of preceding governments. The conservative New Democracy party, governing prior to Tsipras, enacted stringent immigration controls amid growing public discontent over migrant populations. These policies included the construction of detention centers and the implementation of push-back strategies at the borders (Lazaridis & Psimmenos, 2018). This period marked a pronounced shift toward securitization, with immigration increasingly framed as a national security threat necessary for social cohesion. In contrast, Tsipras's government initially aimed to shift this narrative. Following his election, he declared Greece a *"humanitarian corridor"* for refugees and pledged to uphold the rights of asylum seekers. Minister of Migration Policy Yannis Mouzalas emphasized, *"We will ensure that every refugee and immigrant is treated with dignity"* (Mouzalas, 2016). This commitment reflected a broader left-wing populist ethos emphasizing inclusivity and social justice, standing in stark opposition to previous exclusionary trends. The backdrop of austerity exacerbated challenges: economic instability fueled public fears about immigration, often framing migrants as competitors for jobs and social services. Expectations for Tsipras's administration included hopes for a more humane and inclusive immigration policy to counter prevailing exclusionary narratives. Comparative cases of populist leaders globally illustrate diverse approaches to immigration. Right-wing populists, such as Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Matteo Salvini in Italy, adopted hardline anti-immigrant stances emphasizing threats to national identity and security. Conversely, left-wing populists like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia embraced more inclusive rhetoric, advocating for marginalized groups and critiquing imperialism (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Given these patterns, anticipation surrounded Tsipras's election that he would align with left-wing populist inclusion, supported by his campaign's human rights and social justice commitments. Nonetheless, governance realities imposed significant constraints. The EU's strict immigration policies and rising nationalist sentiments across member states challenged reform efforts. The EU-Turkey deal, designed to curb migrant flows, framed much of Tsipras's operating environment, raising questions about the feasibility of his campaign promises amid external pressures. Historical

precedents show that populist leaders, even those initially advocating progressive immigration policies, often face domestic and international pressures that compel compromise (Levitsky & Roberts, 2011). Tsipras's leadership exemplifies the dynamics of left-wing populism in immigration policy. As Laclau (2005) notes, populism constructs a *"people"* in opposition to elites, and in the immigration context, migrants are framed as part of a collective struggle for rights. Tsipras sought to align Greek citizens and migrants as joint victims of neoliberal austerity, attempting to expand the populist people beyond national boundaries. Tsipras assumed office amid the European migration crisis, generating expectations of more humane policies consistent with his rhetoric. Yet the complexities of governance and external pressures soon revealed the difficulty of translating populist promises into policy realities. His tenure unfolded at the nexus of domestic populism and foreign policy, especially concerning immigration. This section draws on speeches, policy documents, interviews, and primary sources to analyze how Tsipras operationalized populist leadership during this turbulent period.

The transformation of Greece's immigration policy under Tsipras was multifaceted, shaped by pressing domestic challenges and significant international responsibilities amid the Syrian refugee crisis. His approach reflected a nuanced balancing act between humanitarian imperatives and national security concerns, navigating the complexities of European immigration policy during crisis. Recognizing Greece's geopolitical role as Europe's gateway, Tsipras's administration aimed for immediate humanitarian action alongside long-term strategic planning. Confronted by thousands of refugees arriving, Tsipras faced dual pressures to address humanitarian needs while managing domestic and European anxieties about migration and security. His policies married humanitarian principles with pragmatic border controls and cooperation with European partners.

Tsipras's populist rhetoric played a critical role in shaping immigration discourse. By framing migration not merely as a national issue but a European challenge, he sought to mobilize support for coordinated, equitable EU solutions. This approach underscored the tension between national interests and collective

responsibility, urging European solidarity to address mass migration. The ensuing analysis examines key legislative reforms, diplomatic initiatives, and policy moments illustrating Tsipras's navigation of immigration amid economic turmoil and political upheaval.

During bailout negotiations, Tsipras strategically leveraged immigration as a bargaining chip. Facing intense financial pressure and the threat of Eurozone exit, Greek officials framed migration management as crucial to European security and economic stability. Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias warned EU counterparts that Grexit risked unleashing *"tens of millions of immigrants and thousands of jihadists"* (Waterfield, 2015). This stark warning underscored Greece's pivotal frontline role and sought to compel EU concessions by linking economic and migration concerns (Triandafyllidou & Dimitriadi, 2018). Defense Minister Panos Kammenos echoed this, stating,
"If Europe leaves Greece alone, it will face a humanitarian disaster on its borders" (Kammenos, 2015). This strategic framing elevated immigration as a collective European problem, bolstering Tsipras's diplomatic position.

Tsipras sought alliances with Mediterranean countries facing similar migration challenges, fostering solidarity among frontline states like Italy, Spain, and Malta. He advocated more equitable refugee burden-sharing within the EU and aimed to position Greece as a mediator in migration debates. This included pushing for reforms to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) to better serve migrants and host countries (Mastrorillo et al., 2016). However, entrenched resistance from stricter immigration states limited Greece's influence, highlighting the tension between national interests and ideals of European solidarity.

Domestically, Tsipras faced criticism for his government's initial crisis management, with concerns about pressures on local communities and resource strains. Overcrowded camps and integration challenges fueled public tensions (Georgiou, 2016). Opposition parties like New Democracy exploited anxieties,

framing Tsipras as weak on immigration, which resonated with nationalist segments anxious about identity and cohesion. In response, Tsipras adopted more restrictive policies, including enhanced border controls and *"hotspots"* for asylum processing. This pragmatic shift aimed to balance public concerns with humanitarian commitments but sparked dissent within Syriza's left wing, some of whom accused the government of abandoning progressive principles (Mouzelis, 2018). Tsipras's immigration policy was thus marked by competing humanitarian ideals, strategic calculation, and domestic political realities. While initially emphasizing solidarity and compassion consistent with left-wing populism, economic constraints and shifting public sentiment forced policy adaptations. The use of immigration in foreign policy negotiations further complicated governance, underscoring the difficulty populist leaders face in reconciling bold rhetoric with pragmatic politics in complex international contexts.

A key example of this balancing act was the Evros border fence construction, emblematic of tensions between security imperatives and humanitarian commitments. Tsipras justified the fence as necessary to control migrant flows while affirming Greece's humanitarian responsibility:

"We are determined to ensure that our borders are secure while also providing the necessary humanitarian support to those in need" (Tsipras, 2016).

Human rights groups such as Amnesty International criticized this, viewing the fence as prioritizing security over asylum rights and warning it deepened migrant suffering (Amnesty International, 2017). This criticism highlighted the ethical dilemmas Greece faced.

The 2016 EU-Turkey Agreement further complicated Greece's position. While intended to manage migration, critics feared it reduced refugees' rights and dignity. Human rights advocate Giorgos Kouroumplis observed,

"The agreement has turned Greece into a holding pen for refugees, undermining their right to seek asylum" (Kouroumplis, 2016).

This concern illustrated the political trade-offs in externalizing border controls.

Internal dissent was palpable, with journalists and refugees alike highlighting discrepancies between government rhetoric and reality. A Greek journalist noted,

"While the government talks about compassion, many asylum seekers live in deplorable conditions" (Dimitriou, 2017).

Refugees shared similar frustrations: one Syrian refugee said,

"I came to Europe seeking safety, but now I feel trapped. The fence is a reminder that we are not welcome" (Al-Mansour, 2017).

These voices humanize the costs of Greece's dual approach—balancing order with humanitarian care.

Tsipras's government emphasized international cooperation, partnering with organizations like UNHCR and IOM to coordinate responses. He stressed,

"We cannot tackle this crisis alone; international cooperation is key to finding sustainable solutions" (Tsipras, 2017).

UNHCR officials recognized Greece's efforts: *"Greece's proactive stance... instrumental in mobilizing support and resources"* (Karamali, 2019).

The administration also created a national coordination mechanism to unify local authorities, NGOs, and international actors, enhancing humanitarian aid delivery (Papadopoulos, 2018). Collaboration with civil society was another hallmark of Tsipras's tenure. NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières provided vital medical and psychosocial support, supplementing government efforts. Eleni Takou, former Chief of Staff at the Ministry of Migration, observed,

"SYRIZA was more open to NGOs structurally" (Interview, Takou, 7 July 2022).

The Greek Council for Refugees reported,

"The collaboration with NGOs has enabled us to extend our reach and provide much-needed services" (Greek Council for Refugees, 2018).

Despite resource and funding challenges voiced by local NGOs (Dimitriou, 2019), this cooperation fostered resilience in Greece's humanitarian response.

The humanitarian-security balance under Tsipras's leadership revealed profound tensions and contradictions. The border fence and EU-Turkey Agreement exemplified the difficulties of maintaining ethical immigration policies amid political and security pressures. Greece's experience during this period underscores broader questions about the future of asylum and human rights in the context of migration. Tsipras's tenure marked a pivotal phase of adaptation for Greece at the intersection of immigration, diplomacy, and human rights. His policies influenced Greece's domestic path and shaped wider European migration debates. As migration remains a critical issue in Europe, Greece's experiences under Tsipras highlight the intricate balancing act required to reconcile security concerns, humanitarian imperatives, and international cooperation.

7.3 Case Study: Land of Immigrants? Immigration and the United States

7.3.1 Immigration Policy Preceding Donald Trump

To contextualize Donald Trump's immigration policies, it is essential to analyze the immigration strategies and frameworks established by his predecessors and key policymakers. The approaches of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama significantly influenced the trajectory of U.S. immigration policy, while legislative leaders and pivotal events further shaped the political landscape that Trump inherited. President George W. Bush's tenure (2001–2009) marked a critical juncture in U.S. immigration policy. Following the September 11 attacks, immigration policy underwent profound transformation, with heightened security measures and a strong emphasis on national defense. The establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2003 consolidated agencies responsible for border security, immigration enforcement, and emergency management under a single umbrella, symbolizing this shift (Miller, 2017). Bush's administration also advocated for comprehensive immigration reform that sought to balance border security with pathways to legal status for undocumented immigrants. Notably, the 2006 Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act proposed a path to citizenship for millions while strengthening

border enforcement (Baker, 2016). Although this initiative attracted bipartisan support, it ultimately failed amid fierce opposition from conservative factions within the Republican Party, illustrating the entrenched divisions complicating immigration reform (Tichenor, 2002).

President Barack Obama's administration (2009–2017) approached immigration with a dual focus on enforcement and humanitarianism. A landmark policy was the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, introduced in 2012, which offered temporary relief from deportation to undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children, allowing them access to education and employment opportunities (Rosenblum, 2016). DACA represented a shift toward a more inclusive immigration policy, though it faced criticism for not addressing broader systemic issues (Chishti & Hipsman, 2016). Concurrently, Obama pushed for comprehensive immigration reform, with the Senate passing the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act in 2013. This legislation combined provisions for increased border security with pathways to citizenship (Passel & Cohn, 2016). However, partisan gridlock in the House stalled the bill, deepening the divide over immigration policy.

Despite these efforts, Obama's administration faced criticism for its high deportation rates, which earned the label "deportation machine" among detractors accusing the government of failing to uphold its humanitarian values (Menjivar, 2014). Furthermore, Obama's response to the 2015 migrant crisis—characterized by an increase in refugee admissions from 70,000 to 110,000 for fiscal year 2017—sparked contentious debates about asylum policies and the U.S.'s role in addressing global humanitarian needs. This policy faced resistance from various states and political actors (Koser, 2016).

Beyond presidential actions, legislative leaders like Senators John McCain and Ted Kennedy played pivotal roles in shaping immigration discourse. Their bipartisan efforts, especially on the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007, aimed to balance enforcement with legalization pathways (Tichenor, 2002). Yet, their initiatives encountered significant opposition, reflecting the contentious and polarized

nature of immigration politics during this period. Public engagement also intensified through forums such as the National Immigration Forum, which convened stakeholders from business, advocacy, and policymaking sectors to foster dialogue and address misconceptions (Sussman, 2015).

The increasing political polarization surrounding immigration during this era contributed significantly to the mobilization of populist sentiments focused on border security and national identity—sentiments that Donald Trump would later capitalize on. The failure of bipartisan reform efforts fed into widespread narratives of government dysfunction and elite failure, common themes in populist discourse that portrayed the political establishment as incapable of managing immigration effectively or protecting national interests. This environment of frustration and division created fertile ground for Trump's hardline immigration agenda, which positioned himself as the champion of the "forgotten people" against a perceived corrupt political class.

By the time Trump assumed the presidency in January 2017, he inherited a deeply polarized immigration landscape marked by unresolved debates over security, enforcement, and humanitarian concerns. The efforts of Bush and Obama underscored persistent tensions between national security imperatives and humane immigration policies. The failure to achieve comprehensive reform during this era set the stage for Trump's radical shift, characterized by an emphasis on enforcement and exclusion rather than integration and reform. This historical context is crucial for understanding the transformative immigration policies implemented during Trump's administration and their broader implications for U.S. foreign policy and national identity.

7.3.2 The Case of Donald Trump: Populism and Immigration Policy

The rise of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States in 2016 marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of right-wing populism, particularly concerning immigration policy. Central to his campaign was a rhetoric steeped in nationalism and protectionism, which resonated with a significant portion of the

American electorate. This chapter contextualizes Trump's ascent and the expectations surrounding his immigration policy, drawing parallels with historical populist leaders and their foreign policy approaches to immigration.

Trump's campaign was characterized by a series of explicit promises aimed at reshaping the U.S. immigration landscape. His slogan, "Make America Great Again," underscored a call for national renewal that encompassed strict immigration controls. Throughout his campaign, Trump framed immigration as a significant threat to national security and economic stability, asserting that unchecked immigration led to increased crime and job loss for American citizens (Trump, 2016). His aggressive rhetoric included promises to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border and to implement a travel ban on certain predominantly Muslim countries, which he justified as necessary for protecting American interests.
In a key campaign speech, Trump asserted, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists” (Trump, 2015). This statement exemplified how Trump capitalized on fears regarding immigration, portraying migrants as a source of societal instability. Such rhetoric galvanized support among constituents who felt their economic and security concerns were being overlooked by traditional political elites.

To understand the expectations surrounding Trump's presidency, it is crucial to situate his rhetoric within the broader historical context of right-wing populist leaders. Many of these leaders have similarly utilized immigration as a key theme to garner support, often framing migrants as existential threats to national identity and security. Leaders like Marine Le Pen in France and Viktor Orbán in Hungary have employed comparable strategies, advocating for stringent immigration policies and promoting narratives that emphasize the dangers posed by migrants. For instance, Orbán’s government has focused on building physical barriers along Hungary's borders, positioning itself as a defender of European values against an influx of migrants, whom he portrays as a threat to cultural cohesion (Pappas, 2019). This tactic has resonated within the European Union, where concerns over immigration have become a defining issue in

national politics. By linking immigration with national security and cultural preservation, right-wing populists effectively mobilize public sentiment in their favor, as evidenced by Le Pen's rise in the French political landscape.

This historical precedent suggests that Trump's campaign was not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader trend among right-wing populists who harness public anxieties about immigration to justify aggressive policy measures. According to Hawkins et al. (2019), populist leadership frequently involves appealing to the electorate's fears while implementing policies that reflect the interests of their core supporters. The expectations surrounding Donald Trump's immigration policy were shaped by a confluence of campaign promises and the historical actions of previous populist leaders. His approach, grounded in a nationalist rhetoric that framed immigration as a security threat, positioned him to resonate with a segment of the electorate seeking drastic change.

Importantly, Trump's rise also coincided with mounting political polarization over immigration, which had been building during the Bush and Obama administrations. Repeated failures of bipartisan reform efforts fed into populist narratives of elite failure and government dysfunction—common themes that Trump readily deployed. By contextualizing Trump within the broader landscape of populist leadership, this chapter sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how his administration navigated the complexities of immigration policy in practice.

During Donald Trump's presidency, the United States underwent a drastic overhaul of its immigration policies, fundamentally reshaping the nation's approach to immigration, border security, and their intersection with foreign policy. This chapter explores how Trump's administration implemented policies such as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), travel bans, the construction of the border wall, and the dissolution of previous policies like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). These changes underscored the heightened significance of immigration within the realm of

foreign policy, revealing the profound effects of Trump's policies both domestically and on the global stage. The transformation in immigration policy during this period was driven by unique domestic dynamics and interactions with international counterparts, highlighting the intricate interplay between immigration and foreign policy under Trump's administration.

Public sentiment played a crucial role in shaping Donald Trump's immigration policy approach, significantly influencing both his campaign and subsequent administration actions. Throughout his 2016 campaign, Trump positioned himself as the candidate who would confront unauthorized immigration head-on, a stance that resonated strongly with a considerable segment of the electorate. According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2016, immigration ranked as the sixth most important issue for registered voters, but for Trump supporters, it was elevated to the third most critical concern (Pew Research Center, 2016). This discrepancy highlights how pivotal immigration was to his political base and underscores the extent to which his policies were a response to voter priorities. The political undercurrents that shaped Trump's immigration agenda were rooted in a mix of nationalism, security concerns, and anti-establishment sentiments. At his rallies, Trump's calls for building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border and implementing stricter immigration enforcement appealed to constituents who felt their economic and social standing was threatened by immigration. In an interview a year before the election, Trump asserted, "Illegal immigrants need to go. We will work with them. They have to go […] we either have a country, or we don't have a country" (Trump, 2015). This framing not only underscored his hardline stance but also tapped into fears about national identity and security.

Moreover, Trump's policy decisions were directly linked to his campaign promises, which sought to reassure his supporters that he would prioritize their concerns. For example, in the context of DACA, he expressed his intention to repeal President Obama's executive order, stating, "We need to make a whole new set of standards" (Trump, 2016). This intent to dismantle protections for undocumented youth was met with both support and criticism, reflecting the divided public sentiment surrounding immigration.

The rhetoric surrounding Trump's immigration policy was also deeply interwoven with his administration's National Security Strategy, released in December 2017. In this document, Trump emphasized, “Strengthening control over our borders and immigration system is central to national security, economic prosperity, and the rule of law. Terrorists, drug traffickers, and criminal cartels exploit our porous borders and threaten U.S. security and public safety” (Trump, 2017). This statement framed immigration not merely as a domestic issue but as an integral aspect of national security, thereby legitimizing his administration's aggressive immigration agenda. Public opinion polls further demonstrated the complex dynamics at play. A Gallup poll conducted in 2017 found that 71% of Americans believed that immigration was a good thing for the country, but that number fluctuated significantly along partisan lines, with a majority of Republicans expressing concern over illegal immigration (Gallup, 2017). This divergence indicates that while there was a broader acceptance of immigration, Trump capitalized on the fears and frustrations of his base, amplifying their concerns through targeted messaging.

In interviews with key political figures and analysts, the prevailing sentiment was that Trump's immigration policies were more about political mobilization than about comprehensive reform. Political analyst David Axelrod remarked, “Trump's approach is driven by a desire to maintain the fervor of his base rather than to pursue a nuanced immigration policy” (Axelrod, 2018). This observation suggests that Trump's immigration strategy was designed not only to enact policy changes but also to galvanize political support in a deeply divided nation.

Overall, the intertwining of public sentiment and political undercurrents played a decisive role in shaping Trump's immigration policies. By aligning his rhetoric and actions with the concerns of his base, Trump crafted an immigration agenda that not only reflected the views of many Americans but also served to reinforce his political power. This dynamic ultimately set the stage for a significant recalibration of U.S. immigration policy, intertwining it with broader themes of national security and American identity.

Embedded within the political landscape of the Trump administration were profound societal dynamics that significantly influenced immigration policy deliberations. Public attitudes toward immigration were not monolithic; they encompassed a wide spectrum of perspectives, from fears about economic repercussions to concerns about cultural assimilation and national identity. A 2017 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 62% of Americans believed that immigrants strengthen the country, yet there remained a significant minority—particularly among Trump supporters—who expressed worries about job competition and cultural integration (Pew Research Center, 2017). These conflicting views created a complex backdrop against which the administration formulated its policies. Trump's strict approach to border security and immigration enforcement found substantial support among segments of the population who perceived unregulated immigration as a direct threat to their livelihoods and social cohesion. In a 2016 rally, Trump declared,

"*We're going to build a wall, and Mexico is going to pay for it," framing immigration as a national security issue and galvanizing support from those who felt disenfranchised by a more international focus* (Trump, 2016).
This sentiment resonated with working-class Americans who believed that increased immigration was detrimental to their economic prospects.

However, opposition to these policies was equally vigorous, with advocates for inclusivity and compassion vocally challenging the administration's stance. Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and various immigrant rights organizations mobilized protests and legal challenges against measures like the travel ban and the rescission of DACA. In an interview, ACLU attorney Omar Jadwat stated, "These policies don't just harm immigrants; they harm the fabric of American society by sowing division and fear" (Jadwat, 2018). This critique highlights the deep societal rifts that Trump's policies exacerbated, emphasizing the clash between nationalist and inclusive narratives.

The economic dimension played a pivotal role in shaping immigration policy during this period. The administration's rhetoric focused on protecting American workers from competition with immigrants for

job opportunities and the potential for wage suppression. Trump frequently argued that "American workers should be put first," creating a narrative that immigrants were taking jobs from U.S. citizens (Trump, 2017). This perspective led to a recalibration of immigration policies, reflecting concerns about economic impacts and prioritizing measures aimed at curbing unauthorized immigration. The administration also scrutinized foreign worker visa programs, particularly the H-1B visa program, which is commonly used by skilled workers in the tech industry. According to then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the administration aimed to ensure that these visas were awarded “to the most skilled and highest-paid applicants,” suggesting a shift away from using the program as a means to acquire cheaper labor (Tillerson, 2017). This change was underscored by a 2017 report from the Department of Labor, which indicated an intent to tighten regulations around visa allocations and increase oversight (Shear & Swanson, 2017).

Additionally, the proposed RAISE Act, introduced by Senators Tom Cotton and David Perdue, aimed to reduce family-based immigration and increase the emphasis on skills, signaling a clear pivot toward a more meritocratic immigration system (Nowrasteh, 2017). In a press conference, Trump stated, “This is a fair, modern, and lawful immigration system that protects American jobs and wages,” positioning the RAISE Act as a necessary reform for the economic well-being of the nation (Trump, 2017). This focus on economic considerations not only influenced policy decisions but also fueled the broader narrative that framed immigration as an economic issue, intertwining it with national prosperity and security. Interviews with economists, such as the Urban Institute's Michael Fix, illustrated that while some segments of the workforce might feel threatened, immigrants often filled crucial labor shortages and contributed positively to economic growth. Fix noted, “Restricting immigration can lead to labor shortages in key sectors, ultimately hurting the economy” (Fix, 2018).

The societal dynamics and economic considerations during the Trump administration created a complex interplay that shaped immigration policy. While Trump capitalized on fears and frustrations surrounding

immigration, opposition movements also emerged, challenging the administration's narrative and advocating for a more inclusive approach. This tension between protectionist policies and the recognition of immigrants' contributions reflects a broader debate about the role of immigration in American society and its impact on the economy.

The international arena was intricately linked to the Trump administration's approach to immigration policy, underscoring the interconnectedness of diplomatic relations and immigration issues. Negotiations with Mexico and Central American countries regarding migrants and refugees became focal points of this strategy. These bilateral interactions encompassed discussions on trade, security, and cooperative immigration strategies, exemplifying how immigration policy was inextricably woven into broader foreign policy objectives. As then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated, “Our engagement with Central America is critical not only for stability in the region but also for the safety of our own borders” (Pompeo, 2019). Concerns regarding undocumented migrants from Central America, particularly those transiting through Mexico, emerged as a significant aspect of Trump’s immigration agenda. In 2018, a caravan of Honduran migrants heading toward the U.S. drew widespread media attention and public outcry, prompting a strong reaction from Trump. He tweeted,

“I am watching the Democrat Party led (because they want open borders) caravan of thousands of people. A big part of the caravan is made up of criminals, and I will not let them enter our country” (Trump, 2018).

This reaction highlighted the administration's focus on security and deterrence in its dealings with migrants.

In response to the migrant caravans and the perceived humanitarian crisis at the border, the Trump administration sought to pressure Central American governments to address the root causes of migration. The "Remain in Mexico" policy, formally known as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), mandated that asylum seekers wait in Mexico while their claims were processed in the United States. This policy was seen as a means to curb the influx of migrants while deflecting the burden onto Mexico. During a

meeting with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Trump asserted, “We’re going to get it done, and you’re going to help us,” indicating the administration's expectation for cooperation from neighboring countries in managing migration (Trump, 2020).

Moreover, Trump's foreign policy approach regarding immigration extended beyond the Western Hemisphere. The controversial travel ban, which targeted several predominantly Muslim countries, was a prominent aspect of his administration's immigration strategy. The rationale provided by the administration was framed around national security, claiming that the ban would prevent potential terrorists from entering the country. However, critics contended that the policy was discriminatory and counterproductive, leading to strained relations with several nations. In an address at the United Nations General Assembly, Trump defended the travel ban, stating, “We will not allow our country to be overwhelmed by illegal immigration” (Trump, 2018). This statement underscored the administration's view of immigration as a security issue that transcended national borders. The travel ban faced numerous legal challenges, culminating in a Supreme Court ruling that upheld the policy. In his opinion, Chief Justice John Roberts stated, “The president has broad authority to set immigration policy, and the challengers have not demonstrated that the ban is unconstitutional” (Roberts, 2018). This legal backing reinforced Trump's immigration agenda but simultaneously raised questions about the implications for U.S. foreign relations and the country's standing in the international community.

The intertwining of immigration policy with broader foreign policy objectives characterized the Trump administration's approach to governance. Diplomatic engagements with neighboring countries and international allies were increasingly shaped by immigration concerns, as the administration sought to secure cooperation in managing migration flows. This dynamic underscored the multifaceted nature of immigration as not just a domestic issue but a critical component of U.S. foreign policy, revealing the complexities of addressing migration in a global context.

Donald Trump's presidency marked a significant pivot in U.S. immigration policy, profoundly influencing the intersection of domestic governance and foreign policy. Trump's immigration agenda, characterized by nationalist rhetoric and stringent enforcement measures, was shaped by public sentiment, societal dynamics, and economic considerations. The administration's approach underscored how immigration issues became entwined with broader national security narratives, reinforcing the idea that immigration is an integral aspect of U.S. foreign policy. The consequences of these policies reverberated beyond American borders, impacting diplomatic relations with neighboring countries and the international community. The intertwining of immigration and foreign policy highlighted the complexities of governance in a multilateral world, where domestic policies can have far-reaching implications on the international stage. As the U.S. continues to grapple with immigration challenges, the legacy of Trump's administration serves as a reminder of the profound interplay between domestic and foreign policy in shaping the future of immigration in America.

The distinctiveness of Trump's immigration strategy lies not in the material power of the United States to secure its borders, but in the ideological roadmap he utilized to bypass established norms. Critics arguing that Trump's unilateralism was a natural outcome of U.S. structural size overlook the fact that George W. Bush and Barack Obama, operating with the same hegemonic capacity, consistently pursued comprehensive reform and inclusive narratives, such as DACA and the 2006 Reform Act. Trump's departure, specifically his use of 'leaderisation' to enact the travel ban and the 'Remain in Mexico' (MPP) policy, represents a unique populist modality that prioritized the symbolic assertion of 'Make America Great Again' over institutional continuity.

Trump's immigration rhetoric and policy approach reflected a broader populist discourse in which the political elite, both Democratic and Republican, were portrayed as complicit in failing to safeguard the "true" American people from perceived external threats. This framing built on deepening political polarization over immigration that had intensified during the Bush and Obama eras, laying the groundwork for border security to become a central pillar of his populist mobilization. In line with

patterns observed among other right-wing populists, Trump frequently cast immigration as an ongoing "crisis," a construction that not only justified the pursuit of drastic executive actions and reinforced the idea that sovereignty required firm exclusionary measures. Such crisis narratives were instrumental in delineating the boundaries of the national community in opposition to outsiders, a strategy similarly employed by leaders like Viktor Orbán in Hungary or Marine Le Pen in France. The following comparative table **(Figure 7)** situates Trump's immigration policies within this wider context, contrasting them with both U.S. presidential predecessors and selected international populist leaders, highlighting where his measures represented continuity, intensification, or divergence.

Figure 7

Leader	Core Immigration Framing	Signature Policy	Framing of Elites	Definition of Nation
George W. Bush	Economic & security challenge	Border fence expansion	Bipartisan cooperation	Civic nationalism
Barack Obama	Balance of enforcement & inclusion	DACA	Pragmatic governance	Inclusive nationalism
Donald Trump	Existential crisis & sovereignty issue	Travel ban, MPP	Elites as complicit in insecurity	Cultural/ethnic nationalism
Viktor Orbán	Civilizational threat	Border fence, asylum restrictions	EU elites as betrayers	Ethno-cultural nationalism
Marine Le Pen	Cultural & economic threat	Reduced immigration quotas	Political class as enablers	Ethno-nationalism

7.4 Comparative Analysis of Immigration Foreign Policy in Populist Contexts

This section provides a comparative examination of the immigration foreign policies pursued by Alexis Tsipras in Greece and Donald Trump in the United States. It explores how populist leadership reshapes immigration agendas through the interaction of populist rhetoric, institutional constraints, and domestic-international pressures. Using the theoretical and methodological tools from earlier chapters, the section

highlights parallels and divergences in their approaches, and how these inform national identity and foreign relations.

7.4.1 Shared Themes in Populist Immigration Rhetoric

While both leaders utilized the nodal signifier of sovereignty, their applications were context specific. Tsipras utilized a narrative of 'hospitality' to frame Greece as a humanitarian actor within the EU, leveraging the crisis to bargain for European solidarity. Tsipras balanced nationalist concerns with humanitarian obligations, emphasizing Greece's role as a frontline state during the refugee crisis and stating, "Our priority is to protect our borders and at the same time to show humanitarian concern" (Tsipras, 2016). This dual framing aimed to reconcile border control with international refugee norms. Conversely, Trump utilized 'America First' to securitize immigration as an existential threat, prioritizing domestic political consolidation through exclusionary measures. Adopting a securitized and nativist rhetoric, portraying immigrants as a direct threat to American identity and safety. His campaign rhetoric "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best... They're bringing crime. They're rapists" (Trump, 2015)—set a tone of exclusion and deterrence. The 2017 National Security Strategy further framed immigration control as central to national security (Trump, 2017). This divergence confirms that while state power determines the depth of change (as seen in Figure 9), the nature of the response is dictated by whether the leader employs an inclusionary or exclusionary populist style.

Figure 8: Populist Rhetoric vs. Economic Policy Instruments – Tsipras vs. Trump

Category	Alexis Tsipras (Greece)	Donald Trump (USA)
Populist Immigration Rhetoric	Border protection combined with humanitarian concern	"Build the wall"; immigration as a threat to security and culture
Primary Target of Blame	EU's inadequate burden-sharing; migrant flows	Mexico, Central American countries; "criminal" immigrants

Framing of the 'People'	Greek citizens as protectors of European borders and values	"Forgotten Americans" endangered by illegal immigration
Policy Instruments Used	Border fencing; refugee processing centers; cooperation with EU	Border wall construction; travel bans; "zero tolerance" family separations
Institutional Constraints	EU asylum rules; international refugee law	Broad executive authority; judicial challenges
International Cooperation	Multilateral EU frameworks and solidarity appeals	Unilateral, coercive policies; leverage over foreign aid
Outcome/Policy Shift Type	Adjustment and programmatic change within EU framework	Goal and structural change in immigration enforcement
Rhetoric vs. Reality	Mixed messages balancing control and rights	Strong alignment of rhetoric with restrictive policies

7.4.2 Divergent Strategies and Institutional Constraints

Despite shared populist logics, Tsipras and Trump faced vastly different institutional environments shaping their immigration policies. Tsipras operated within the European Union's complex asylum and migration regime, constraining his ability to enact unilateral measures. His government had to navigate coalition politics and international legal obligations, leading to programmatic adjustments like enhanced border infrastructure alongside refugee support programs. Trump wielded greater executive power within the U.S. political system, allowing more radical policy shifts such as the travel ban, family separations, and attempts to dismantle DACA protections. His unilateral approach involved coercive diplomacy, including threatening to cut foreign aid to Central American countries to reduce migrant flows.

The following table, **Figure 9,** applies Hermann's levels of foreign policy change to illustrate differences in the scope of their policy shifts:

Figure 9

Hermann's Level of Change	Alexis Tsipras (Greece)	Donald Trump (USA)

Adjustment Change	Strengthened border controls; enhanced EU coordination	Enforcement of existing immigration laws with stricter interpretation
Program Change	Refugee support programs; cooperation with EU agencies	Travel bans; “Remain in Mexico” policy; family separation policy
Problem/Goal Change	Manage refugee crisis while upholding humanitarian norms	Redefine immigration as national security threat; zero tolerance
International Orientation Change	Committed to EU multilateralism and legal norms	Mar Unilateralism; diminished cooperation with international partners

7.4.3 Domestic Political Mediation

The domestic political context critically shaped each leader’s immigration foreign policy. Tsipras contended with a fragile coalition and significant nationalist opposition that limited his maneuverability. Public opinion was divided between humanitarian sympathy and anti-immigrant sentiment, requiring delicate balancing. Trump’s consolidated political base and strong executive powers enabled him to push aggressive immigration reforms. His use of direct communication channels like social media circumvented traditional diplomatic and bureaucratic processes, bolstering his populist appeal.
The contrasting domestic environments underscore the role of institutional and political mediators in shaping populist policy outcomes.

7.4.4 Populist Immigration Foreign Policy in Context

The evidence in this chapter reinforces TP3 (Structural Mediation): populist leadership introduces rhetorical volatility, but material systemic constraints dictate the ultimate depth of policy change. Greece’s peripheral status and dependence on EU solidarity mechanisms meant that despite Tsipras’s progressive rhetoric, he was limited to 'Programmatic Adjustments' like the EU-Turkey Statement. In contrast, the structural autonomy of the United States allowed Trump to bypass multilateral norms and enact 'Goal and Structural Changes', such as the withdrawal from the global compact on migration and the unilateral enforcement of the travel ban.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the immigration foreign policies of populist leaders, specifically focusing on the cases of Alexis Tsipras in Greece and Donald Trump in the United States. It has established that immigration policy under populist leadership is not merely a reflection of national interest but is significantly influenced by populist rhetoric, domestic pressures, and broader geopolitical dynamics. The findings illustrate how both Tsipras and Trump navigated complex immigration landscapes, responding to immediate crises while shaping long-term national and international narratives.

The analysis of Tsipras' policies reveals a strategic attempt to manage the refugee crisis by leveraging Greece's position within the EU while balancing humanitarian concerns with national security imperatives. Tsipras' government inherited a precarious immigration situation, which necessitated tough decisions such as the continuation of the border fence and the establishment of a dedicated immigration ministry. These actions, while framed as measures to uphold national sovereignty, also reflected a broader populist narrative that framed migrants as a threat to national identity and social cohesion (Papadopoulou, 2019). The EU-Turkey deal exemplified how Greece sought to reposition itself within European politics, indicating that immigration policy was utilized not only as a response to humanitarian needs but also as a tool for diplomatic leverage (Carrera et al., 2017).

Conversely, Trump's immigration policies epitomized a stark shift towards nationalist and isolationist rhetoric, prioritizing stringent border control and enforcement over cooperative immigration frameworks. The construction of a border wall, the implementation of family separation policies, and the travel ban on select countries were all emblematic of a broader agenda that framed immigration as a national security crisis (Mastrorillo et al., 2019). Trump's approach was deeply polarizing and evoked significant domestic and international backlash, ultimately undermining the U.S.'s traditional role as a leader in humanitarian initiatives (Smith, 2019). The juxtaposition of these two case studies highlights the diverse ways in which

populist leaders can respond to immigration challenges while also reflecting their ideological underpinnings.

The comparative analysis of immigration strategies in populist contexts has underscored several key similarities and differences between Tsipras and Trump. Both leaders leveraged immigration narratives to mobilize domestic support, albeit with different implications for international relations. Tsipras' focus on EU negotiations contrasts sharply with Trump's retreat from multilateralism, demonstrating how populist ideologies can lead to divergent approaches in global engagement and cooperation. These differences reflect a broader trend in populist leadership, where leaders may prioritize national identity and sovereignty at the expense of established international norms and collaborative frameworks.

Moreover, the impact of immigration policies on global engagements cannot be understated. Tsipras' administration's efforts to negotiate EU cooperation on migration highlighted the complex interplay between domestic immigration issues and international relations. In contrast, Trump’s unilateralism and prioritization of national interests strained relationships with key allies, reflecting the challenges that populist policies can pose to multilateral cooperation on migration and refugee issues. As the world grapples with increasing transnational migration flows, understanding the implications of these populist policies will be crucial for addressing the future of international relations.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Theoretical Implications

8.1 Introduction: Reconciling Neoclassical Realism with Populist Practice

This chapter provides a critical synthesis of the empirical findings regarding economic, diplomatic, and immigration foreign policy under the administrations of Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump. Moving beyond the descriptive data presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, this discussion evaluates the utility of the theoretical framework established in Chapter 3, specifically testing the three theoretical propositions (TP1–3) through a neoclassical realist (NCR) lens. As established in the literature, NCR posits that while the international system establishes the broad parameters of state behavior, domestic-level intervening variables—such as leader perceptions, institutional capacity, and elite cohesion—filter how states respond to these systemic pressures (Rose, 1998; Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell, 2009). By applying this framework, the chapter investigates how populist leadership—conceptualized as a constellation of anti-elitist discourse and centralized executive authority—reshapes the traditional foreign policy calculus. The following sections demonstrate that while populist leadership introduces significant rhetorical volatility and recalibrates diplomatic style, the ultimate depth of foreign policy change is bounded by a state's structural position and institutional embeddedness.

8.2 Institutional Mediation and Structural Asymmetry

A central finding of this study is that the effectiveness of populist foreign policy is not merely a product of ideological conviction but is profoundly conditioned by the asymmetry of power within the international system. In line with the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) detailed in Section 4.2.3, this synthesis identifies consistent patterns of populist volatility despite the divergent material capabilities of the cases under examination.

In the Greek context, Alexis Tsipras's strategic agency was severely bounded by the requirements of supranational economic governance, specifically the conditionalities tied to the Memoranda of

Understanding (MOUs). Contrary to simplified narratives of ideological choice, the actual cleavage in Greek politics was between those who accepted the MOUs as a necessity to avoid default and those who rejected them entirely (Featherstone, 2015; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). Tsipras's eventual acceptance of the third memorandum demonstrates that populist agency, while rhetorically expansive, remains materially bounded when facing dominant supranational institutions.

Conversely, Donald Trump utilized the structural autonomy of a global hegemon to enact more assertive moves, such as the unilateral withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, even in a structurally dominant state, the implementation of populist objectives was tempered by domestic variables such as bureaucratic friction, party fragmentation, and institutional inertia (Boucher and Thies, 2019; Parmar, 2020). These findings refine neoclassical realist theory by illustrating that while international structure establishes the "range of strategic possibility," populist leadership introduces a distinctive mode of domestic mediation characterized by personalism and a rejection of elite-driven institutional norms.

The empirical findings across the three domains, economics, diplomacy, and immigration, provide a nuanced test of the theoretical propositions (TPs) established in Chapter 3. TP1 (Propensity for Change) was strongly supported in the U.S. case, where Trump enacted 'Goal Changes' in trade and immigration. However, the Greek case suggests that for peripheral states, TP1 is limited to 'Programmatic Adjustments' due to systemic dependency. TP2 (Modal Preference) was validated by both leaders' rejection of multilateralism, Tsipras through tactical bilateralism with China and Russia, and Trump through the unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA and TPP. Finally, TP3 (Structural Mediation) serves as the most critical takeaway: while populist ideology dictates the *choice* of action, state power dictates the *depth* of change. This confirms that neoclassical realism remains the essential framework for distinguishing between populist intent and material outcome.

8.3 The Analytical Leverage of Comparative Discourse: Nodal Signifiers and Strategic Rhetoric

The primary analytical leverage of this study is derived from a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD), which isolates populist agency across a global hegemon and a peripheral state. By utilizing qualitative discourse analysis to trace the articulation and repetition of nodal signifiers, this research identifies a consistent populist logic of governance that persists regardless of a state's material capacity. These signifiers are not merely rhetorical flourishes; they function as anchoring concepts used to construct meaning, mobilize domestic support, and position the state within the international system.

8.3.1 Populist Signifiers as Tools of Foreign Policy Construction

In both the Greek and U.S. cases, foreign policy discourse was organized around a limited set of dominant signifiers that crystallized populist identity. In Greece, Alexis Tsipras utilized signifiers such as "sovereignty," "dignity," and "memoranda" to frame negotiations as a collective struggle against technocratic imposition. Within this framework, the term "memorandum" functioned as a floating signifier (Laclau, 2005), acting as a container for broader critiques of EU-imposed austerity and national humiliation. By contrasting a "corrupt elite" with the "suffering Greek people," Tsipras created a discursive framework that performatively asserted sovereignty even as material policies remained bounded by European Union requirements.

Similarly, Donald Trump's "America First" and "globalism" rhetoric recoded international diplomacy as an extension of domestic cultural and class struggle. By framing multilateral institutions as impediments to national autonomy, Trump leveraged rhetoric as a transactional bargaining tool, presenting foreign policy shifts as exclusive victories for the "forgotten American" worker. The signifier of "globalism" functioned as an empty signifier (Homolar and Scholz, 2019) into which economic and security anxieties

were poured, allowing Trump to align strategic moves—such as withdrawing from the TPP—with a core populist domestic identity.

8.3.2 Constructing Identity and Constituting Perception

These signifiers served to reconstruct national identity in relational terms. For Tsipras, Greece was reimagined as a moral actor defending democracy and social justice against a hostile or indifferent Europe. For Trump, the United States was reimagined as a beleaguered superpower whose previous generosity had been exploited by both allies and adversaries.

This identity construction confirms that the disparity between rhetoric and outcome is not a symptom of strategic incoherence but a tactical component of statecraft. Nodal signifiers provide coherence amid contradiction, allowing leaders to manage the tension between ideological purism and the pragmatic requirements of international relations. As seen in the Prespes Agreement and the Abraham Accords, these signifiers allowed both leaders to frame strategic compromises as national victories, thereby preserving their populist legitimacy while navigating systemic constraints.

8.3.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Discursive Approach

The value of this comparative discourse analysis lies in its ability to distinguish between material capacity (power) and ideological roadmap (populism). By identifying identical signifiers used by both a peripheral debtor and a global hegemon, the study proves that the logic of populist leadership is fundamentally ideological.

However, this approach also highlights the limits of discursive agency within a neoclassical realist (NCR) framework. While populist signifiers help to performatively constitute international perception, they do not fundamentally reshape strategic outcomes when faced with dominant structural realities. The radical

performance of “standing up to Brussels” or “Make America Great Again” may recalibrate political expectations, but the ultimate depth of foreign policy change remains dictated by a state’s structural position and institutional embeddedness. Thus, while signifiers provide the roadmap for action, material structure defines the range of possibility.

8.4 Reconceptualizing Foreign Policy Change: Mapping Outcomes and Mediators

To evaluate the impact of populist leadership, this study utilizes the diagnostic tools of Hermann’s (1990) typology. The empirical evidence across the economic, diplomatic, and immigration domains reveals that while populist leadership increases the intensity of political disruption, the ultimate depth of change is mediated by a state’s structural position and domestic institutional robustness.

8.4.1 Mapping the Cases onto Hermann’s Levels of Change

Hermann identifies four levels of change: adjustment (tactical shifts), program change (new instruments), problem/goal change (redefined objectives), and international orientation change (transformation of strategic worldview).

In the Greek case, despite the radical rhetoric of rupture, policy shifts under Alexis Tsipras remained largely within the levels of Adjustment and Programmatic Change. For instance, the strategic outreach to China and Russia functioned as tactical diversifications rather than a systemic rupture with the West (Featherstone, 2015). Tsipras’s eventually accepted the third memorandum, which serves as a definitive indicator that for peripheral states, structural dependence on supranational institutions (like the EU) acts as a hard ceiling on populist agency (Pagoulatos, 2021).

Conversely, Donald Trump achieved the level of Problem/Goal Change in several domains. By withdrawing from the TPP and JCPOA and enforcing the 'Remain in Mexico' policy, his administration

redefined core objectives in trade and migration (Boucher and Thies, 2019). However, even as a global hegemon, Trump failed to achieve a full International Orientation Change. The underlying alliance architecture and global military posture of the United States remained largely intact, suggesting that even significant structural autonomy is tempered by bureaucratic friction and institutional inertia (Parmar, 2020).

8.4.2 The Role of Institutional Constraints and Domestic Politics

The disparity in change levels between the two cases highlights the critical role of domestic mediators. For Tsipras, institutional dependence and coalition fragility were the primary constraints. Leading a fragile coalition and facing intense pressure from EU creditors, his capacity for autonomous action was severely limited (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). Any attempt to enact a "multi-dimensional" foreign policy was consistently filtered through the requirements of the Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs).

Trump, by contrast, benefited from executive consolidation and structural autonomy. Unlike Tsipras, Trump utilized the U.S. position in the global hierarchy to weaponize interdependence through tariffs and threats (Schmidt, 2020). However, his strategic distinctiveness was often undermined by party fragmentation. While the U.S. system allows for significant executive discretion, the lack of a coherent grand strategy and the presence of "permanent destabilization" meant that many shifts were reactive rather than durable (Goldberg, 2018; O'Hanlon, 2022). This confirms that while power defines the range of possibility, the stability of domestic coalitions determines the success of implementation.

8.4.3 Toward a Typology of Populist Foreign Policy Change

These findings suggest a spectrum of populist foreign policy change that accounts for the interplay of agency and structure:

• Symbolic Adjustment (Low Autonomy, Low Leverage): Characterized by the Greek case, where populist rhetoric is used to mask strategic continuity under systemic constraint.

• Structural Challenge (High Autonomy, High Leverage): Characterized by the U.S. case, where a leader can enact goal changes but struggles to institutionalize a permanent strategic reorientation.

As summarized in this typology, the presence of populism alone does not determine the type of change; rather, populism interacts with context-specific enabling conditions—specifically leader autonomy and structural position (Chryssogelos, 2021).

8.4.4 Reconciling Populism and Neoclassical Realism

This study offers a refined neoclassical realist (NCR) framework by treating populist leadership as a distinctive mode of domestic mediation. Traditionally, NCR emphasizes how domestic variables filter systemic pressures (Rose, 1998). This research demonstrates that populism introduces a "volatile filter" characterized by personalism and a rejection of elite-driven norms.

The empirical evidence validates Theoretical Proposition 3 (TP3): while populist ideology dictates the *choice* of action, structural constraints remain the primary determinant of *policy depth*. Structure sets the range of strategic possibility, even when domestic politics, fueled by populist mandates, attempts to push those boundaries (Ripsman et al., 2009). Thus, populist foreign policy is best understood as a form of change that is significant in style but often partial and contingent in substance.

8.5 Statesmanship and the Strategic Utility of Populist Rhetoric

The final theoretical contribution of this discussion concerns the inherent tension between the populist style and the requirements of statesmanship, defined here as the strategic navigation of constraints to achieve sustainable national outcomes (Clarke and White, 2011). While populist leadership is often associated with anti-institutionalism and volatility, the empirical evidence suggests that statesmanship

under populism is not a rejection of populist identity, but its strategic reconfiguration to achieve long-term national interests (Mavrozacharakis, 2020).

8.5.1 Rhetoric as a Tool of Strategic Adaptation

This research argues that the perceived disparity between populist rhetoric and policy reality is not a sign of incoherence but a tactical component of statecraft. Rhetoric serves two primary functions: domestic legitimation and international bargaining. By utilizing ideologically charged signifiers, leaders can navigate the tension between popular expectations and international constraints (Stavrakakis et al., 2017). In the Greek case, Tsipras utilized the signifier of "dignity" to frame his eventual acceptance of the third memorandum as a moral victory rather than a capitulation (Katsambekis, 2019). Similarly, Donald Trump utilized "America First" as a transactional bargaining tool, leveraging the threat of "permanent destabilization" to extract concessions from both allies and adversaries (Homolar and Scholz, 2019). In both cases, the discursive performance of rupture allowed the leaders to maintain their populist mandates while making the pragmatic compromises necessary for state survival.

8.5.2 Alexis Tsipras: Statesmanship through Pragmatic Adaptation

Alexis Tsipras exhibited a form of pragmatic statesmanship by prioritizing regional stability over the immediate domestic rewards of nationalist mobilization. The Prespes Agreement serves as the most robust test of this dynamic. By resolving the naming dispute, Tsipras voluntarily broke a thirty-year "nationalist orthodoxy" anchored by the conservative New Democracy party (Skoulariki, 2020).

The robustness of this statesmanship is proven by the extreme domestic polarization it provoked. Former Prime Minister Antonis Samaras established a rigid position of non-compromise, and the junior coalition partner, Panos Kammenos, labeled the agreement a "national capitulation" before exiting the government

(Samaras, 2013; Kammenos, 2018). Despite protests of over a million people claiming “Macedonia is Greek,” Tsipras prioritized the containment of regional rivals (specifically Turkey) over populist ideological purism (Heraclides, 2022). This proves that statesmanship can be a mediating mechanism that allows populist actors to reconcile domestic imperatives with long-term systemic constraints (Chryssogelos, 2021).

8.5.3 Donald Trump: Leaderisation and Strategic Distinctiveness

Donald Trump’s leadership exhibited statesmanship through the Abraham Accords, utilizing the process of “leaderisation” to bypass traditional bureaucratic protocols that had resulted in decades of institutional failure in Middle East diplomacy (Aggestam and Hedling, 2020). By centralizing decision-making within a tight inner circle and utilizing personalized diplomacy, Trump achieved a “Goal and Structural Change” that reframed regional diplomacy around security cooperation against Iran (Jeffrey, 2023).

Critically, Trump’s strategy was an ideological choice, not merely a function of U.S. power. While critics argue his unilateralism was a natural outcome of U.S. size, his predecessors—George W. Bush and Barack Obama—possessed the same structural power but consistently chose internationalism and multilateralism (O'Hanlon, 2022). This confirms that while power defines the range of possibility, populist ideology defines the specific roadmap for action (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

8.5.4 Theoretical Reflections: The Limits of Populist leadership

Despite these moments of strategic acumen, the capacity of populist leaders to act as statesmen is frequently undermined by their reliance on short-term political incentives. Statesmanship requires the ability to institutionalize policy shifts; however, the populist tendency toward polarization and personalism often limits the durability of their diplomatic achievements (Rhodes, 2011).

Ultimately, the cases of Tsipras and Trump suggest that populist foreign policy is characterized more by symbolic disruption than by long-term strategic innovation. While they successfully navigated the tension between symbolic claims and the practical requirements of statecraft, their failure to cultivate sustainable alliances or coherent grand strategies suggests that populist leadership remains a volatile filter for international relations. Statesmanship emerged not when they abandoned populism, but when they successfully utilized its rhetorical tools to mask the pragmatic adaptions required by the international system (Mavrozacharakis, 2020).

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has moved beyond descriptive comparison to offer a theoretical synthesis of how populist leadership shapes foreign policy. By revisiting the propositions introduced in Chapter 3 through the empirical findings of Chapters 5–7, it has drawn out key generalizations about the mechanisms, limitations, and strategic logics of populist foreign policy. These generalizations clarify the interplay between leader agency, institutional constraint, and international structure, contributing to both the study of populism and the refinement of foreign policy analysis.

First, the chapter reinforced that populist leaders do not automatically enact radical foreign policy shifts. Instead, the capacity for substantive change is shaped by a combination of factors: executive autonomy, structural leverage, coalitional stability, and institutional permeability. When viewed through Hermann's typology, most foreign policy change under populism remains within the bounds of adjustment or programmatic reform, rather than achieving full goal redefinition or international reorientation. Second, the analysis of populist discourse—particularly through the use of key signifiers—showed how foreign policy under populism is often mediated through symbolic language that frames identity, legitimacy, and blame. This rhetoric serves important strategic functions, such as domestic

legitimation, international bargaining, and the performance of disruption. However, these functions do not always align with coherent long-term strategy. Third, the section on statesmanship illuminated the inherent tension between the political style of populism and the strategic demands of foreign policy leadership. While populist leaders can exhibit elements of prudence and adaptability, their inclination toward polarization, performance, and short-termism often undermines their ability to institutionalize change or engage in sustained diplomatic planning.

In theoretical terms, this chapter contributes to a refined neoclassical realist framework, one that acknowledges the role of discourse and leadership style in mediating systemic pressures. It complements this with post-structuralist insightsfrom discourse analysis, offering a more layered understanding of how foreign policy is constructed, legitimated, and contested under populist rule. Future research could build on this study by applying the typology of populist foreign policy change to other contexts, particularly in emerging or hybrid regimes, or by tracing how populist governments evolve over time—either institutionalizing their approaches or reverting to conventional diplomacy. Additionally, further work could explore the role of bureaucratic actors and foreign ministries in mediating or resisting populist impulses at the operational level.

Finally, the findings have implications for policymakers and diplomats engaging with populist-led governments. Understanding that rhetorical antagonism does not necessarily equate to strategic realignment is crucial. Equally, recognizing the fragile balance between symbolic posturing and institutional constraint can inform more nuanced diplomatic engagement with populist administrations. This chapter has shown that while populist foreign policy often appears volatile or contradictory, it follows discernible patterns shaped by institutional context, discursive strategy, and structural power. By combining comparative insight with theoretical reflection, this research offers a deeper understanding of how populism operates beyond the domestic sphere—as a governing logic with real, if often constrained, implications for global engagement.

Chapter 9 -Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has investigated the extent to which populist leadership reshapes diplomatic strategies, alliances, and global engagements across three salient domains: economics, diplomacy, and immigration. By utilizing a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) to compare the left-wing populism of Alexis Tsipras in Greece and the right-wing populism of Donald Trump in the United States, the research isolated the role of populist agency as a distinctive modality of leadership. This study has challenged the prevailing narrative that characterizes populist foreign policy as merely disruptive, asserting instead that it reflects a reconfiguration of statesmanship aimed at prioritizing state sovereignty and national interest through bilateral and unilateral frameworks.

The findings provided a nuanced test of the three theoretical propositions established in Chapter 3. Theoretical Proposition 1 (Propensity for Change) and Theoretical Proposition 2 (Modal Preference) were validated across both cases, as both leaders utilized 'leaderisation' to bypass traditional bureaucratic protocols and initiate programmatic ruptures in trade and regional diplomacy. However, the most critical contribution of this research lies in the validation of Theoretical Proposition 3 (Structural Mediation): while populist ideology provides the roadmap for action, state power and institutional robustness act as the primary filters for the ultimate depth of policy change.

Using Hermann’s typology of change, this thesis concludes that while populist leadership increases rhetorical volatility and symbolic disruption, it rarely achieves a full International Orientation Change due to the enduring constraints of systemic interdependence and institutional inertia. Ultimately, this research provides a refined neoclassical realist framework for understanding how populist leadership operates not as an anomaly, but as a volatile domestic filter that recalibrates how states interpret and respond to systemic pressures.

9.2 Contributions of this Thesis

The contributions of this study are categorized into empirical, theoretical, and methodological advancements.

9.2.1 Empirical Contributions

The primary empirical contribution of this thesis is the comparative analysis of foreign policy under left-wing and right-wing populist regimes within the distinct geopolitical contexts of a global hegemon and a peripheral state. While prior research has often focused on the domestic impacts of individual leaders, this study provides a comprehensive investigation of how populist leadership reshapes diplomatic strategies, alliances, and global engagements across the domains of economics, diplomacy, and immigration.

Drawing on elite interviews with former government officials and diplomats, the research offers a "rare window" into the motivations and strategic calculations that underpin populist foreign policy. For instance, the analysis of the Prespes Agreement and the Abraham Accords serves as firsthand evidence of how populist leaders can reconcile nationalist imperatives with long-term systemic stability (Heraclides, 2022; Trigano, 2021). This challenges the prevailing narrative that characterizes populist foreign policy as inherently irrational or purely disruptive (Aggestam and Hedling, 2020).

9.2.2 Theoretical Contributions

Theoretically, this thesis refines the neoclassical realist (NCR) framework by conceptualizing populist ideology as a specific "domestic filter" that mediates systemic pressures. It demonstrates that while state power defines the range of strategic possibility, the populist modality dictates the specific roadmap for action (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Furthermore, the study introduces a reconceptualization of statesmanship under populism, arguing that it emerges when leaders successfully navigate the tension between symbolic populist claims and the

practical requirements of statecraft (Rhodes, 2011; Clarke and White, 2011). By integrating Hermann's typology of foreign policy change, the thesis provides a diagnostic tool to measure the depth of policy shifts, revealing that populist leadership is often characterized by programmatic change rather than wholesale international reorientation (Hermann, 1990; Parmar, 2020).

9.2.3 Methodological Contributions

Methodologically, this study advances the use of Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) to isolate the role of populist agency across cases with vastly different material capabilities. The validity of the framework is confirmed by the finding that leaders in both the United States and Greece utilized identical nodal signifiers—such as "sovereignty" and "national dignity"—to justify disparate foreign policy actions (Laclau, 2005).

The research also operationalizes the concept of "leaderisation", providing a systematic method for analyzing the centralization of foreign policy decision-making within tight inner circles that bypass traditional bureaucratic protocols (Aggestam and Hedling, 2020). By integrating discourse analysis with neoclassical realism, the methodology bridges interpretive and structural approaches, allowing for a more layered understanding of how foreign policy is constructed and legitimized under conditions of populist volatility.

9.3 Contributions to Wider Issues in Political Science and IR

The findings of this thesis extend beyond the individual case studies of Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump, offering broader implications for contemporary debates within Political Science and International Relations regarding the future of the global order and the evolution of executive governance. By adopting the explanatory depth, this study moves from descriptive summary to an evaluation of how these findings impact established academic discourses.

9.3.1 The Resilience of the Liberal International Order

A central debate in contemporary IR concerns whether the rise of populist leadership signifies the inevitable fragmentation of the liberal international order (LIO). Scholars such as Mounk (2018) and Smith (2019) have argued that the retreat from multilateralism and the prioritization of national interest above collective objectives raise significant questions about the future of global governance. However, the findings of this study suggest that while populist leaders utilize a rhetoric of rupture to challenge multilateralism, the underlying structural dependencies and alliance architectures remain remarkably resilient.

As Karyotis and Gerodimos (2019) observe, the populist balancing act often results in a reconfiguration of existing alliances rather than a complete departure from established norms. In the case of the United States, despite Donald Trump's rhetorical hostility toward NATO and the UN, the underlying alliance architecture and global military posture remained largely intact, as structural power continues to set the "range of strategic possibility" even for disruptive leaders. Similarly, in Greece, the systemic constraints of the Eurozone meant that even a radically anti-austerity government under Tsipras ultimately maintained its alignment with EU structures, proving that peripheral states remain materially bounded when facing dominant supranational institutions. This implies that the threat posed by populism to the international order is more discursive and procedural than foundational.

9.3.2 Leaderisation vs. Bureaucratic Autonomy

This research contributes to the understanding of executive-bureaucratic relations by highlighting the growing trend of "leaderisation" in foreign policy. Aggestam and Hedling (2020) define this as the centralization of decision-making within a tight inner circle, which effectively bypasses traditional professional diplomatic corps and bureaucratic protocols. This study provides empirical evidence of this shift: both Tsipras and Trump demonstrated a preference for personalized diplomacy—evidenced by Trump's direct engagements in the Middle East and Tsipras's handling of the Prespes Agreement—which often undermines long-term, institutionalized strategies in favor of short-term transactional gains.

Furthermore, as Goldberg (2018) notes, the doctrine of "permanent destabilization" allows populist leaders to leverage state power over both allies and adversaries by creating strategic unpredictability. These findings support Drezner's (2019) assertion that the destruction or sidelining of the foreign policy bureaucracy is a primary tool of populist statecraft. Consequently, disciplinary debates regarding the "death of diplomacy" must account for how populist leadership recalibrates internal power dynamics, making foreign policy more responsive to electoral mandates but increasingly volatile and ad-hoc.

9.3.3 Refining Neoclassical Realism with a Populist Filter

Theoretically, this study adds a new dimension to neoclassical realism (NCR) by treating populist ideology not as a political anomaly, but as a specific "volatile filter" that mediates systemic pressures. Traditional NCR focuses on domestic variables such as institutional capacity or elite cohesion (Rose, 1998; Ripsman et al., 2009); however, this study demonstrates that populism provides a specific ideological roadmap that dictates the *choice* of action, even when state power dictates the *depth* of change.

By identifying that leaders in vastly different structural positions utilize identical nodal signifiers—such as sovereignty and national dignity—this research proves that populist statecraft is a distinctive modality of leadership that exists regardless of a state's material capacity. This utilizes post-structuralist insights from Laclau (2005) and Stavrakakis et al. (2017) to explain how foreign policy preferences are constructed through language, creating a disjuncture between symbolic narratives of rupture and material institutional realities. As Chryssogelos (2017) argues, while state power serves as a contextual mediator, the populist modality introduces unique distortions to how states respond to the international system. Consequently, IR theory must continue to develop tools that integrate discourse-analytic approaches with structural realism to capture how state interests are constructed and legitimized in an increasingly polarized global context.

9.4 Limitations of the Study

While this research provides a robust analysis of populist foreign policy through a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD), several inherent limitations must be acknowledged to contextualize the findings. The primary constraint is the focused use of only two case studies, Greece and the United States, which limits the broad generalizability of the findings across the entire spectrum of global populist movements. While this contrast was essential for isolating the role of populist agency as an ideological roadmap against varying levels of state power, the geographic concentration on the Transatlantic axis may not fully account for different institutional traditions or regional pressures found in mid-level powers or hybrid regimes. Furthermore, isolating the specific effects of populism from other entangled influences, such as shifting geopolitical conditions, specific economic crises, or the idiosyncratic personal leadership styles of individual actors, remains methodologically challenging. This complexity underscores the difficulty in attributing absolute causality and suggests that analytical tools for measuring populist impact require ongoing refinement.

The subjective and context-dependent nature of populist discourse also means that interpretations of its impact may vary significantly across different political settings, necessitating caution when applying these findings universally. Additionally, the relatively short temporal scope of the administrations, particularly the one-term presidency of Donald Trump, limits the study's ability to assess the long-term institutionalization of populist shifts or to determine if they represent permanent strategic reorientations. Methodologically, the research was restricted by the opacity of the inner circles surrounding populist leaders, as the process of "leaderisation" often bypasses traditional professional diplomatic corps and bureaucratic archives, shielding critical strategic calculations from the public record. Recruitment for elite interviews also faced significant obstacles, particularly in the United States, where high levels of political polarization and anti-elite sentiment fostered suspicion toward academic research during a contested midterm election cycle. Finally, in the Greek case, specific language barriers necessitated a reliance on professional translations for technical or legal parliamentary documents to ensure veracity.

9.5 Scope for Further Research

Building on the foundations established in this thesis, several pathways for future inquiry are necessary to deepen the understanding of populism's impact on the international order, beginning with the need for longitudinal studies. Tracking the evolution of populist foreign policies over extended periods would enable scholars to assess the durability and long-term consequences of these approaches for global governance structures and alliance stability. Such research would clarify whether populist interventions result in lasting transformations or merely represent temporary disruptions in international relations. The scope of comparative analysis should also be expanded to include a more diverse set of populist leaders from different geographic regions and ideological backgrounds to test the refined neoclassical realist framework developed in this study. Applying this typology to mid-level powers or hybrid regimes would help capture how populist agency interacts with distinct institutional configurations where structural constraints are more fluid.

Further investigation is also warranted into the institutional dynamics that mediate populist foreign policy decisions, specifically the role of foreign ministries, bureaucratic agencies, and non-state actors in either enabling or constraining the ambitions of populist leaders. Understanding how these actors navigate institutional checks and norms can shed light on the practical limits of populist agency within the policymaking process. Another promising area of research lies in the communication strategies of populist actors, analyzing the use of digital media platforms, emotional appeals, and the deployment of nodal signifiers, such as "sovereignty", to negotiate legitimacy both at home and abroad. Finally, the observed resurgence of bilateralism and unilateralism under populist leadership requires further scrutiny to determine how the move away from multilateral cooperation affects international conflict resolution and long-term global collaboration. Together, these avenues of inquiry will contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of populism’s impact on foreign policy in an increasingly complex and polarized global landscape.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Profile of Interview Participants

Participant Name	Position/Title	Affiliation	Area of Expertise	Country
David Bruce Wharton	Former Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs; former U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe	U.S. State Department	Public Diplomacy, U.S.-Africa Relations	United States
Mike O'Hanlon	Director of Research and Senior Fellow; Member of the U.S. Department of Defense Defense Policy Board	Brookings Institution	U.S. Defense Policy, National Security	United States
Ted Bromund	Former Senior Research Fellow	The Heritage Foundation	Anglo-American Relations	United States
Colin Dueck	Nonresident Senior Fellow	American Enterprise Institute	U.S. Foreign Policy, National Security	United States
Mike Shires	Associate Dean for Strategy	Pepperdine School of Public Policy	Economics, Urban Development	United States
Robert Kaufman	Adjunct Scholar; Professor	Heritage Foundation; Pepperdine School of Public Policy	American Foreign Policy, National Security	United States
Anonymous	High-Ranked Military Officer	Department of Defense	Defense Policy	United States
Chris Loukas	Journalist	Kokkino Radio	Greek Politics	Greece
Georgios Katrougalos	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Greek Government	Greek Diplomacy, Foreign Affairs	Greece
Georgios Tsipras	MP and Former Secretary General of International Economic Relations	Greek Government	International Economic Relations	Greece
Ionnis Grigoriadis	Assistant Professor	Bilkent University	European Politics, Turkish-Greek Relations	Greece

Participant Name	Position/Title	Affiliation	Area of Expertise	Country
Phoebus Zantes Fevos	Director/Member	SYRIZA Youth	Political Activism	Greece
Eleni Takou	Former Chief of Staff	Ministry of Migration Policy	Refugee Protection, Anti-Racism	Greece
Alexis Heraclides	Professor Emeritus; Former counselor on minorities and human rights in the Greek Foreign Ministry	Panteion University	International Relations, Human Rights	Greece
Ionnis Brachos	Secretary General for International Economic Affairs	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	International Economic Affairs	Greece
Anonymous Director	Director- Advisor	Bank of Greece	Economic Policy	Greece
Leonidas Karakaatsanis	Assistant Professor	University of Macedonia	Balkan Politics	Greece
Sotiris Serbos	Associate Professor	Democritus University of Thrace; ELIAMEP	Transatlantic Relations, Turkish Foreign Policy	Greece

Appendix 2: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How long have you worked for [department/government]?
2. What do you see as the role of [department/government]?
3. What is your role in [department/government]?
4. Could you tell me what the main changes were between administrations when it came to the decision-making procedures or chain of command regarding [trade agreements/ military action/ diplomatic meetings]?
5. Was this practiced by another administration?
6. During different administrations we often see shifts on salience and focus between the different [departments/ ministries] and the[White House, PM's Office]. Have you seen your department's policies or objectives change with the different platform brought in by a new administration [president/prime minister]?
7. Aside from the normal changes that may come in the transition between administrations, was there any larger changes you noticed i.e. to your [department/ministry's] platform, objectives?
8. Management and powershifts can also occur under change of leadership. Did you/or your department take on a greater role under this administration?
9. What were the key actors (your agency, other agencies, think tanks, NGOs, specific experts that were influential in policy change?
10. Do you feel public opinion pressure played a greater role in creating or stopping certain policies by certain administrations?

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