UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

“Democrats would never put up with a Presidential Election stolen by the Republicans!”

A rhetorical analysis of Donald Trump’s use of populist rhetoric on Twitter in the aftermath of the United States presidential election 2020

Master’s Thesis
in Master’s Programme in Social Science in Swedish, Journalism and communication

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10.6.2023
Helsinki

Faculty: Faculty of Social Sciences

Department: Master's Programme in Social Science in Swedish

Subject: Journalism and Communication

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Title: "Democrats would never put up with a Presidential Election stolen by the Republicans!". A rhetorical analysis of Donald Trump's use of populist rhetoric on Twitter in the aftermath of the United States presidential election 2020

Level: Master's thesis

Month and year: June 2023

Number of pages: 63

Keywords: Populism, rhetoric, populist rhetoric, Donald Trump, Twitter, tweets, United States, presidential election, Republicans, Democrats

Advisor: Mats Bergman

Abstract:

Populist leaders are often studied when they are in opposition, providing an alternative to a failing democracy. The case of Donald Trump in the aftermath of the United States presidential election 2020 is different, as he is a populist leader in the position of power, trying to be re-elected as president.

Thus, my aim in this thesis is to study the use of populist rhetoric by Donald Trump on Twitter following election day, 3 November 2020, as a populist who is no longer in the opposition, but rather a president trying to maintain office. By mainly drawing on the characteristics of populist rhetoric mapped out by Benjamin Moffitt (2014), I analyze a selection of tweets from November 2020 to January 2021 with the goal of identifying characteristics of populist rhetoric in his tweets.

Moffitt identifies three main characteristics of populist rhetoric: 'the people' versus 'the elite', performing a notion of crisis, and 'bad manners'. My results show that both 'the people' versus 'the elite' and the performance of crisis are both explicitly present in Donald Trump's tweets. He creates a typically populist binary, identifying himself and Republicans with the true American Heartland, 'the people'. Trump elevates the election results to a level of crisis, claiming a stolen election and voter fraud as the reasons for Biden's victory. 'Bad manners' is almost Trump's trademark. While visible in his tweets, it is at times difficult to draw the line between the rhetoric of Twitter and populist rhetoric, as there is significant overlap between the two.

My results show, that even when losing power, Trump follows traditional populist rhetoric. However, in an interesting turn of events, he also changes the limits of 'the people' and 'the enemy', calling out other Republicans and Fox News in his tweets when he feels that they are betraying him and no longer supporting him. Thus, he diverts from the traditional populist 'us' and 'them' binary, creating a third category, a sort of purgatory, where Republicans who formerly were 'the people' now reside.

Table of contents

1. Introduction 1
1.1 Aim and research questions 2
1.2 Key concepts 3
1.2.1 Rhetoric 3
1.2.2 Populism and populist rhetoric 3
1.3 Previous research 4
2. Context 6
2.1 Twitter as a platform for communicative acts 7
2.2 The 2020 United States presidential election 9
3. Theoretical framework: rhetorical analysis and populist rhetoric 11
3.1 Rhetorical analysis 11
3.2 Populist rhetoric 14
4. Method: rhetorical analysis 16
4.1 Material 22
4.2 Ethical qualms 24
4.3 Populism as a perceived issue of the right 26
5. Analysis 27
5.1 Us versus them: who is part of Trump's America? 28
5.2 Our country's in crisis: the election has been stolen 30
5.3 Bad manners: subverting the expectation of political conduct 41
5.4 Shifting the blame 45
5.5 The fake news lamestream media 46
5.6 Breaking the binary: turning on other Republicans 48
6. Results 53
7. Discussion 58
8. Conclusion 60
List of references 64

1. Introduction

6 January 2021. Followers of Donald Trump storm the United States Capitol in Washington D.C. Some argue that this comes after incitement from Trump himself, after his continuous rhetoric of a stolen election on Twitter following election day, 3 November 2020, of the United States presidential election 2020. The upheaval in Washington D.C. can be seen as the climax following the events of the United States presidential election 2020 and Joe Biden being the incumbent president-elect, a narrative which Donald Trump continuously refused to believe on his Twitter account. (Duignan, 2023)

Instead, the tweeter-in-chief Trump crafts his own narrative of voter fraud and a stolen election, urging his followers to fight back, and to stop the 'evil' Democrats from gaining power in the country. Trump's conduct on Twitter in the aftermath of the United States presidential election is an interesting case study of a populist leader losing power, and the rhetoric he chooses to use in this situation.

Leading up to the 2016 United States presidential election, Donald Trump was in a very different position. He was a businessman and somewhat of a celebrity, new to the field of politics, and could through his populist rhetoric and performance of politics offer another option to democracy for the American voters. As an extraordinary populist leader, Trump's compelling speeches, simple solutions to the pressing issues of the nation, and refusal to follow standard political conduct managed to bear fruits, and he was, to the shock of many, elected president in 2016. (Schneiker, 2018)

In 2020, he was up for re-election after completing his first presidential term. This time, however, many Democrats had their mind set on not allowing Trump to complete another term in office. They wanted him out. Furthermore, as is common for populist leaders, Donald Trump's actions after being elected president could not compete with the grandeur of the promises that he made leading up to the election. (Heinisch, 2003; Burns 2021)

Populist leaders, their rhetoric and populism itself are often studied from the perspective of opposition – when a populist party emerges as an alternative to the current government. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2014) In this thesis, I want to look at it from a different perspective. I am interested in Trump's rhetoric on Twitter, the medium often chosen by populist leaders to

communicate with their followers, as he is losing power. Looking at populism from an ideology-free perspective, I aim to analyze what characteristics of populist rhetoric are present in Donald Trump's tweets in the aftermath of the United States presidential election 2020, to gain a better understanding of the rhetoric of a populist leader not in the opposition, but as the current president slowly losing his grip on the country. Ideology-free populism here means that, as I further explore in chapter 1.2.2, I am not viewing populism as a concept tied to a certain ideology, but rather as a style: a way of doing politics as well as a type of rhetoric that can be identified.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to examine the populist rhetoric of Donald Trump's tweets in the aftermath of the U.S. presidential election 2020. While there have been other studies on Trump's populist rhetoric in for instance his political speeches, as well as numerous studies of his usage of Twitter and how that in itself is typical of a populist leader, (Rowland, 2021; Kreis, 2017), there have not been studies that explicitly focus on the populist rhetoric in his tweets in this context. For this study, the interest lies primarily in how Donald Trump uses populist rhetoric, meaning the aim is to identify certain characteristics of populist rhetoric in his tweets. I will return to the characteristics in the methodology section of this thesis. Furthermore, my interest lies in how the context of being in the middle of losing an election plays a role in the populist leader, Trump, communicating on Twitter.

The main research question is thus: "What types of populist rhetoric does Donald Trump use in his tweets in the aftermath of the United States presidential election 2020?" Furthermore, I will seek answers to the following sub questions:

1. What type of rhetoric does Donald Trump use to separate 'the people' and 'the enemy'?
2. How does Donald Trump use populist rhetoric to perpetuate a sense of crisis surrounding the election?
3. Are there elements of populist rhetoric outside of the scope of the theoretical framework present in Donald Trump's tweets?

To clarify, by aftermath, I am referring to the events beginning on Twitter on election night, November 3rd, 2020, and culminating in Trump's removal from the platform on January 8th,

2021. In the next the key concepts rhetoric and populism are presented and defined for the purposes of this thesis.

1.2 Key concepts

1.2.1 Rhetoric

For the legibility of the subject of this thesis as well as the research question, some key concepts need to be defined. Firstly, I will touch upon rhetoric, as it is an old concept, dating back to ancient Greece. One of the most prominent figures of the study of rhetoric in ancient Greece was Aristotle, and his dogma of rhetoric is still both actively used by contemporary scholars, as well as functions as the basis for new studies and theories. (Aristotle, 2020; Zachry 2007, P. 71)

In *Art of Rhetoric*, Aristotle never defines rhetoric through the text, the product of rhetoric, as some more contemporary scholars tend to do. Rather, he puts emphasis on the rhetorician as "someone who is always able to see what is persuasive (*Topics* VI.12, 149b25); correspondingly, rhetoric is defined as the ability to see what is possibly persuasive in every given case (*Rhet.* I.2, 1355b26f.)." (Rapp, 2022) This definition is supported by contemporary scholar Joan Leach, who views rhetoric as a term with a multiplicity of uses, and thus defines rhetoric in three levels: "Rhetoric I The act of persuasion. Rhetoric II The analysis of acts of persuasion. Rhetoric III A worldview about the persuasive power of discourse." (Leach, 2000, p. 2) For the purposes of defining the term rhetoric and how it is used in this thesis, Leach's Rhetoric I is the most relevant, however, both Rhetoric II and Rhetoric III come into play as I delve into rhetorical analysis later in this thesis.

When it comes to definitions of rhetoric, the word 'persuasion' is of the utmost importance. It is present both in Aristotle's original definition and Leach's definition above, as well as in definitions given by other contemporary scholars, in which rhetoric is seen as a ways of persuading others through language. (Renvall, 2007, p. 14; Zachry, 2007, p. 71) Thus, the term 'rhetoric' in this thesis is defined as communicative acts of persuasion.

1.2.2 Populism and populist rhetoric

As my study is interested in populist rhetoric, both the term 'populism' and, maybe more importantly, the adjective form of the word, 'populist', need to be defined. I will delve deeper

into how populism functions as the theoretical frame of reference for this study later in the thesis, but before that I want to give a brief definition of how I use the terms in this thesis.

Populism is a highly contested concept, and there is no consensus on the definition of the word among contemporary scholars. (Laclau, 2005; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2014; Canovan, 2004) Benjamin Moffitt (2014) has mapped out four main categories of populism in contemporary literature, where populism is seen as either ideology, discourse, strategy or political logic. (Moffitt 2014, p. 17) In this thesis, populism is defined as discourse. This means that populism is not seen as something that holds any ideological values in itself, but rather that it is a way of performing politics. (Ibid., p. 21)

Thus, I claim that there are certain characteristics of populism as a discourse, as a way of expressing oneself and performing politics, that can be identified as populist rhetoric. This is an idea presented by Kirk Hawkins (2010), in which he posits that there are elements of populism that can be found in texts, and that focusing on rhetoric and speech acts brings forth a populist discourse. (Hawkins, 2010) Populism, in this thesis, is thus seen as discourse, as a way of expressing political ideas, and as a concept that has rhetorical elements which can be found in texts.

The main theories of populism I will be drawing from as I conduct my analysis are those of Benjamin Moffitt. Moffitt views populism as a style: a way of doing politics. (Moffitt, 2014) He has mapped out three characteristics of populist rhetoric, populist rhetoric here being understood as something that the populist leader uses in their way of doing politics. These three categories are: 'the people' versus 'the elite', 'bad manners', and performing a crisis. Populist rhetoric, or discourse, will further be explored as I present the theoretical framework.

1.3 Previous research

In this section, a brief overview of previous research within the subject of my analysis will be presented. The previous research that applies to this thesis can roughly be divided into three categories: research on Donald Trump's tweets, rhetorical analyses on political texts, such as speeches, and rhetorical analyses on tweets. While rhetorical analyses have been conducted on Trump's tweets, I was unable to find any previous research which specifically focused on populist aspects of his rhetoric on Twitter. Furthermore, while studies about populism have

been conducted on Donald Trump's Twitter account and tweets, these have mainly been concerned with populist leaders' use of Twitter as a tool to reach their audience, rather than focusing specifically on populist rhetoric.

Previous research on populism and Twitter has centered on populist leaders' use of Twitter, for instance the fact that populist leaders tend to favor Twitter more than other political leaders, as it gives them a platform to communicate directly with their audience without media interference. (Jacobs & Sprierings 2018). In his article "Performative and ideological populism: The case of charismatic leaders on Twitter" (2019), Angelos Kissas places Donald Trump in the populist context of the charismatic leader and explains how performing this persona brings forth a notion of authenticity on part of the populist leader. (Kissas, 2019) While Donald Trump's Twitter use has been studied within the context of populism, his populist rhetoric has not been explicitly studied.

Ruth Breeze analyses the populist political discourse on Twitter by combining quantitative corpus linguistics techniques with qualitative analysis in her article "Exploring populist styles of political discourse on Twitter." (2020) In the article, she compares a corpus of 'veteran populist' Nigel Farage's tweets with the tweets of four other British politicians. By doing this, she identifies three core aspects of populist rhetoric employed by Farage, namely "the projection of negative emotions, especially anger/violence; the use of questions to provoke reactions; and the deployment of colloquial expressions and catchphrases to resonate with popular audiences and claim the status of 'common sense'." (Breeze 2020, p. 1) While Breeze did not conduct a rhetorical analysis, the characteristics of populist discourse that she identified are useful for my analysis and could be applied to Donald Trump's tweets.

Rhetorical analyses which focus on political discourse have been made by for instance Niini Vartia-Paukku in her PhD dissertation "Public Speaking in International Flora. Rhetorical strategies, coherence and responsibility in political discourse." (2020) In her dissertation, Vartia-Paukku studies political discourses and how rhetorical choices affect international stability by constructing coherence and responsibility. One of the interesting things that she did in this dissertation, is look at political speeches and analyze them by focusing on the use of the pronoun 'we', and how the speakers in turn through this pronoun positioned themselves in relation to their audience. While it is not explicitly mentioned in her dissertation, the use of

‘we’, or the ‘us versus them’-dichotomy, is commonly used in populist rhetoric, and also something I will be examining in my analysis. (Mouffe, 2000; Vartia-Paukku, 2020)

A similar analysis was made by Virpi Salojärvi in her PhD dissertation “The Media in the Core of Political Conflict. Venezuela during the last years of Hugo Chavez’s Presidency.” (2016). She conducts a visual rhetorical analysis on newspaper images, asking the question of who ‘the people’ are, that is, who is included or excluded and how. She also focuses on the three core signifiers of populism: the people, the leader and the enemy. (Salojärvi, 2016, p. 74, 97) These are important parts of populist discourse and are thus of value to me as I conduct my own analysis.

Watt et al. conduct a rhetorical analysis on Trump’s tweets in their article “Trump typhoon: A rhetorical analysis of the Donald’s Twitter feed” (2017) by applying Aristotle’s traditional categories of rhetoric – deliberative, forensic, and epideictic – on his tweets. They use these categories as a way of understanding what makes Trump’s tweets persuasive. This is an interesting rhetorical analysis of Trump’s tweets, especially using the older, traditional categories on a mode of communication that is highly postmodern. (Watt et al. 2017, p. 1) While my aim is not to conduct a rhetorical analysis following the traditional categories of classical rhetoric, a rhetorical analysis conducted with tweets as the material is still useful previous research for me to build upon and take inspiration from. Another important aspect of my analysis, that I will present in the next chapter, is the context in which the communicative act, and thus also the rhetorical analysis of said act, takes place.

2. Context

Jack Selzer (2002) presents two extremes of rhetorical analysis: textual analysis and contextual analysis. He presents these two as not being mutually exclusive, but rather existing on a gradient scale. As the names of the two extremes suggest, textual analysis is mainly concerned with what the texts say, and considers a communicative act as a singular event, to be examined on “its own discrete terms.” (Selzer, 2002, p. 283) A contextual analysis, on the other hand, views the cultural environment that existed when the communicative act took place as even more important than what was said. Further, they view a single rhetorical act as always being part of a larger communicative chain, which is to be taken into consideration when analyzing a single communicative act. (Ibid.)

Few rhetorical analysts operate in one of the extremes; rather, most position themselves somewhere along the continuum between the two. (Ibid., p. 302) For the purpose of my analysis, the context in which Trump's communicative acts take place is of utmost importance, as both the platform on which the speech acts happen, Twitter, as well as the backdrop of events, the presidential election, affect not only what is said and how it is said, but also what can be said and how much.

Thus, there are two main contextual factors in my analysis: Twitter as a platform for communicative acts and the events of the presidential election and how they set off the thunderstorm of tweets on Trump's account.

2.1 Twitter as a platform for communicative acts

When considering the context in which a communicative act takes place, it is important to not only consider the cultural context, which in this case is Trump's imminent loss in the United States Presidential election 2020, and which I will discuss in the next section, but also the practical possibilities and limitations of the communicative space. (Renberg, 2007, p. 20) Twitter is a unique communicative space, with both structural limitations, as well as unwritten norms and rules for the users of the platform about how one should communicate on the platform. This means that Trump's rhetoric on Twitter is affected by the practical aspects of the platform, for instance that the character limit for a singular tweet is 280 characters.[1]

While it is entirely possible to create longer communicative chains on Twitter by creating a thread of tweets, the way in which people express themselves is affected by the platform, as people tend to express themselves in shorter terms. (Zappavigna, 2012) Even though the communication on Twitter is mainly written, excluding pictures and videos, tweets often resemble oral communication based on their style. (Schmidt, 2012, p. 9) It is not uncommon to see tweets with few words, and Donald Trump is no stranger to short tweets, or using caps lock and exclamation points to get his point across, as will be made obvious once I present the material and move on to the analysis. While these could be construed as populist rhetoric, as they are short, sweet and straight to the point, I argue that these are typical of communication

[1] The character limit used to be 140 but was changed to 280 in 2017. This means that for the empirical data used in this analysis, the character limit is 280.

on Twitter, and thus I will not bring these elements into my analysis of Trump's populist rhetoric.

When considering Twitter as a communicative space from a rhetorical perspective, one also needs to consider the audience. Something that is characteristic of Twitter, and, arguably, all social media sites, is the notion of the personal public. (Schmidt, 2012, p. 4) A personal public differs from the so-called traditional publics that exist in relation to mass media in three main elements, mapped out by Schmidt (2012). Firstly, in a personal public the information is not determined by 'journalistic news factors', but rather by the audience's personal interests. Secondly, the audience is not an unknown, scattered mass of people, but rather "consists of network ties made explicit." Finally, the communication in personal publics is more resemblant of a two-way conversation, rather than the typical one-way mode of broadcasted mass media. (Schmidt, 2012, p. 4)

Donald Trump's audience on Twitter cannot necessarily be called a personal public, as I argue that his tweets reach a larger, unknown audience, thus not fulfilling Schmidt's second element. While the audience on Twitter may come across Trump's tweets by choosing to follow him or by the content in them corroborating with their personal interests, his tweets are constantly re-shared, not just through retweets on the platform, but on other social media platforms as well as in traditional journalistic news media.

When looking at classic rhetoric theory, an important part of rhetorical analysis is the audience. A rhetor performing an act of communication always has an audience of a kind, because the rhetorical process cannot be completed without someone being on the receiving end of the communicative act and this act affecting them in one way or another. As already mentioned, this is complicated by social media platforms such as Twitter, because they create a unique audience that is neither the mass audience of broadcast news media, nor the clearly defined audience of ancient Greek speeches imagined by Aristotle. Thus, the actual public on Twitter is not always the intended one. (Renberg, 2007, p. 21; Leach, 2000, p. 5)

While the audience on Twitter may not always be identifiable, Leach (2000) posits that there are ways in which the audience can be created within the text: "While the audience does not always reside in the text in any obvious fashion, the text rhetorically positions its audience in ways that can be discerned through analysis." (Leach, 2000, p. 5) An example of this

positioning, especially when considering political texts, is the "us" versus "them"-dichotomy. While this is something that is always present in politics, this divide is highlighted in populism. (Salojärvi, 2016, p. 19) Thus, populist politicians often position themselves, as well as their audience by the pronoun 'we'. (Vartia-Paukku, 2020, p. 59) This is something that I will examine further when I present the characteristics of populist communication in the theory chapter, as well as in my analysis applying these characteristics using rhetorical analysis.

A final aspect to consider regarding Twitter as a communicative space concerns the possibility for the rhetor to connect directly with the audience, without journalistic mass media as a middleman. This is a main reason why populist politicians, such as Trump, prefer to user Twitter, as it allows them to control the narrative, rather than having it be filtered by the media. (Johnson, 2012, p. 56)

While populist leaders often claim authenticity as well as horizontal and interactive communication through their communicative acts on Twitter, in a study of Latin American populist leaders' communication on Twitter, Waisbord and Amado (2017) found that this is rarely the case. Instead, populist leaders used Twitter to be able to provide unfiltered immediate commentary on current events without being asked uncomfortable questions, as well as to 'attack' political rivals, critical journalists and even citizens. (Waisbord & Amado 2017, p. 1334) This seems to be very much in line with Donald Trump's use of Twitter, as he frequently delegitimizes any mass media outlet, journalist or political rival who disagrees with him or criticizes him. In the next chapter, I give an overview of the other major context for the analysis, which is the United States presidential election 2020.

2.2 The 2020 United States presidential election

November 3, 2020 was election night of the 2020 United States presidential election, in which President Donald Trump, candidate for the Republican Party, was looking to be re-elected for a second term after first being elected as president in 2016. (Ax, 2020) Throughout the campaign and leading up to election day, as he was lagging behind Biden in the polls, Trump continuously made attempts to delegitimize and undermine vote tallying. One of the most common claims made by him was that only votes tallied on election night, November 3, were valid. (Wilkie, 2020)

In the end, Trump lost the election, and the Democratic candidate Joe Biden was elected the 46th president of the United States, by defeating Trump 306-232 in the Electoral College and with a 4-point margin in the popular vote. This makes Trump the first incumbent to not be re-elected since 1992, when George HW Bush lost to Bill Clinton. (Gambino, 2021; Igielnik et al., 2022)

The 2020 presidential election was unique, being realized amid the Covid-19 pandemic. (Igielnik et al., 2022) This was the first time that mail-in voting was used on a larger scale in the United States, being made available to a broader audience. The voting methods did vary widely between different states, however, 69 percent of voters nationwide still chose to cast their ballot 'nontraditionally', that is, by either voting before Election Day or opting for a mail-in ballot. In 2016, only about 40 percent of voters chose to cast their ballot in a nontraditional way. Most of the increase in nontraditional voting was due to the mail-in voting, as 43 percent of voters in 2020 cast their ballots by mail, compared to 21 percent in 2016. (The United States Census Bureau, 2021) I will further discuss the implications of the mail-in voting on Trump's rhetoric on Twitter in chapter 5.2 of the analysis.

Another important factor in the lead-in to the 2020 presidential election is the position in which Donald Trump was situated. When he was elected president in 2016, Trump had the advantage of being a new figure in politics: he was a businessman and had a past as a celebrity on both reality tv as well as appearing in movies and tv shows. (Street, 2018) This helped him emerge as a populist leader, an alternative to 'other' politicians, and ultimately as someone who had been outside of the political sphere and thus could present an alternative to a seemingly failing democracy in the United States. He did this, for instance, by providing simple solutions to complex issues, such as solving the illegal immigration crisis by building a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. (Demata, 2017)

In 2020, on the other hand, Donald Trump ran for re-election. He had completed his first presidential term and, as is common for populist leaders, had not necessarily managed to perform and complete the promises he made as he was running for president in 2016. (Heinisch, 2003) One of the main platforms he ran on in 2016 was immigration policy and during the initial months of his presidency, Trump implemented a range of executive actions, policy objectives, and enforcement measures that made clear his desire to move away from Obama's pro-immigration policy towards a more nativist stance. However, even with these policy

changes, Trump struggled with implementing them, as almost all his executive orders related to immigration were met with federal lawsuits supported by states and municipalities, leading to either complete or partial injunctions against them. (Reich, 2018)

Populist leaders tend to do better in opposition, as the techniques and populist rhetoric they use to gain office are more fruitful when they are an opposition party rather than the governing party. (Heinisch, 2003) Making grandiose promises is easier as an opposition party, as the alternative to the party in power. Thus, when Trump ran for re-election in 2020 as the leader of the governing party, he was in a distinctly different position than during his initial victory in 2016.

3. Theoretical framework: rhetorical analysis and populist rhetoric

This chapter is an overview of the theoretical framework applied in my analysis. The main theoretical framework will be populist rhetoric as defined by Benjamin Moffitt; however, I will also be drawing from the theory of rhetorical analysis. Moffitt's theories on performative populism, in particular the way in which populist leaders perform a crisis, are also a central part of the theoretical framework. While rhetorical analysis is a research method and the primary method I will be using in this analysis, it relies on theory, and thus I choose to also present it as part of the theoretical framework chapter.

3.1 Rhetorical analysis

Rhetorical analysis is a theory-based research method that is not strictly defined or limited to a specific set of steps to follow. Selzer (2002) writes: "There is no generally accepted definition of rhetorical analysis (or rhetorical criticism, as it is also called), probably because there is really no generally accepted definition of rhetoric." (Selzer, 2002, p. 279) As a first step when conducting rhetorical analysis, it is thus important to define which method or theory of rhetorical analysis one will be following. Rhetoric has a long and complex history, with near 2500 years worth of diverse theories and methods of employment. (Selzer, 2002, p. 279; Zachry, 2007, p. 69; Leach, 2000, p. 3)

While rhetorical analysis is similar to, for instance, narrative analysis and content analysis, what makes it unique is the theories drawn from rhetorical tradition, such as Aristotle's *Art of*

Rhetoric. (Zachry, 2007, p. 68; Vartia-Paukku, 2020, p. 4) While many ancient Greek philosophers and thinkers contributed to theories surrounding rhetoric and rhetorical analysis, the most well-known of them is Aristotle. This is highlighted in the fact that many contemporary rhetorical analyses still follow Aristotle's classic tools of persuasion and categorize texts according to his traditional categories or stases. (Zachry, 2007, p. 71; Renberg, 2007, p. 26)

According to Aristotle, the rhetor has three main tools of persuasion at their disposal: ethos, pathos and logos, that is, the credibility of the speaker, the emotional effect on the public and the apparent truth in their argument. (Zachry, 2007, p. 71; Renberg, 2007, p. 26) That is not to say that the rhetor uses only one of these at a time, but rather, their persuasiveness is based on a combination of the abovementioned.

Besides methods of persuasion, Aristotle also mapped out three different categories or stases for different types of rhetorical performances: deliberative, forensic and demonstrative (also known as epideictic). Briefly put, deliberative rhetoric is focused on the future, forensic rhetoric assesses past events, and demonstrative rhetoric deals with the present. This is from Aristotle's classic rhetoric, in which policy was the arena for deliberative rhetoric, while forensic rhetoric is concerned with judiciary matters. Demonstrative, or epideictic, rhetoric in its classical form was most often used in award ceremonies and funerals. (Zachry, 2007, p. 71; Leach, 2000, p. 6)

Something to consider is that Aristotle's rhetoric is from a time when most communicative acts were oral performances. Thus, when applying these in contemporary analyses, one may have to adjust the method of analysis depending on the material and the context in which it appears. An example of this, is that when Aristotle considers his public, this is the public that is present during a speech, whereas in our interconnected information-overload era, the public can be difficult to pinpoint. When Donald Trump posts a tweet, it is almost impossible to say how large of an audience that tweet reaches, as it is spread throughout other social media platforms and possibly quoted in news articles, as well as probably shared by many private persons through different channels.

Some definitions of rhetorical analysis include trying to understand and explain the effect that certain communicative acts have, or more specifically, trying to pinpoint what exactly makes

certain acts of communication persuasive. (Renberg, 2007, p. 14; Selzer, 2002, p. 281) Leach writes: "Politicians perform 'acts of rhetoric'. That is, they organize discourse to be persuasive. Rhetorical scholars, however, seek to unpack such discourses and ask why they are persuasive." (Leach, 2000, p. 2) Further, she presents three definitions of the term 'rhetoric': 1. The act of persuasion, 2. The analysis of acts of persuasion, and 3. A worldview about the persuasive power of discourse. (Ibid.)

Rhetoric is closely tied to persuasion, if not synonymous with it, as Johnson (2012) writes "rhetoric is simply persuasion through communication". (Johnson, 2012, p. 54) She also notes that the term 'rhetoric' is often viewed through the lens of negative connotation, with many viewing the act of being persuasive as something deceptive. I am inclined to agree with Johnson, who herself presents rhetoric as something neutral to be analyzed in rhetorical analysis, rather than something inherently deceptive to its nature. (Ibid.) Johnson's definition of rhetoric is simpler than Leach's, as Leach also considers how rhetoricians both analyze rhetorical discourses created by others, like I am doing in this thesis with analyzing Trump's rhetoric on Twitter, while also themselves producing a rhetorical discourse in the process of analyzing it. (Leach, 2000, p. 3)

Rhetorical analysis is thus interpretive to its nature – both in analysis and application, because, as I mentioned above, there is no uniform way to conduct rhetorical analysis, and often rhetoricians choose their method of rhetorical analysis based on the material and context. (Leach, 2000, p. 9) There is, however, also an interesting epistemological quality to rhetoric and rhetorical analysis: rhetoric is, besides the act of being persuasive, also a way of producing and shaping knowledge. It enables the rhetor to rhetorically package their knowledge – what we know, we put into words, and what we put into words, we say we know. (Leach, 2000, p. 13)

Furthermore, rhetoric also creates meaning by sharing a certain act or situation with the (real or imagined) public. The public, however, then takes over the meaning-making, creating their own definition of the rhetorical situation that was presented. (Johnson, 2012, p. 60) This means that rhetoric is more than just mere words or language, it is a way of persuasion and expressing knowledge, but also of creating that knowledge as well as shaping the narratives we tell.

3.2 Populist rhetoric

As already mentioned, when defining the key concepts in chapter 1.2, populism is a concept without a clear definition. In this thesis, populism is understood as a political style; as a way of doing politics, regardless of the ideological contents of the information that is being shared. (Eklund & Knott (eds) 2020, p. 11) Populism is thus also seen as discursive, and I argue that there are characteristics of populist discourse that can be identified through rhetorical analysis. In general, populist movements and parties follow vertical communication patterns which center on a charismatic leader, use antagonistic rhetoric toward critics and (perceived) rivals, while also obsessing over the 'elite' media and being their target. (Waisbord & Amado 2017, p. 1331)

I borrow the theoretical framework from Moffitt (2014), who in his book *The Global Rise of Populism* writes: "We need to move from seeing populism as a particular 'thing' or entity towards viewing it as a *political style* that is performed, embodied and enacted across a variety of political and cultural contexts." (Moffitt 2014, p. 3) Within this, the focus lies on speech acts and rhetoric. Further, Moffitt views populism and populist rhetoric as gradational rather than binary, meaning that there is room for evaluating the level of populism, rather than just viewing parties and political leaders as strictly populist or non-populist. (Moffitt 2014, p. 22)

Moffitt identifies three main features of populism as a political style: "an appeal to 'the people' versus 'the elite', 'bad manners' and the performance of crisis, breakdown or threat." (Moffitt 2014, p. 45) 'The people' is contrasted with 'the elite' or 'the enemy', which, in an American context often is defined in cultural, rather than economic terms. (Eklundh & Knott (eds.) 2020, p. 31) This means, that when Trump defines his 'people' and their enemy, 'the elite', he views himself as one of the people, even though it would be easy to, in economic terms, view Trump as someone who belongs to the elite. Trump's 'elite', then, often consists of those who are critical of him, such as 'Hollywood liberals' or the mainstream media. (Eklundh & Knott (eds.) 2020, p. 15, 31)

The people' and 'the elite' are Laclaudian empty signifiers. The empty signifiers come from post-structuralist discourse theory and were presented in relation to populism in Laclau's work *On Populist Reason* (2005). An empty signifier is a word or a concept that can be filled with any meaning. This notion of empty signifiers is utilized by populist actors like Trump when

they present the ‘us versus them’-dichotomy. There is no set definition of ‘the people’ or ‘the enemy’, but rather, these are empty placeholders, that can be filled with any given meaning depending on the populist leader’s needs. (Laclau, 2005; Jacobs, 2018)

‘The people’ versus ‘the elite’ in populist rhetoric is often phrased through using the pronoun ‘we’. ‘We’ has the power of being both inclusive and exclusive. Through the usage of this pronoun in acts of communication by populist leaders, a rhetorical analysis can determine the positioning of the audience as well as that of the leader in relation to the audience and thus also the pronoun. Usually, populist leaders use ‘we’ to strengthen their position as one of ‘the people’, and in a sense, distancing themselves from their role as politicians. (Taggart, 2000, p. 61) Further, as there is no ideological ground to either populist rhetoric or to the empty signifier ‘the people’, populists are often clearer on what or who they are not, than what they are. Thus, sometimes ‘the people’ is defined based on what it is not and who it does not include, this being, ‘the enemy’ or ‘the elite’. (Taggart, 2000, p. 92, 94)

‘Bad manners’ is defined by Moffitt as “a coarsening of political rhetoric, and a disregard for ‘appropriate’ modes of acting in the political realm.” (Moffitt, 2014, p. 43) Scholars often talk about how populist leaders are ‘charismatic’, that is, in a sense, extraordinary. (Pappas, 2016) To relate to the people, however, populists need to come across as ordinary, as one of them. A way for populist leaders to maintain this perilous balance – to appear both charismatic and ordinary – is for them to use ‘bad manners’. (Moffitt, 2014, p. 55) Through this, they can distance themselves from the very real political (and often economical) elite that they belong to and seem as different from other mainstream politicians. (Moffitt, 2014, p. 58)

While other politicians conduct themselves in an appropriate manner, often using language that can seem difficult and unclear to ‘ordinary people’, populists pride themselves on not behaving in the expected or ‘appropriate’ way in the political realm. (Moffitt, 2014, p. 58) Ways in which bad manners are performed rhetorically include communicating in a more casual way than traditional political discourse, through for instance swearing, taunting, and making over-the-top claims. In more extreme forms, this ‘bad manners’ can take the form of political incorrectness. (Moffitt 2014, p. 60-61) Thus, by performing politics incorrectly through coarsening political rhetoric, the populist leader is brought closer to the people.

Finally, Moffitt posits that populism as a political style perpetuates a notion of crisis through communication. (Moffitt 2014, p. 45) Populism gains momentum when there is a crisis or threat, and it usually manages to come to power when democracy is unstable. (Brown, 2020) Populist discourse, however, does not need an actual crisis to perform crisis. This means, that populist communication exaggerates and dramatizes events to induce threat or crisis. (Moffitt 2014, p. 45) Or, as Moffitt puts it: "Populist actors actively 'perform' and perpetuate a sense of crisis, rather than simply reacting to external crisis." (Moffitt 2014, p. 118) Because the populist leader manages to make an event seem like a crisis, this also creates a sense of urgency: action must be taken, and it needs to be done quickly. (Ibid.)

In the case of Trump and the 2020 presidential election, the election itself is the crisis. Or, rather, the perception that the election is being stolen from the Republicans and that the voting has been rigged is the crisis, and it is this crisis that is then performed through communication. Something that is highlighted in this perpetuation of crisis or threat, is the fact that populism is not just a style of politics that emerges when democracy is in crisis and populism can take power, but that it is also a strategy to maintain office. (Eklundh & Knott (eds.) 2020, p. 15)

It is these three elements then, 'the people' versus 'the elite', 'bad manners', and the notion of crisis, that Moffitt uses to characterize populist discourse. These elements function as the basis for my analysis, as I will be looking for these elements in Donald Trump's tweets following the United States presidential election 2020. Through conducting a rhetorical analysis of his tweets, I attempt to identify what elements or types of populist rhetoric that Trump uses in his tweets.

4. Method: rhetorical analysis

This chapter explains the research method used in the analysis. I draw from the theories of rhetorical analysis to build my own method in my approach to the material. While some contemporary scholars of rhetorical analysis turn to Aristotle's classic rhetorical analysis, many build their own method based on the needs of the material they are analyzing. Based on the material and the context surrounding it, I have created my own toolkit and will be looking for elements of populist rhetoric in the rhetorical analysis I conduct. As defined in the previous chapter, the populist elements that I will be looking for are appeals to 'the people', 'bad manners', and the notion of crisis. While conducting the rhetorical analysis on the material,

Trump's tweets, which I will present in chapter 4.1, I will both be looking closely at the material to identify elements of populist rhetoric, while at the same time considering the context in which the communicative act happens.

Taking inspiration from the theory of rhetorical analysis as well as how rhetorical analysis has been implemented as a method by others before me, I have built my own method of rhetorical analysis with which I analyze the empirical material, that is, Trump's tweets. As I began my analysis, I started by viewing the material on thetrumparchive.com and applying relevant filters (presented below) to narrow down the tweets to the relevant time period. As I explain further below, I also opted to focus solely on original tweets from Donald Trump's Twitter account, @realdonaldtrmp, thus filtering out any retweets. While rhetorical analysis can be conducted on images, as done by Virpi Salojärvi in her PhD dissertation "The Media in the Core of Political Conflict. Venezuela during the last years of Hugo Chavez's Presidency." (2016), I wanted to conduct a solely textual rhetorical analysis, thus also choosing not to include any tweets which include visual material.

This process left me with 988 tweets, spanning from 3 November 2020 to 8 January 2021.[2] This is still a sizeable amount of material to comb through. However, not all the tweets within that time span are related to the election. Another common theme in Trump's tweets during that time was the issue of Covid-19.

To narrow down the material I opted to filter the existing 988 tweets with the keyword 'election', which left me with 191 tweets in total. I did a close reading of the tweets I had left and began mapping out themes that were present in tweets that also included the word 'election'. These include, but are not limited to, references to the Democratic party and Joe Biden, both of which are sometimes referred to as 'the radical left' by Trump, references to fake news and the media being corrupt as well as references to missing ballots and election fraud.

I categorized the tweets according to Moffitt's characteristics of populist rhetoric: 'us versus them', 'the performance of crisis', and 'bad manners'. It is important to note that during this stage, I noticed that many of the tweets included several of these characteristics, for instance

[2] While Donald Trump was suspended from Twitter on 8 January 2021 his last tweet before his suspension was on 6 January 2021.

both the ‘us versus them’-binary and the performance of crisis, and this can also be seen in the tweets I use as examples in the analysis chapter. However, I still opted to analyze the three categories separately to identify whether clear examples of all three characteristics of populist rhetoric could be found in the material. Table 1 below showcases the total amount of original tweets posted from Trump’s twitter account @realdonaldtrump from 3 November 2020 – 8 January 2021, as well as the sample size of 191 tweets analyzed in this thesis.

Category	**Amount**
Tweets from 3 Nov. 2020 – 8 Jan. 2021	988
Tweets containing keyword ”election” from 3 Nov. 2020 – 8 Jan. 2021	191
Tweets containing populist rhetoric: us versus them	42
Tweets containing populist rhetoric: bad manners	62
Tweets containing populist rhetoric: performing crisis	79
Tweets containing populist rhetoric: shifting the blame	33
Tweets containing populist rhetoric: attacking the media	19
Tweets containing populist rhetoric: turning on other Republicans	17

Table 1: Tweets analyzed and categories of populist rhetoric present in them.

When analyzing the material, I applied both close reading and contextual reading of it. This means, that I was specifically looking for words and phrases which fulfill Moffitt’s characteristics of populist rhetoric, such as references to ‘us’ and ‘them’, as well as implications of a crisis that needs to be solved. However, as populism and populist rhetoric are dependent on the emotions they evoke in the publics, I also considered the context in which this rhetoric is used as I was analyzing the material. The contexts I considered are Donald Trump as a populist leader, Twitter as a platform for populist rhetoric, as well as the election results in the United States presidential election 2020.

However, the approach to identifying characteristics of populist rhetoric differed depending on which characteristic I was looking for. With the first category, ‘us versus them’, I read through the material specifically looking for references to ‘us’ or ‘them’. In certain instances, the tweets including references to ‘us versus them’ did not include the exact words ‘we’, ‘us’, or ‘them’, but rather terminology such as ‘our country’ or simply ‘the USA’, which, within the context of

Trump's 'people' refers to 'us'. When referencing 'them', Trump would at times simply use the term 'Democrats', or, often, 'the radical left Democrats'.

While a category like 'us versus them' allowed me to look for certain words and terms in the tweets, 'bad manners' is not as explicit and literal, and rather required a contextual reading of the text. 'Bad manners' is also the most challenging aspect of populist rhetoric to identify in Trump's tweets, as there is significant overlap between the rhetoric of Twitter and populist rhetoric. I will further explore this in chapter 5.3 of the analysis. While there may be more distinct norms and rules for Presidential conduct in settings such as diplomatic meetings, social media, and particularly Twitter, do not have these same expectations, thus allowing for freer expression and a blurring of the lines regarding what constitutes as 'bad manners' and what is simply in line with the rhetoric of Twitter.

Thus, when approaching 'bad manners' I looked for wordings and terms that could be considered inappropriate even within the context of Twitter. These included, for instance, Trump claiming that he won the election many times throughout the studied time period, as this was an untrue statement according to the facts. Other examples include Trump referring to the proceedings of the election as: "the stench of the 2020 Election Hoax!" as well as calling both Democrats and other Republicans losers, cheats and pathetic. (Trump, 2020), It is, however, worth noting that many of the tweets containing 'bad manners' also included many of the other aspects of populist rhetoric. In general, this was true for many of the tweets in the sample I studied: it was rare to find a tweet containing only one aspect of populist rhetoric, as often they would be intertwined, with Trump both making references to 'us versus them', name-calling as part of 'bad manners' and perpetuating the crisis of the stolen election all in one.

The third category, 'performing crisis', was the most represented one in the sample of tweets. As will be explored further in chapter 5.2 of the analysis, Donald Trump's performance of crisis in the tweets studied is that of a stolen election because of voter fraud. Thus, when approaching and reading the material through the lens of 'performing crisis' I looked for specific references to the election, election process and processing of votes. In the tweets studied, I found references to late votes, votes by deceased people, and animosity towards mail-in ballots, which were made more widely available in the 2020 presidential election due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as discussed in chapter 2.2.

Further, through populist rhetoric of perpetuating a crisis, Trump points to a larger picture of the Democrats 'stealing' the election, and through that, the country. As I was reading the tweets, I noticed a pattern of themes he brings up in relation to the election, which in this case is a populist notion of crisis. These themes are illustrated in Table 2 below.

Theme	**Amount**	**Example**
Votes that came in late	6	"Votes cannot be cast after the Polls are closed!" (Trump, 2020)
Republican observers not allowed in counting rooms	8	"No Republican Poll Watchers allowed" (Trump, 2020)
Mail-in voting	7	"How dare they allow this massive and ridiculous Mail-In Voting to occur" (Trump, 2020)
Dominion Voting Systems and other mechanical 'issues'	9	"Vote tabulated by a Radical Left privately owned company, Dominion, with a bad reputation & bum equipment that couldn't even qualify for Texas" (Trump, 2020)
Biden receiving 'dumps' of votes after the election in swing states	10	"THE DEMOCRATS DUMPED HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF BALLOTS IN THE SWING STATES LATE IN THE EVENING." (Trum, 2020)
More votes than people voting and deceased people voting	6	"The Great State of Michigan, with votes being far greater than the number of people who voted, cannot certify the election." (Trump, 2020)

Table 2: Themes present in 'performing crisis'.

Often, the themes presented in Table 2 above would also coincide, meaning that two or more of them were mentioned in the same tweet. In chapter 5.2 of the analysis, I delve deeper into Trump perpetuating a crisis surrounding the election, and while I perform a broader analysis of how he painted the election and especially the voting process surrounding the election as a crisis to be resolved, I felt mapping out these categories was important, as all of them play a part in the overall performance of crisis.

It is worth noting, that a possible reason for the performance of crisis accounting for the largest sample of tweets has to do with the chosen keyword, 'election'. As the crisis perpetuated by Donald Trump in this thesis is understood as the events surrounding the election and consequent voting process, it is unsurprising that the keyword 'election' would bring a large

sample of tweets related to the events surrounding the election. However, both 'bad manners' and 'us versus them' are also prevalent in the sample of tweets as shown in Table 1.

By only filtering with dates, I had a sample size of 988 tweets, many of which were not concerned with the election, which is my case study in this thesis. Another prominent issue during the chosen time frame, 3 November 2020 – 8 January 2021 was Covid-19, a topic which was prevalent in Donald Trump's tweets during that time. However, as it was not of interest for me in this study, I opted to filter out tweets about Covid-19 as well as any other tweets which did not explicitly relate to the election, thus leading me to choose the keyword 'election' to filter the relevant empirical material.

While I chose to approach my material through a theory-based methodology and a notion of the characteristics of populist rhetoric, I was still open to see where the material would lead me as I began my analysis. Thus, I was also prepared to find aspects and characteristics outside my theoretical framework within the empirical material. While conducting the analysis on the sample of 191 tweets, a pattern of themes and aspects of populist rhetoric outside of the theoretical framework by Moffitt became visible. These are shown in the final three rows of Table 1: shifting the blame, attacking the media, and turning on other Republicans.

Reading through the empirical material with Moffitt's elements of populist rhetoric in mind, I started noticing a pattern of blame-shifting in the tweets. These instances of shifting the blame were not necessarily dependent on specific terms, that is, explicitly using the verb 'to blame', but rather, the rhetoric of blame was present on a broader level. While the rhetoric of blame is tied in with Moffitt's three elements of populist rhetoric, I found that the rhetoric of blame was distinct enough in my analysis that I chose to include it as a separate chapter: chapter 5.4 of the analysis. In chapter 5.4, I further explore in which was Trump uses the rhetoric of blame to shift the responsibility of the outcome of the election to external factors, separate from himself.

Another prominent theme in the sample of 191 tweets analyzed was contempt towards the mainstream media. This is not an uncommon rhetorical tool among populist leaders. (Mazzoleni, 2008) While this othering of the media is closely linked to the populist rhetoric of 'the people versus the elite', with the media representing 'the elite', there was a distinct pattern of on the one hand, Donald Trump dividing the people of the United States into 'us' versus 'them, and on the other hand, verbal attacks towards the media. Following this pattern of

criticism towards the media and giving them a distinct role in the performed crisis surrounding the election, I felt it was justified to dedicate a separate chapter to examining Trump's rhetoric surrounding the media, which will be discussed in chapter 5.5 of the analysis.

An interesting find during my analysis is what will be further explored in chapter 5.6: what I have chosen to call 'turning on his own'. Reading through the tweets chronologically, towards the midway point of the selected timeframe, I started noticing a change in rhetoric by Donald Trump. While still perpetuating the crisis and performing 'bad manners', I noticed that the limits of 'us' versus 'them' started to blur. Unexpectedly, Donald Trump was no longer just focusing on the Democrats and the mainstream media, who had been his focus and 'enemy' in the performed crisis, but also started to blame other Republicans as well as Fox News, a media house that is known to be partisan to the Republican Party. Reading through the material, a pattern of Trump separating himself from other Republicans, or maybe more specifically, separating other Republicans from 'true' Republicans, started to form. Thus, the traditional 'us versus them'-binary was broken, as Trump instead created a third category for Republicans he perceived as obstacles and reasons for his failure in the election.

4.1 Material

The chosen material is tweets from former U.S. president Donald Trump, focusing on the aftermath of the 2020 U.S. presidential election. While there are many other rhetorical events of interest on Trump's Twitter account, I have chosen to focus on the communicative acts that happened beginning election night, November 3, leading up to Trump's permanent suspension from the platform on January 8. The reason I find this specific cultural context, that is, the Republican party's loss in the presidential election, interesting is that it showcases populist rhetoric in a position of losing power. Often populist rhetoric is seen when the populist party or movement is trying to gain political office: when the populist leader presents an alternative to the party that is in power. In this case however, a populist leader is trying to hold on to political office and applying populist rhetoric often associated with one attempting to gain political office.

As Donald Trump has been suspended from Twitter[3], I cannot access his tweets directly on the platform and will instead be using a website called The Trump Archive (https://www.thetrumparchive.com/), which is an archive of all the tweets Trump has posted since joining the platform in 2009 up until his suspension on January 8, 2021. Using this website does make filtering through the tweets and determining the material easier. Even though I am looking at tweets within the timespan 3 November, 2020 to 8 January, 2021, I will only be including tweets that directly reference the presidential election.

There are some other criteria applied to the tweets that will be included in the material. They need to be original tweets from Donald Trump's twitter account @realdonaldtrump. I am not including retweets or replies to other people, just original tweets straight from Trump on his personal account. The Trump Archive allows you to choose these filters, meaning I am filtering out retweets and replies. The Trump Archive also shows tweets that have been deleted from Trump's account at some point before his suspension, and because it would be difficult for me to know why these tweets were deleted and when, I do not want to include them in this analysis, as I believe the context of why they were deleted would be important, and thus the analysis would be incomplete in a sense. Thus, these will also be filtered out.

The Trump Archive allows you to filter tweets by using keywords. To get a selection of tweets starting November 3, 2020, and leading up to January 8, 2021, I began by sifting through the tweets to identify words or terms that were linked to the presidential election, to find keywords that I could use for my final selection of tweets to analyze. A keyword that came up often in tweets from this time period is 'election', and thus I began my analysis by applying this keyword filter. I opted for the keyword 'election' for two main reasons. The first being that this search gave me 191 tweets, which is a good selection yet a small enough amount of material that I can read through all the tweets and try to find elements of populist rhetoric in them. The second reason is that 'election' is a neutral word, that is, it is not making a value judgement of the outcome of either the election, Trump's opinions about the election or my upcoming analysis.

The neutrality of the keyword 'election' is important, especially if we compare it to words like 'fraud' or 'stolen', which both appear in Trump's tweets in the narrowed down material of 191

[3] Trump's account has since been reinstated on Twitter in November 2022 following Elon Musk acquiring the platform.

tweets. These words have a clear negative connotation, and thus I do not want to use them as keywords to filter my material. By limiting the material to tweets where the word 'election' is present I am not actively filtering the results to include emotionally charged words or words with a certain connotation to specifically find populist rhetoric. Rather, I am applying a neutral keyword, election, and inspecting whether populist rhetoric appears in combination with it.

While one might argue that I am losing out on empirical material by only including tweets that explicitly use the word 'election' I find there is a wide enough range of tweets in this selection, as Trump discusses a variety of themes related to the election in these, such as ballots, votes, and news media. Furthermore, there are tweets which implicitly address the election, and tweets which might address the election, but because I do not want to be unsure about my empirical material, I am choosing to limit myself to tweets which explicitly mention the election.

Tweets were chosen as material for two main reasons. Firstly, as I am interested in how Trump himself performs populism and applies populist rhetoric, I need the material to be something that comes directly from him and has not been filtered in any way by for instance a news outlet. As Trump was also very vocal and unfiltered in his stance on Twitter, it seems a suitable source. Secondly, while once could say that it would be worthwhile to study other forms of material in relation to performative and discursive aspects of populism, such as speeches given by Trump as an example, I believe that to be too large an undertaking for this thesis, as the possible material would multiply exponentially. As I am also interested in the role of social media and Twitter in providing a platform for political actors to perform populism, I have chosen to focus solely on tweets in this instance.

4.2 Ethical qualms

There are very few, if none, ethical concerns related to the chosen material. Donald Trump is a public figure and his Twitter account, @realdonaldtrump, is also public and openly accessible to anyone with an internet connection and a Twitter account. To be able to filter the tweets according to my needs specified in the previous chapter, I am using The Trump Archive (https://www.thetrumparchive.com/), rather than going through the tweets on his Twitter account.

The site was launched in 2016 and is an archive of all of Trump's tweets from the time he got the twitter account @realdonaldtrump in 2009 up until his suspension in January 2021. According to the site's creators, they want to provide a public resource where people can access Donald Trump's tweets. Therefore, I am not using any hidden or otherwise non-public material.

The ethical issues, or concerns, are most present in the chosen method of analysis, that is, rhetorical analysis. While many of the research methods within social sciences struggle with the researcher's own position in relation to their object of study, that is, reflexivity, Leach posits that this is most explicit in rhetorical analysis. She explains that, as a researcher, one studies rhetorical discourses while also producing rhetorical discourses at the same time. (Leach, 2000, p. 3)

Rhetorical analysis is concerned with studying what it is that makes rhetoric persuasive. This begs the question: "At what point does the 'analysis' of persuasion not become persuasive itself?" (Ibid.) I, as a researcher, need to keep this in mind while conducting my analysis of Trump's tweets; am I analyzing what makes his rhetoric persuasive or using persuasive rhetoric to persuade the reader myself? Granted, no text is ever fully objective or free of persuasion, as Foucauldian notions of subjectivity affect how each individual completes the analysis, as well as what they choose to include and what not to. (Heyes, 2010) While there are no clear answers to the question I asked above, or no clear boundaries between what is merely analyzing what makes rhetoric persuasive and what is creating persuasive discourses, this is still an important ethical issue to keep in mind as I embark on my analysis.

Furthermore, I need to consider my own approach to this analysis. As this is an emotionally charged subject, as is most politics in the United States, which exists quite strictly on a liberal-conservative binary, I need to be aware of my own political standings and how I choose to approach a politician whose values and opinions I, in general, disagree with. With what expectations do I approach Trump's tweets? Am I prepared to find populist rhetoric in them? When conducting my research, I need to be honest with the material, and not approach it with preconceived notions of what I will find.

Another ethical aspect to consider is that I, as a Finn, am approaching U.S. politics from a distinctly Nordic perspective in this analysis. I may overemphasize the populist binary, as this is something that exists in U.S. politics outside of populism, as they are essentially a two-party

state, with the governing party being either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party, and the losing party of the two aforementioned serving as the opposition. While the U.S. today is a multi-party state, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party are the two major parties, and while other smaller parties such as the Green Party and the Libertarian Party can promote candidates in a presidential election, they are rarely, if ever, successful. Thus, politics in the United States is a two-horse race, and this is something that differs distinctly from the politics of my own country, Finland, as Finland is a functioning multi-party state with coalition governments.

Now, while I am approaching a conservative leader, Donald Trump, from a more liberal perspective, that is, my own political opinions, I am not judging or criticizing Trump based on what he says but rather how he says it. As I mentioned in chapter 1.2.2, I am approaching populism and populist rhetoric from a strictly non-ideological perspective. While conservative, nationalist, and nativist politics is often mislabeled as 'populist' by more liberal or left-leaning actors to delegitimize it, that is not what I am doing or aiming to do in this thesis. (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Newth, 2021) Rather, I am interested in elements of populist rhetoric, which are not bound to any certain ideology, as Moffitt writes. And, as I will show in the following chapter, populism can be as much a phenomenon of the left as the right.

4.3 Populism as a perceived issue of the right

Before delving into the rhetorical analysis of Trump's tweets, I want to briefly discuss populism as a perceived characteristic of right-wing politics. In the West, especially in a European and North American perspective, populism tends to be viewed as somewhat synonymous with conservatism, nationalism, and nativism. A possible explanation for this is that the populist parties and movements we have seen in the West in recent history have often been counter-initiatives for the more left-leaning societies or governments that have, at least perceptually, existed in European and North American countries. (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Newth, 2021)

This can be seen in Sweden with the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna), Poland with Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), Finland with the Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset) and Italy with Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia), just to name a few. While it is entirely possible that many of these parties employ populist communication, populism is not a

characteristic of their ideology, but simply a way of doing politics. Their ideologies, on the other hand, are characterized by conservative and traditional values, nationalism, and nativism.

Knowing this, it is entirely understandable why populism in the West often is viewed as something that goes hand in hand with national-conservative and right-wing ideologies. However, in many Latin American countries, populism has a strong left-wing identity. As de la Torre writes, "Latin America is the land of populism." (de la Torre 2017, p. 1) An article by Block & Negrine (2017) studies populist rhetoric by comparing socialist Bolivarian Hugo Chávez and libertarian right-wing UKIP leader Nigel Farage. While these two populist leaders come from opposite sides of the political spectrum, they share similarities in their styles, approaches to identity, rhetoric, and interactions with the news media. (Block & Negrine, 2017, p. 183)

Another presidential candidate in the lead-up to the 2016 election, Bernie Sanders, has also been described as populist in his approach to politics. (Staufer, 2020) Had I chosen him as a case study for this thesis, I would have approached his rhetoric the exact same way I approach Trump's, even though they are on different sides of the political spectrum, with Sanders presenting left-wing socialist-leaning views. Thus, even though Donald Trump presents nativist ideology in his policies, for the sake of this thesis I view this as something separate from his populist rhetoric, which is his way of performing politics.

5. Analysis

In this chapter I present the analysis of the empirical material, that is, elements of populist rhetoric used by Donald Trump in his tweets in the aftermath of the U.S. presidential election 2020. In his tweets, I found uses of the performance of crisis or threat as well as us vs. them-positioning. 'Bad manners' was more difficult to identify, as I will explain further down, as it is the characteristic of populist rhetoric that most coincides with rhetoric and communication on Twitter in general. However, I still found examples of Trump performing 'bad manners', albeit these are not as clear as the other examples, and again, could also be viewed as simply a product of communication on Twitter as a platform.

Furthermore, as I analyzed Trump's tweets, I also found other interesting rhetorical aspects, some of which are also commonly used by populists. One of these is references to 'fake news'

or a ‘corrupt media’. While these do tie into the us versus them narrative, as ‘the media’ is often viewed as ‘elite’ by populists and thus part of ‘them’, I still found them to be worthy of examining in their own category. (Mazzoleni, 2008) What is possibly even more interesting, is which media companies Donald Trump talked about, for instance Fox News, and how he essentially made the traditionally right-wing, Republican news site a part of ‘them’ rather than us. I will delve deeper into this when I examine his tweets about fake news.

Other characteristics I found in his tweets were references to himself and ‘his’ America as a sort of Heartland, another tactic commonly used in populist rhetoric, as well as repeated short phrases and personal attacks on president-elect Joe Biden as well as his son Hunter, as well as Republican politicians he felt did not have his side. Especially choosing to target other Republicans is an interesting rhetorical choice, as by doing this Donald Trump is breaking the ‘us versus them’-dichotomy, which is typical of populist rhetoric.

Before I delve deeper into my analysis, I want to stress that many tweets contain several of the elements listed above, and as can be seen above, certain themes and characteristics that are present in the tweets fit into several different categories. I begin by looking at the us versus them-dichotomy, or ‘the people’ versus ‘the elite’ or ‘the enemy’.

5.1 Us versus them: who is part of Trump’s America?

In his tweets from the time after the election 2020, Donald Trump exhibits a pattern of saying ‘we’ in reference to an ambivalent ‘the people’. A clear example of this can be seen in his tweet from November 4, 2020, where he writes: “We are up BIG, but they are trying to STEAL the Election. We will never let them do it. Votes cannot be cast after the Polls are closed!” (Trump, 2020)[4] Contextually, it is important to note that this was tweeted after polls had closed but before all votes had been counted, and thus the race for president was still very much ongoing.

In the tweet above, Trump clearly distinguishes between an ‘us’, his people, and a ‘them’, ‘the enemy’. While it is easy to read Trump’s ‘the people’ as the Republicans, the ones voting for him and ‘the elite’ as the Democrats, it is important to note that the notion of ‘the people’ versus ‘the elite’ is very much fluid. This tweet also includes references to a crisis or threat, which I will get to in the following subchapter.

[4] All capitalizations are Donald Trump’s, both in this tweet and all tweets I use as examples going forward.

On November 5, 2020, Trump writes "WE WILL WIN! America First!" as part of a tweet discussing election fraud. (Trump, 2020) Here, he takes his implication of 'the people' further, as he also makes a direct reference to America. The underlying message here is that America stands for Trump's 'the people'. This, again, could mean that for Trump, America stands for his supporters, the Republicans, and not for all the other groups of people, such as the Democrats, who could also identify with the term 'America'.

This notion of 'America', the Heartland (Löfflmann, 2021), being part of the Republican 'us' and belonging to 'the people' is further exemplified in tweets from November 14, 2020, and November 15, 2020, where Trump writes, respectively: "Don't let the Radical Left Dems STEAL THE ELECTION!" (Trump, 2020) and "We won't let a RIGGED ELECTION steal our Country!" (Trump, 2020) While there is not an explicit mention of us or them in the first tweet, there is an othering of the Democrats, and an implicit notion of "the radical left dems" being synonymous with 'them' or 'the elite'. This pattern continues in the second tweet, where Trump first performs a crisis through calling the presidential election rigged, and implying that this rigged election, by the democrats, will steal the country from 'us', the Republicans.

By calling America 'our country', Donald Trump makes it a part of his 'us', something belonging to his 'the people', and thus being something that does not belong to 'them', and furthermore, something that can be wrongfully stolen by 'them'. He exhibits this behavior again on November 17, 2020, writing: "The USA stands proud!" (Trump, 2020) This tweet is written in the context of Michigan refusing to officially recognize the election results, which Trump views as fraudulent. This begs the question – who is Trump referring to when he says 'the USA'? In another context, the name of the country would refer to the entire country and its population, however, here 'the USA' sounds almost synonymous with 'Republicans' or, maybe even more specifically, 'Trump supporters'. Again, this revokes a notion of the Heartland, and of Trump equating himself with the Heartland and the 'true America'. (Löfflmann, 2021)

While I will discuss Trump's rhetoric surrounding the media in its own chapter, it is worth mentioning that traditionally, populist parties view 'the media' as 'the elite', someone who is not on their side and cannot be trusted in their reports, unless it is a media site with a clear political agenda similar to the populist party's. Thus, it is not uncommon to see populist leaders

refer to the media when talking in terms of 'the people' versus 'the elite'. After all, a populist leader's greatest strength is showcasing that they are one of the people, the everyman, and not part of the so-called 'elite' – even if they very much are part of the elite of the country.

Trump applies this rhetoric in his tweet from November 16, 2020, when he writes: "The Radical Left Democrats, working with their partner, the Fake News Media, are trying to STEAL this Election. We won't let them!" (Trump, 2020) As I mentioned earlier, the categories of 'us' versus 'them' are purposefully kept vague, so that they can change and include or exclude different people depending on the needs of the populist leader at the time. Here, Trump refers to both the democrats, or 'radical left democrats', and the news media, or 'fake news media', as he calls each group respectively, as 'them' or 'the elite'. While he does not explicitly use these terms, we can see that he posits the two aforementioned groups against 'us' when he writes that 'we' will not let 'the elite' steal the election.

Thus, while not explicitly stating that the democrats and the news media are 'them' or explicitly stating who is part of the 'we' he refers to in the tweet, he does make a clear distinction of who is not part of 'us', of 'the people', and that is the Democrats and the news media. News media can here be understood as any news media that does not portray Donald Trump in a positive light. However, further down the line, Trump also disrupts this order, as he includes Fox News, which is traditionally viewed as a Republican news media in the United States in 'them' and in his words, 'the fake news media', rather than as part of his 'us'. I will discuss Trump's rhetoric surrounding the news further in chapter 5.4. In the next chapter I analyze something already mentioned in this chapter, that is, how Trump creates a rhetoric of crisis surrounding the election.

5.2 Our country's in crisis: the election has been stolen

"Our country's in crisis, who wants to vote for the mother of ISIS". (ERB, 2016) This is a line said by the character Donald Trump, played by Lloyd Ahlquist (known online as EpicLLOYD), in the Youtube video *Donald Trump vs Hillary Clinton. Epic Rap Battles of History*. While this is a humorous rap line in a comedy series created by Ahlquist and Peter Shukoff (known online as Nice Peter), it does speak to one of the cornerstones of populist rhetoric: there is an ongoing crisis that needs to be rectified somehow.

Just as his fictionalized character in the ERB video, Donald Trump constantly performs an ongoing and looming threat or crisis in his tweets following election day, November 3, 2020. Some of the main crises he references in his tweets include votes that were turned in late, a rigged election, as well as the fact that this election allowed mail-in ballots. Throughout Donald Trump's tweets in the around two months following the election, there is a pattern to be observed regarding what the main crisis surrounding the election is.

Just after the election, in the days after November 3, 2020, the crisis Trump performs has to do with votes that were cast after the polls closed, meaning they were too late to be counted according to Trump. This is exemplified in two tweets from November 4 and November 5, where he writes: "Votes cannot be cast after the Polls are closed" and "ANY VOTE THAT CAME IN AFTER ELECTION DAY WILL NOT BE COUNTED!", respectively. (Trump, 2020; Trump, 2020) He continues this narrative, writing: "Tens of thousands of votes were illegally received after 8 P.M. on Tuesday, Election Day, totally and easily changing the results in Pennsylvania and certain other razor thin states." on November 7. (Trump, 2020)

The crisis that Trump creates and spreads to his followers here is a question of invalid votes, votes that should not be counted in the election because he claims they were cast after the polls closed on November 3. The way Donald Trump words things in these tweets makes it sound like people voted in person after the polls had closed, and, more specifically, the underlying implication in his tweets is that the so-called late votes in certain states, especially the swing states, were cast by Democrats to ensure that Trump would not win said state in the election.

Trump further strengthens this narrative in his rhetoric by claiming that there was a myriad of votes ('hundreds of thousands', as he writes in one tweet), which were not allowed to be observed. He continues this narrative later, positing that specifically no Republican vote watchers were allowed in a tweet posted on November 18. What he alludes to here is that Democrats tampered with the votes, either during the voting process itself or during the counting of the votes. Using this rhetoric, he further elevates the perceived crisis surrounding the election, and creates a crisis surrounding the voting results of the election, by using claims of populist rhetoric that the votes were fraudulent in one way or another.

What might be happening regarding Trump's claims of fraudulent and late votes has to do with the election process in the United States. While polls closed on November 3, not all votes were

counted that day. The time the polls closed also varied, with polls closing between 7 and 8 pm in the respective time zones. Nonetheless, it is standard practice to keep tabulating and counting votes after the polls have closed, and in the days following the election, as explained by Nicholas Riccardi in an article posted on 2 November 2020, in The Associated Press. ("AP Explains: The Election Result May Be Delayed. That's OK.," 2020)

It seems, however, as though Trump believes that only votes which were counted as of election night should count, as he tweets: "I had such a big lead in all of these states late into election night, only to see the leads miraculously disappear as the days went by. Perhaps these leads will return as our legal proceedings move forward." (Trump, 2020) While Trump may have held the lead in certain key states on election night, after the polls had closed, it does not mean that he won the states, as it is possible that many votes were yet to be counted.

The rhetoric he uses to elevate the count and tabulation of the votes after November 3 to a crisis almost sounds like a conspiracy – that there was a plan by the Democrats to overturn the election, if need be, meaning if Trump were to win, to ensure that Biden was elected president. He furthers this narrative on November 9, by tweeting: "Georgia will be a big presidential win, as it was the night of the Election!" (Trump, 2020) Here, again, there is a focus on the number and the amount of votes on election night, when Trump claims he had a clear lead in several of the important states, such as swing states and states with a large number of electoral votes, even though it is common procedure in the United States presidential election that the winner is not declared on election night as a significant number of votes may yet to be counted at that time. ("AP Explains: The Election Result May Be Delayed. That's OK.," 2020)

While it is not uncommon for the count of votes to take longer than election night in the United States, the results in the 2020 election were further delayed because of the large increase of mail-in ballots and the differences in legislation surrounding them in the 50 states. While mail-in ballots have been used in previous elections, there was a distinct upturn in the accessibility of mail-in ballots in the 2020 election because of the Covid-19 pandemic. (Love et al., 2020) According to the Pew Research Center, 46% of Americans opted to vote by absentee or mail-in ballot. Out of those that voted by absentee or mail-in ballot, 44% returned their votes by mail. (Pew Research Center, 2020)

One of the key ways in which mail-in ballots affected the time it took to count the popular vote is the fact that 22 states had grace periods for ballots arriving after November 3. This grace period varied from one day in some states all the way up to 20 days in Washington. Some of the states implementing grace periods already had legislation allowing these procedures, whereas others put into effect special extensions because of the pandemic. The records surrounding mail-in ballots that arrived within the grace period were not well-kept, meaning there are not exact numbers on how many of the mail-in votes arrived after November 3 in the 22 states that allowed grace periods. (Kozlowska, 2020)

However, *The Guardian* reports estimated numbers and percentages of mail-in ballots during the grace periods in the different states. In Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, both of which had a three-day grace period, the grace period votes made up 0.4 per cent and 0.2 per cent, respectively, of the total mail-in vote. North Carolina had a nine-day grace period, and in this time around 15,000 votes came in, making up around 1.4 per cent of the total mail-in vote. Washington had the longest grace period, spanning up to 20 days after the election, as votes were only cast by mail. Here, the total number of grace period mail-in ballots was around 2.4 per cent of the total votes. When speaking of mail-in ballots, it is worth noting that citizens were also able to deliver their mail-in ballot to the election office or through a drop box, and that these also count as mail-in votes. (Kozlowska, 2020) All in all, ballots arriving during the grace period did not make up a large amount of the total votes. This does not mean that they were not important to the final results, as, especially in states where the popular vote was close even a small number of votes can make a difference.

As already mentioned, the reason more mail-in ballots were utilized in the 2020 election is the Covid-19 pandemic. Without the increased possibility of using a mail-in vote, there is a risk that many citizens would have been unable to vote, as they maybe could not have risked their health during in-person voting. The grace periods were also implemented to help the voters: there had been delays in United States postal services leading up to the election and some voters were not getting their mail-in ballots in time to have time to fill them in and mail them so they would arrive by November 3. (Kozlowska, 2020)

Donald Trump, however, creates a different narrative surrounding the mail-in votes on his Twitter account. On November 7, he finishes a tweet about alleged voter fraud by stating: “MILLIONS OF MAIL-IN BALLOTS WERE SENT TO PEOPLE WHO NEVER ASKED

FOR THEM!" (Trump, 2020) The implication in his rhetoric here is that mail-in votes are somehow inherently untrustworthy, and that people who did not absolutely need to vote via mail should not have done so. He creates an uncertainty around the security of mail-in votes, which could influence some of his followers to trust and believe in the crisis he is creating through his rhetoric surrounding the election.

This narrative continues on November 15, when Trump writes: "All of the mechanical 'glitches' that took place on Election Night were really THEM getting caught trying to steal votes. They succeeded plenty, however, without getting caught. Mail-in elections are a sick joke!" (Trump, 2020) This tweet uses both the notion of crisis and threat as well as us versus them rhetoric. The mechanical 'glitches' as he calls them and other election security-related issues are also brought up by Trump, and I will return to these later in this chapter, as they are also a part of creating a notion of threat around the election.

The latter part of the tweet mentioned above is of specific interest: "Mail-in elections are a sick joke!" Here Trump clearly voices his stance on the use of mail-in ballots, while also adding to the crisis he has created surrounding them. This tweet reads as though mail-in ballots cannot be trusted, inciting further distrust in his followers surrounding the security of the election, while simultaneously discrediting the results of the election. While it is perfectly valid to question the processes in place surrounding the security of mail-in votes and to further the discussions, what Donald Trump is doing is not having a nuanced conversation about the possible security risks and issues associated with mail-in votes. Rather, he is using rhetoric to shift the blame of the results of the election onto anything but himself while simultaneously inciting a sense of threat in his followers. I will return to Trump's rhetoric surrounding blame later in this analysis.

Furthermore, there has been no proof that the use of mail-in votes increases the risk of voter fraud, as proven in a study conducted by the Brennan Center for Justice. (Harwood, 2020) Donald Trump uses a rhetoric of voter fraud and places the blame on the outcome of the election on, among other things, the use of mail-in ballots, claiming that specifically the results in states he lost to Joe Biden cannot be trusted. This is exemplified in a three-part thread of tweets posted by Trump on November 15, 2020:

Why does the Fake News Media continuously assume that Joe Biden will ascend to the Presidency, not even allowing our side to show, which we are just getting ready to do, how badly shattered and violated our great Constitution has been in the 2020 Election. It was attacked,.. (1/3)

….perhaps like never before! From large numbers of Poll Watchers that were thrown out of vote counting rooms in many of our States, to millions of ballots that have been altered by Democrats, only for Democrats, to voting after the Election was over, to using Radical Left (2/3)

….owned Dominion Voting Systems, turned down by Texas and many others because it was not good or secure, those responsible for the safeguarding of our Constitution cannot allow the Fake results of the 2020 Mail-In Election to stand. The World is watching! (3/3) (Trump, 2020)

There are many elements of populist rhetoric present in these tweets. He discusses fake news, a rhetorical tactic to delegitimize news media, which I will return to in chapter 5.5, as well as uses the us versus them-dichotomy.

The main crisis that Trump performs in his tweets is the case of the stolen election. However, he performs several different mini crises that function as causes for this main crisis. Examples of these can be found in the second and third tweets in the thread, in which he presents the following things as crises which led to a stolen election: the Dominion Voting Systems, mail-in votes and votes that were turned in late. The common factor in Trump's rhetoric surrounding all of these is that they are all in one way or another tied to the Democrats. He claims that only Democratic voters turned in votes late and alludes to the mail-in election having played a part in this. Further, he targets Dominion Voting Systems, a company that sells electronic voting hardware and software, by claiming that it is a "Radical Left" company. What Trump may be referencing here are false claims that Dominion has ties to the Clintons and Soros, which is a major Democratic donor. This was, however, fact-checked by CNN and proven to be untrue. (*CNN's Facts First Searchable Database*, n.d.) Thus, he performs a threat surrounding the election by using rhetoric that spreads disinformation, specifically attacking mail-in votes and electrical voting systems, marking them as something 'left' and Democratic and thus not part of his 'us'.

What may be happening here is a Republican fear that more groups with less access to traditional voting or groups that are historically less likely to vote will be incentivized to vote as it becomes more accessible – and these groups tend to lean Democratic. Darrell M. West writes:

> Republicans fear mail balloting will increase votes for Democrats. They worry that individuals who are part of groups that typically vote in lower numbers will cast absentee ballots because of the ease of doing so. This includes young people, low-income people, minorities, and those without access to transportation.
> Yet one group that benefits from absentee ballots is senior citizens, who often skew GOP. Those who are incapacitated or sick can request mail ballots as can those who cannot drive or lack access to mass transit. Mail ballots represent a way for those individuals to exercise their constitutional rights at election time. (West, 2020)

The use of the words 'constitutional rights' by West here are interesting, as Donald Trump likes to call the election 'unconstitutional', again claiming election fraud by the Democrats through for instance mail-in ballots. As Trump creates this crisis of late votes and election fraud through his tweets, he sends an underlying message that the mail-in votes were mainly used by Democrat voters. It is worth noting that more Biden than Trump voters opted to vote by mail. Around 46 per cent of Biden voters opted by mail-in ballot compared to 32 per cent of Trump voters. (Pew Research Center, 2020) While Democrats were in the majority among mail-in voters, by discrediting mail-in elections Trumps is essentially also discrediting around 30 per cent of the votes for himself.

Granted, it is worth noting whether the reason for the lack of nuance in Donald Trump's statements and rhetoric is a characteristic of populist rhetoric or simply a feature of rhetoric on Twitter. Twitter, as a platform, is not known for a place of nuanced conversation. (Murthy, 2013) The short format of tweets often forces individuals to express themselves in shorter and more direct ways, which can directly affect the level of nuance in statements. There is only so much room for discussing different sides and aspects to an issue in 280 characters. I will return to the discussion of Twitter rhetoric in chapter 5.3, which is concerned with 'bad manners' as a populist rhetorical tool. Still, the repeated statements by Trump regarding the validity and reliability of mail-in votes in the election do resemble populist rhetoric, not just through the performance of crisis, but also through the simplification of complicated and complex issues.

A common rhetorical tool used by populist leaders is simplifying complex issues. In my opinion, this is closely related to the performance of threat or crisis. In a 2014 article, Benjamin Moffitt identifies simplifying complex issues and offering facile solutions to the perceived crisis as an integral part of performative populist politics and communication. (Moffitt 2014, p. 205) Simplifying complex issues helps populists perpetuate a notion of crisis, as they focus

on one or a few specific issues and identify these as the root cause for whatever complex issue they are catastrophizing.

Donald Trump often uses simplified rhetoric to offer seemingly simple and easy solutions to complex issues that he perceives as crises. One of the most well-known examples from his time as president is the wall.[5] In this, Trump presented a simple solution, that is, building a wall across the 2,000-mile USA-Mexico border, to solve a complex issue, that is, illegal immigration from and via Mexico into the United States. (USA Today, 2019) By offering these seemingly simple solutions to complex political issues, populists like Trump are able to position themselves on the side of 'the people' by showing that they are different from 'other' politicians – proving that they are ready to act and have solutions to the crisis at hand. By removing 'the enemy', that is, whoever the populist leader has decided is responsible, they will end the crisis. (Moffitt 2014, p. 204, 206)

Donald Trump presents the idea of a stolen election as the main crisis that needs to be dealt with. Trump finds many reasons for what he perceives and thus also communicates to be an untrustworthy election, such as the voting system being used, as well as claims about fraudulent mail-in ballots and dead people voting. These are exemplified in tweets below:

This was a rigged election. No Republican Poll Watchers allowed, voting machine "glitches" all over the place (meaning they got caught cheating!), voting after election ended, and so much more! (Trump, 2020)

The Great State of Michigan, with votes being far greater than the number of people who voted, cannot certify the election. The Democrats cheated big time, and got caught. A Republican WIN! (Trump, 2020)

Look at this in Wisconsin! A day AFTER the election, Biden receives a dump of 143,379 votes at 3:42AM, when they learned he was losing badly. This is unbelievable! (Trump, 2020)

… an Election that is a fraudulent mess. Fake ballots, dead people voting, no Republican Poll Watchers allowed, & more! (Trump, 2020)

If somebody cheated in the Election, which the Democrats did, why wouldn't the Election be immediately overturned? How can a Country be run like this? (Trump, 2020)

[5] With Donald Trump's wall we also see another common tool of populist rhetoric, namely, creating short and catchy slogans for people to latch on to. "Build the Wall" and "Make America Great Again" are well-known examples of Trump's fondness of simplified slogans to push bigger issues. (Breeze, 2020)

I WON THE ELECTION IN A LANDSLIDE, but remember, I only think in terms of legal votes, not all of the fake voters and fraud that miraculously floated in from everywhere! What a disgrace! (Trump, 2020)

When perpetuating a crisis, the populist leader first finds a failure that must urgently be fixed or remedied. As Moffitt writes: "The ability to elevate a failure to a level of crisis will probably be more successful if the chosen failure already has some political salience." (Moffitt 2014, p. 198) Earlier in this chapter, I noted that Donald Trump placed a lot of attention on the more widespread use of mail-in ballots in this election compared to previous elections. As his chosen failure was fraudulent votes, by focusing on mail-in ballots, which is something new and thus can raise people's suspicion regarding the safety surrounding mail-in voting, Trump manages to elevate this failure to a crisis.

After doing so, he can then further these failures, pointing not only to mail-in votes but other fraudulent votes in his opinion and in his performance of crisis, such as there being more votes than people, dead people voting and Biden supposedly receiving anonymous dumps of votes. The validity of these claims does not matter. The failure has been identified and the crisis, a rigged election, is well underway. The common enemy that Donald Trump identifies in these failures and as the cause of the crisis is the Democrats, an us versus them-dichotomy being easy to form in a two-party country like the United States.

Identifying a failure, is, however, not enough to elevate the situation at hand to the level of crisis. Moffitt writes: "The next step is to link this chosen failure with other failures, thus locating it within a wider structural or moral framework. In doing this, populist actors attempt to make the failure appear symptomatic of a wider problem, thus elevating the failure to the level of crisis." (Moffitt 2014, p. 199) By linking the failures in the election process to a wider picture of wrongdoing by 'the enemy' (which, in Trump's case is often the Democrats at large, but can also be split into smaller subsections such as Democratic leaders or the mainstream media), Donald Trump manages to paint a picture of crisis surrounding the future of the United States by invoking an impending sense of doom: if the elections are lost by the Republicans, so is the country.

Within this type of performed crisis, time is of the essence. As mentioned previously, Trump invokes an impending sense of doom through his tweets, suggesting that the only solution is to

act now, or the perceived crisis will be fulfilled, and all will be lost. I argue that the sense of hurry is present not just in the wording of his tweets but also the formatting – the excessive use of capitalized letters and exclamation marks. A performative crisis can only be a crisis if there is a temporal component to it. One could say it is a characteristic of crisis to be periodic: it is not a constant state of being within the cultural context, but rather something abnormal and episodic.

In the case of the performative crisis surrounding the election, the temporal element also becomes part of it through the context: an election only lasts for a certain period. And the voting process, which is one of the main failures Trump has identified to accelerate this crisis, lasts an even shorter period of time. Thus, within performative crisis rhetoric, Donald Trump has the tools he needs to elevate the election and his possible loss of presidency to a crisis.

There is, however, a certain challenge when it comes to preserving the sense of crisis. As a crisis has a temporal quality, it cannot go on forever. Scholars often point to the fact that populists tend to take over the rule of a country when it is in a crisis, such as when democracy is failing. Thus, it is in the interest of populist leaders for a country to be in a crisis so that they can present a populist alternative – as Trump managed to do when he was elected president in 2016. In the 2020 presidential election, however, as the president at the time, Donald Trump can no longer make use of the country perceivably being in crisis and presenting another alternative. Thus, he must instead perpetuate and perform a crisis.

Performing and perpetuating a sense of crisis can be challenging, especially if "one's notion of crisis is not particularly convincing, or if the issues that one's notion of crisis revolve around become less salient to voters or media." (Moffitt 2014, p. 207) As the results of the presidential election move forward and votes Trump claimed to be fraudulent turn out to be valid (Wolfe, 2022; Eggers et al., 2021), he must accelerate the crisis. He has claimed voter fraud by pointing to mail-in ballots and other supposedly invalid votes that Joe Biden received, in Trump's opinion, too late to ensure Biden's victory. He has claimed election fraud by pointing to the Dominion Voting Systems that were used in the election and claimed that he is going to sure to ensure that the, in his words, fraudulent and stolen election does not go further. Yet, Trump does not manage to stop the election results from being validified and verified. The impending doom he has perpetuated by performing a crisis is now upon 'the people'.

One could argue that the culmination of Donald Trump's performative crisis are the events that took place on 6 January 2021, as supporters of Trump stormed and attacked the United States Capitol in Washington D.C. As his claims of election fraud and call upon the United States justice system did not stop the perceived performative crisis, Trump, as well as some of his supporters acted in the face of impending doom. On 26 December 2020, Donald Trump tweeted:

> The "Justice" Department and the FBI have done nothing about the 2020 Presidential Election Voter Fraud, the biggest SCAM in our nation's history, despite overwhelming evidence. They should be ashamed. History will remember. Never give up. See everyone in D.C. on January 6th. (Trump, 2020)

The attach on January 6, 2021, interrupted a session where Congress had assembled to ratify the results of the presidential election 2020, in which Joe Biden was elected president. The attack was regarded as an insurrection or attempted coup d'état, as the Trump supporters tried to prevent a legitimate president-elect from assuming office. Besides rallying his supporters to show up in D.C. on January 6 on Twitter, as seen in the tweet above, Donald Trump also gave a speech before the attack and "encouraged a large crowd of his supporters near the White House to march to the Capitol and violently resist Congress's certification of Biden's victory." (Duignan, 2023)

As Moffitt points out, populists use media events, such as gatherings and marches to perform crisis. (Moffitt 2014, p. 204) Donald Trump's performance of crisis on Twitter, as well as through other various media outlets, as news media often reports on the things Trump says and through that themselves perpetuate the notion of crisis, did not manage to stop the crisis, even though it did manage to garner a lot of media attention. Trump's encouragement for people to meet him in D.C. on January 6 gained a lot of media attention (Rothkopf, 2022), further accelerating his performance of crisis.

Even in the January 6 attack on the Capitol, a core characteristic of catastrophizing failure and through it performing a notion of crisis was visible. That is, offering a simple solution to, what in the eyes of Trump and his supporters, was an issue: Joe Biden being officially declared president. In the action-ready style of populist leaders, Trump presented a solution to the issue at hand: gathering people near the White House and storming the Capitol, which halted the proceedings.

While on the topic of performative crisis, I want to make a distinction between the performative acts of crisis that populist leaders like Trump enact through a rhetoric of failure and finding an enemy to blame and crisis politics in general. While crises are always mediated and performed in one way or another, the performed crises of populist actors are not the same as crisis politics. Moffitt explains:

> Crisis politics' here can be understood as the type of politics and responses outlined in Boin et al. (2005) that seek to deal with large-scale crises – examples include the governance of cities after natural disasters (such as Hurricane Katrina), political reactions to terrorist attacks (such as the 11 September attacks), the politics of large-scale disasters (such as the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster) or the politics of responding and adapting to financial crisis (such as the Greek government-debt crisis). (Moffitt 2014, p. 208)

Crisis politics has no need to create a dichotomy of 'the people' versus 'the enemy'. Crisis politics can operate effectively without the rhetoric of 'the people' fighting against an enemy that is causing the crisis. Performative crisis, performed by populist leaders, on the other hand, relies on the us versus them-dichotomy and needs to identify a failure which can then be accelerated into a notion of crisis, for which the aforementioned enemy is responsible. This type of performative crisis is the one being performed by Donald Trump in his tweets surrounding the election.

5.3 Bad manners: subverting the expectation of political conduct

The most difficult characteristic of populist rhetoric to identify in Trump's tweets is 'bad manners', as it has the most in common with the rhetoric on Twitter in general. 'Bad manners' refers to conducting oneself in a way that is not suited or expected by a person in a certain position. For Donald Trump this means, within the context of this study, how he conducts himself as a president of the United States, and how a president of the United States is expected to speak, address people and express emotions.

The issue of presidential conduct is, however, a complex one, with many subtle nuances depending on the context in which the conduct is taking place. Populist leaders tend to distance themselves from other politicians and political leaders by offering an alternative way of doing things – this is tied both to the extraordinary quality of populist leaders as well as their claim and ability to come across as one of 'the people'. (de la Torre, 2016) Being one of 'the people' is not only an essential part of populist rhetoric and how populist leaders like Trump utilize the

us versus-them dichotomy to gain followers, but it also gives populist leaders the freedom to act unlike traditional politicians or according to standard political conduct, rather presenting themselves like the everyman. Essentially, all populist leaders perform 'bad manners' in one way or another as they enter the political scene or context subverting the expected political conduct. (Fitzi et al., 2018)

Tweets as empirical material complicate identifying 'bad manners', as the communication on Twitter is more free-form, and does not have the same expectations as, say, a presidential speech or a debate between two presidential candidates. Donald Trump's 'bad manners' in his populist rhetoric are more identifiable when analyzing his conduct in speeches he holds at rallies for his supporters as well as in his debates with Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden leading up to both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.

In his three debates with Hillary Clinton, as an article in the Guardian states, the conduct of both candidates was "mired with heated exchanges over the series of controversies that have surfaced about each candidate throughout this electoral cycle, with discussion on their policies peppered in between." (Sidahmed et al., 2016) While both candidates engaged in heated discussion and brought up controversies that the other had been part of, Clinton was more likely to stay on topic and answer the moderator's question, while Trump would revert to talking about other topics, often focusing on Clinton's email scandal[6]. (Sidahmed et al., 2016) While it is not uncommon for presidential debates in the United States to be heated, there is something to be said about Hillary Clinton possibly adapting her debating style to be more like Donald Trump's. (Clayman, 1995) A study by Romero et al. (2015), found that matching the debating style of their opponents may be helpful for presidential candidates in gaining support from the public. (Romero et al., 2015)

While the topic of this thesis is not 'bad manners' in presidential debates or in speeches held by Donald Trump, I found it necessary to point out that studying 'bad manners' within a different context than Twitter may be more fruitful, as the rhetoric of 'bad manners' is not just limited to the things one says (or tweets), but also body language, tone of voice and other nuances of speech which are not visible on a platform like Twitter. Still, there is a certain expectation of how a president or presidential candidate should speak and act – and through

[6] From 2009 to 2013, while being secretary of state, Hillary Clinton used a private email server situated in her New York home. (Smith,t 2016)

subverting this by performing ‘bad manners’, that is, refusing to act according to expectations within a certain context or role, Donald Trump is essentially performing populism through a rhetoric of ‘bad manners’.

There is also a link between a populist communication style or populist rhetoric and social media. As populists tend to distrust traditional news media, fearing being misrepresented or that the news media has an agenda against them, they tend to favor direct communication with their supporters and anyone else they can reach. For this, a platform like Twitter is ideal. As Bracciale and Martella (2017) put it: “ [Twitter is] perfect for the embodiment of populism.” (Bracciale & Martella 2017, p. 2–3)

Donald Trump’s distaste for mainstream news media is palpable in his tweets following the presidential election 2020, tweeting: “He only won in the eyes of the FAKE NEWS MEDIA.” on November 15, 2020. (Trump, 2020) There are many such examples in the sample of tweets I have analyzed, with Donald Trump making references to any mainstream news media which, in his eyes, paints him in a negative light. Thus, it also explains why populist leaders like Trump would favor to use Twitter over communicating via news media. Social media platforms give them direct access to the public. Furthermore, social media platforms like Twitter are not bound by similar hierarchies as traditional news media, but rather have a more non-hierarchical aspect to them. (Bracciale & Martella 2017, p. 2) This non-hierarchical feature of sites like Twitter also fits the populist leader’s desire to be one of ‘the people’, and thus, by communicating with his followers on Twitter he can position himself as the everyman, different from the other politicians.

The suitability of Twitter as a platform for populist politicians does, however, pose a challenge when it comes to analyzing the ‘bad manners’ aspect of populist rhetoric. Even though populist leaders may favor Twitter and know how to use it to their advantage more than other political actors, most contemporary political leaders use Twitter and communicate with their followers via the platform. Of course, one might say that Joe Biden or Barack Obama have never acted in a way that is reminiscent of ‘bad manners’, but that would also be a bold claim. It is difficult to draw the line between Twitter rhetoric and populist rhetoric. Thus, of the so called ‘bad manners’ on Twitter, it is worth asking the question of how much can be attributed to populist rhetoric and how much has to do with the communication space itself.

In their 2020 article, Lee et al. discuss politicians so called 'Twitter blunders'. They found that non-populist politicians also conduct themselves inappropriately on Twitter, and behave in a way that is unexpected or not accepted considering their role and the space they are expressing themselves in. (Lee et al., 2020) Yet these politicians are rarely accused of being populist. Rather, however, the public may often condemn them, and they may face consequences as a result of their conduct on Twitter.

While I do not intend to be speculative, the question of populist leader's 'bad manners' on Twitter made me wonder if using this type of populist rhetoric, that is, not behaving in the way that is expected of a politician, is more accepted by a populist leader like Trump. After all, using characteristics of populist rhetoric, such as invoking 'the people', perpetuating a notion of crisis and using short catchy slogans is almost Donald Trump's trademark – and what the public expects of him. Whereas in the case of a non-populist leader who does not subscribe to the rhetorical style of populism, trying to step out of the allocated way of communicating on Twitter may have more severe consequences.

What could, however, be seen as bad manners is Trump's constant insistence that he won the election. This is a statement that he repeats in his tweets following the presidential election 2020. On November 15, 2020, he tweeted: "I WON THE ELECTION!" (Trump, 2020) This is just one example of many similar tweets. By this point, Joe Biden had already been declared the new president of the United States, meaning that he is not being truthful. His statements lack validity, and while saying that not being truthful on social media is 'bad manners' may be a stretch, I do consider Donald Trump to be acting outside of the expected conduct of a political leader.

However, a lot of Donald Trump's rhetoric on Twitter could very easily be placed into the 'bad manners' category. If 'bad manners', as mapped out by Moffitt, is behaving in a way that is not appropriate either considering your status or the setting in which you are in, then I would argue that it is one of the core characteristics of a populist leader. As a populist leader enters the political sphere, like Donald Trump, who came from the business world, he does so by subverting expectations and not behaving as 'other politicians'. Thus, almost all of Trump's rhetoric and manner of expressing himself could be placed under the 'bad manners' aspect of populist rhetoric.

As far as where the line between Twitter rhetoric and populist 'bad manners' rhetoric goes, I do not have any conclusive answers. Quite frankly, I am unsure if performing a rhetorical analysis on 'bad manners' specifically on Twitter is even possible, as I believe the rhetoric of Twitter and the rhetoric of populism are deeply intertwined. Twitter as a platform encourages populist rhetoric by giving populist leaders direct access in short-form messages to their public, and populist leaders will continue using Twitter as they see it as a useful means to an end. Further, Twitter, as a platform, benefits from populist leaders using the platform and performing 'bad manners', as this attracts attention from the users and leads to more people visiting the site.

While I originally set out to examine Donald Trump's use of populist rhetoric in his tweets using the categories of populist rhetoric mapped out by Benjamin Moffitt, I found other interesting uses of rhetoric in his tweets. I am calling these further three categories 'shifting the blame, 'the fake news lamestream media' and 'turning on one's own'. The first two are somewhat common within the rhetoric of populist leaders, however, the third one shows an interesting shift in rhetoric as a populist leader loses power.

As we know, populist rhetoric is more useful for gaining power than maintaining it, as populist leaders will present themselves as preferable options at times when a country's democracy is in crisis. (Stavrakakis, 2018) Thus, attacking the news as well as shifting the blame onto someone else are not uncommon techniques used by populist leaders in their speech acts. (Van Kessel & Castelein, 2016) What Donald Trump does, however, besides the two aforementioned, and perhaps as a result of the failure of those, is something populist leaders rarely do – he turns on his own. In these following three chapters, I discuss Trump's rhetoric of shifting the blame, attacking the media, and ultimately, turning on his own.

5.4 Shifting the blame

An interesting aspect of performing populist rhetoric is the tactic of shifting the blame onto someone else. This is an aspect of populist rhetoric, that in my opinion, is present in all three categories presented by Moffitt, which my analysis was based on. In forming the signifier 'the people', a populist actor creates an 'us versus them'-dichotomy. The creation of this is important not only for the populist leader to gain followers and influence, but also because it gives them someone to blame for any issues that may arise.

Having a clear separation of who is ‘us’, part of ‘the people’ and who is ‘them’, ‘the enemy’ is a key part of a leader like Trump to be able to point to the enemy as the one who is the root cause of the issue at hand. This is a necessary part of what I discussed in chapter 5.2, that is, invoking a sense of crisis and finding someone to blame for said crisis. Finally, having another person or circumstance to blame or changing the subject whenever one’s own failures or controversies are brought up is reminiscent of ‘bad manners’.

The rhetoric of shifting the blame is visible in Trump’s tweets. On November 17, 2020, he tweeted: “The only thing secure about our 2020 Election was that it was virtually impenetrable by foreign powers. On that, the Trump Administration takes great credit. Unfortunately, the Radical Left Democrats, Dominion, and others, were perhaps more successful!” (Trump, 2020) As the election results were not favorable to Trump, he refuses to accept defeat on his own part, and instead using rhetoric of blame to shift his own apparent failure onto other people, ‘the enemy’.

In an interesting combination, he also then takes credit for parts of the election he perceives as having been done well, such as the safety of the election against foreign powers, as seen in the tweet above. It is a very black and white way of viewing the events surrounding the presidential election 2020, where perceived failures and crises are ‘them’ and perceived successes and victories are ‘us’. Granted, viewing things in such a way is not inherently populist, but the excessive rhetoric of blame, which is heavily tied into the characteristics of populist rhetoric mapped out by Moffitt, points to a populist rhetoric of blame.

5.5 The fake news lamestream media

While I briefly discussed Donald Trump’s distaste for mainstream news media, and in particular why populist leaders like Trump often prefer the use of social media platforms like Twitter to communicate with their followers, the relationship between populist leaders and the media, and in this case particularly Trump’s relationship with the media deserves its own chapter. Criticizing the mainstream media is overall a common tool used by populist leaders. (Krämer et al., 2020)

Trump also utilizes this tool in his rhetoric on Twitter, showing open disdain towards media outlets, as exemplified by this tweet posted on November 26, 2020: “I gave a long news conference today after wishing the military a Happy Thanksgiving, & realized once again that the Fake News Media coordinates so that the real message of such a conference never gets out. Primary point made was that the 2020 Election was RIGGED, and that I WON!” (Trump, 2020) Trump, as populist leaders often do, feels that their true message is not reported by the media in a way that they feel is satisfactory, which in turn makes him turn to Twitter to voice things in his own words and get his own message out. (Jacobs & Spierings, 2018)

Despite the disdain towards mainstream media outlets voiced by Trump, populism and populist leaders are also very dependent on media attention. Through his populist rhetoric and conduct on Twitter, Donald Trump gains media attention and may be at the center of a controversy, which in turn brings him even more attention. Despite his disdain for the media, an open rhetoric of partly blaming the media for the election results as he perceives they did not report them accurately, Donald Trump, as all populist leaders, also feeds off mediatic controversy. (Block & Negrine 2017, p. 182)

Often, Trump does not refer to any specific media outlets, instead opting for terms such as: “fake news”, “fake news media” or “lamestream media”, a wordplay on mainstream media. However, similarly as with the empty signifiers of ‘the people’ and ‘the enemy’, Trump does not need to specify which media outlets he is talking about. Leaving the definition of the terms he uses to the public gives more freedom to his followers, as many of them come from different backgrounds, and while they may have some unified opinions on which mainstream media is with them rather than against them, leaving it up to them to decide who this “fake news media” is ensures that Trump’s followers still feel part of ‘the people’.

Trump does, however, at times refer to certain media outlets specifically, as exemplified in this tweet: “@FoxNews, @QuinnipiacPoll, ABC/WaPo, NBC/WSJ were so inaccurate with their polls on me, that it really is tampering with an Election. They were so far off in their polling, and in their attempt to suppress – that they should be called out for Election Interference…” (Trump, 2020) In this tweet, the news outlets Trump is referring to are Fox News, Quinnipac University Poll, the ABC News and Washington Post Poll Series as well as the NBC News and Wall Street Journal Poll. What is interesting here and stands out when considering populist leaders’ relationship to the media, is Trump mentions Fox News.

Fox News is widely known within the United States as a news outlet that tends to favor the Republican Party, practicing partisan reporting to support their values and causes, while more often portraying the Democratic Party in a negative light. (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Skocpol & Williamson, 2016) Thus, what Donald Trump does here is move the borders of 'us' versus 'them'. While the limits of who belong to 'the people' and who belongs to 'the enemy' are fluid and mutable, it is interesting to see how Trump now excludes something, that is, Fox News, from the 'us' category. This point leads me to my final observation in my analysis: how Donald Trump subverts populist rhetoric by, essentially, turning on his own.

5.6 Breaking the binary: turning on other Republicans

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Donald Trump calls out Fox News for their, in his opinion, faulty polling results. While it is not uncommon for a populist leader like Trump to openly refer to certain media outlets that do not portray him in a favorable light, it is uncommon for a populist leader to apply this same rhetoric to media outlets that in general report on them favorably.

Fox News has played an important role in U.S. politics, being one of the largest media outlets in the country and having been partisan towards the Republican party for a long time, supporting for instance also George W. Bush. (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008) Republican politicians are counting on the support of Fox News and care about what appears in the news regarding them. Yglesias (2018) writes:

> The implication of both these kind of findings and of qualitative work done by reporters on the degree to which GOP politicians care about what appears on Fox suggests, however, that the network deserves to be studied as a key pillar of the Republican Party coalition—an entity that deserves to be studied alongside labor unions, the Chamber of Commerce, the anti-abortion movement, and other main building blocks of the American party system. (Yglesias, 2018, p. 2)

Thus, Fox News had a prominent role in Donald Trump's political rise and eventual ascension to president in the 2016 United States presidential election.

The 2016 election was a favorable one for Donald Trump. He was elected president of the United States and was able to come onto the political scene as a new contender, someone who was outside of politics and who by, among other things, through populist rhetoric managed to

offer an alternative to non-populist politicians. He came onto the political scene as a billionaire businessman with a celebrity past, announcing his run for presidency in June 2015. His campaign and platform were controversial, especially his policies on immigration and abortion, but he managed to gain a following by promising that his presidency would be a 'blow against the political establishment.' By presenting himself as an outsider in the political sphere, an everyman for 'the people', a populist leader was born. (BBC News 2017)

With the 2020 presidential election seemingly not turning in his favor, Trump chose to not only employ the tactics of populist rhetoric I have specified in this thesis, but also to make a clear shift in the us versus-them dichotomy. On November 12, 2020, he tweeted: "@FoxNews daytime ratings have completely collapsed. Weekend daytime even WORSE. Very sad to watch this happen, but they forgot what made them successful, what got them here. They forgot the Golden Goose. The biggest difference between the 2016 Election, and 2020, was @FoxNews!" (Trump, 2020) In this tweet, Trump points to three distinct things. Firstly, he mentions a drop in Fox News daytime ratings.

Which specific time period he is referring to is unclear, however, it is worth noting that Fox News is the most-watched network in the United States. (Watson, 2019) In 2016, Fox News made headlines by being the most-watched cable network for the first time in its 20-year history, amassing 2.439 million total viewers in primetime and 1.394 million viewers in daytime. Much of their views are thanks to their coverage of Donald Trump's ascension to presidency. (Moraes, 2016) However, according to data, Fox News was also the largest primetime and daytime network in 2020, amassing the largest viewership in the network's history, with 3.62 million primetime viewers and 1.90 million in daytime. Thus, Donald Trump's claim of drop in daytime ratings is false. (Johnson, 2020)

Secondly, he accuses them of having forgotten "what made them successful, what got them here." He then makes a reference to them forgetting the golden goose. Merriam-Webster defines *the golden goose* as "something that is a very good source of money or business." (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary,* 2023) While it may be speculative, I believe that Trump is in this case referring to himself, viewing himself as what made Fox News successful, as well as being a great source of income to them. Though it is not hyperbole to claim that Trump has been monetarily meaningful for Fox News (Moraes, 2016), him claiming that he 'made them' has the aura of an extraordinary populist leader. While articles and other forms of media content

about Donald Trump leading up to both the elections in 2016 and 2020 have no doubt been a great source of income for Fox News, as well as having generated higher ratings, Fox News does not need Donald Trump to survive, as they are still the number one cable network in the United States.

And finally, he notes Fox News as being the entity which made the largest difference in the outcomes between the 2016 election, in which he was victorious, and the 2020 election, in which he suffered a loss to Democratic representative Joe Biden. This may have to do with the decrease in ratings that he mentioned in his tweet, or he may be pointing to the fact that he is of the opinion that Fox News were not partisan enough towards him, painting him in a negative light.

As the election results were becoming clear and a Democratic win spearheaded by Joe Biden was inevitable, Donald Trump would shift his rhetoric. He changed the limits of 'the people', seemingly no longer including Fox News in this vague category, as he feels they no longer served him the way they should, being the partisan news outlet for Republican politics in the United States.

Besides changing the limits of who belongs to 'the people' and who belongs to 'the enemy' regarding Fox News, Donald Trump also points out certain Republican political actors, who, according to him are no longer on his side, thus no longer 'us' but 'them'. On November 11, 2020, he tweets: "A guy named Al Schmidt, a Philadelphia Commissioner and so-called Republican (RINO), is being used big time by the Fake News Media to explain how honest things were with respect to the Election in Philadelphia. He refuses to look at a mountain of corruption & dishonesty. We win!" (Trump, 2020)

Al Schmidt is a former commissioner for the city of Philadelphia. During the 2020 election, Schmidt served as the only Republican member of the Philadelphia commission, which was tasked with overseeing the city's elections. (PBS NewsHour, 2022) Which news outlet Donald Trump is referring to here is unclear, however, he is clearly displeased with Schmidt's conduct. Philadelphia is one of the cities that Trump accused of voter fraud, and it seems as though Trump is not happy with Schmidt's way of managing the situation. As there was no evident voter fraud found in the elections, it is possible Trump's displease stems from Schmidt not agreeing with him, but rather viewing the results of the election as valid. (Eggers et al., 2021)

He also refers to Schmidt as a RINO, which stands for Republican In Name Only. This is 'a disparaging term that refers to a Republican candidate whose political views are seen as insufficiently conforming to the party line.' (*Political Dictionary*, 2021) By doing this, Trump, as the leader of the party at the time, is affirming that the party line is defined by him, and thus, Republicans who do not follow this line are no longer 'the people'.

Another Republican politician that Trump places into 'the enemy' category is Brian Kemp, Governor of Georgia. (*Governor Brian P. Kemp Office of the Governor*, 2020) Within the material analysed in this thesis, Trump explicitly mentions Kemp three times:

"Do something @BrianKempGA. You allowed your state to be scammed. We must check signatures and count signed envelopes against ballots. Then call off election. It won't be needed. We will all WIN!" (Trump, 2020)

"The "Republican" Governor of Georgia, @BrianKempGA, and the Secretary of State, MUST immediately allow a signature verification match on the Presidential Election. If that happens, we quickly and easily win the State and importantly, pave the way for a big David and Kelly WIN!" (Trump, 2020)

"Hearings from Atlanta on the Georgia Election overturn now being broadcast. Check it out. @OANN @newsmax and many more. @BrianKempGA should resign from office. He is an obstructionist who refuses to admit that we won Georgia, BIG! Also won the other Swing States." (Trump, 2020)

Georgia is another state that Trump accused of voter fraud. In the first tweet he is urging Brian Kemp to act, as Trump, a populist would. In the second one, Trump again refers to Kemp, as he did with Schmidt, as not truly being Republican. While not explicitly calling him a RINO, as he did Schmidt, Trump puts the word "Republican" in quote marks, signifying that Kemp is not a real Republican, thus not part of 'the people'. In this tweet, he also offers a simple solution, a signature verification, to end the crisis, which is him losing the election.

In the third tweet, he furthers this rhetoric by saying that Kemp should resign, as he refuses to admit that the Republicans won the state of Georgia. The Republicans did not win Georgia, as Joe Biden received more votes than Donald Trump, however, Trump believes this to be a case of voter fraud and condemns Kemp for not agreeing with him. (Georgia 2020 Election Results, n.d.) Interestingly, he also does not mention Fox News among the news outlets broadcasting the Georgia election overturn.

He also mentions Senator Mitch McConnell, the U.S. senator for Kentucky and the Senate Republican Leader in two tweets from 18 December, 2020 and 24 December, 2020, respectively:

> @senatemajldr and Republican Senators have to get tougher, or you won't have a Republican Party anymore. We won the Presidential Election, by a lot. FIGHT FOR IT. Don't let them take it away! (Trump, 2020)

> I saved at least 8 Republican Senators, including Mitch, from losing in the last Rigged (for President) Election. Now they (almost all) sit back and watch me fight against a crooked and vicious foe, the Radical Left Democrats. I will NEVER FORGET! (Trump, 2020)

While specifically referencing McConnell by name in both tweets, Trump also points to other Republican Senators, using a rhetoric of blame and urging them to 'fight' for the election. In the first tweet, he furthers the crisis surrounding the election, by saying there will be no more Republican party if the election is lost. This bears the resemblance of a populist leader equating themselves with the party, which is not uncommon. The GOP did also become a populist party under Trump, as even though they have been a conservative, right-wing party, they have not always been populist. Populist leaders often become one with the party they lead, being the clear figurehead and leader, and by using this rhetoric, Donald Trump is himself portraying this image. (Barber, 2019)

In the second tweet, he points to his own efforts with winning a Republican majority and thus 'saving' certain Republican senators. It is possible that he is referring to the presidential elections 2016. He now voices his disdain that they are, according to him, unwilling to do the same for him. Interestingly, while seemingly placing these Republicans in a different category than 'us', 'the people', he is also not equating them with 'the enemy', as he then goes on to name 'them': "the Radical Left Democrats", as he calls them. Subverting the traditional populist binary of 'us' and 'them', it seems as though Donald Trump has placed these senators in an unknown third category, a purgatory between 'us' and 'them', and by referring to them in these tweets he is presenting them with an opportunity to still be part of 'us' if they comply with his wishes.

Thus, Donald Trump has in his rhetoric following the U.S. presidential election 2020 deviated from the populist rhetoric as mapped out by Moffitt. While he still uses rhetoric from all three

characteristics Moffitt presented, he also performs a diversion by converting the limits of who 'the people' and 'the enemy' are, and thus also finds other people, such as Fox News and other Republicans, to blame for the crisis at hand – losing the election.

6. Results

In the analysis above, I have drawn on Benjamin Moffitt's characteristics of populist rhetoric, which include the 'us versus them'-binary, the performance of crisis and 'bad manners'. In the sample of tweets analyzed, which consists of all original tweets from Donald Trump's twitter account @realdonaldtrump from the time period 3 November 2020–8 January 2021 that included the keyword 'election', I found examples of populist rhetoric according to Moffitt's categories. Surprisingly, I also found examples of him using this populist rhetoric towards other Republicans and news media that is partisan to the Republican party, thus changing the limits of who is part of 'us', 'the people', and who is part of 'them', 'the enemy'.

Donald Trump makes explicit references to 'them' in his tweets, clearly showcasing the binary. At other times, he refers to 'us' or 'we', his notion of the people. By using Laclaudian empty signifiers, Donald Trump creates 'the people' and 'the enemy'. This is a common rhetorical tool used by populist leaders to create a dichotomy between two groups of people, as placing two seemingly opposing groups against one another helps populists strengthen their rhetoric and build a sense of community among their supporters, 'the people'.

These groups are not clearly defined. Rather, they are left as ambivalent signifiers, for the reader to fill with their own perspective of who belongs to 'us' and who belongs to 'them'. In other tweets, he makes explicit references to 'radical left democrats' as well as 'fake news media', both two categories which for Donald Trump fall into 'the enemy' or 'the elite'. Thus, Trump makes a binary distinction between 'the people' and 'the enemy', while keeping the definitions for both categories vague to an extent. Populists are often surer of who they are not than who they are. Thus, by focusing who they are not, such as the Democrats, populists like Trump are able to place themselves based on what they are not, and by this implicitly telling their supporters what or who he is.

By doing this, Trump does not need to specifically define himself, but can rather define himself through what he is not, and in a way, by doing this manages to unite people over shared

animosity towards others. As a result, there is explicit evidence of Donald Trump using Moffitt's first characteristic of populist rhetoric, the 'us versus them'-dichotomy, in his tweets. Dividing these two groups is necessary for the populist's creation of crisis, as to perform a crisis in the sense of populist rhetoric, there needs to be someone to blame.

Having defined 'the people' and 'the enemy', Donald Trump now has a scapegoat in his performance of crisis, Moffitt's second characteristic of populist rhetoric. To perpetuate a notion of crisis that needs to be remedied immediately, the populist leader identifies a failure that can then be elevated to the status of crisis. He then also uses the previously defined 'us versus them'-dichotomy to find someone to blame for said crisis. Finally, he focuses on the temporal quality of the crisis at hand, creating a sense of urgency and saying that this is something that needs to be rectified immediately by showcasing an impending doom.

The main crisis presented in the analyzed material is the issue of the so-called 'stolen election'. As more votes are counted and Biden is seemingly the new president-elect, instead of admitting defeat, Trump creates a crisis. The ones to blame for the 'stolen election' or 'election fraud' are the Democrats. He perpetuates the crisis by finding failures in the election process, such as the use of mail-in votes, seemingly anonymous votes for Biden, as well as claiming that there are more votes than people – and connects all of these to create a crisis surrounding the election.

The temporal quality of a crisis is important when it comes to the populist notion of perpetuating a crisis. As there is only a limited time in which people's attention will be kept on the crisis at hand, there is a hurried sense of urging people to act in Trump's tweets. As Donald Trump is in a different position in the election 2020 compared to the election in 2016, he can no longer rely on the country's democracy being in a crisis and present himself as an option to it, as populist leaders trying to gain power often do. As the votes of the 2020 election are counted, and Trump's loss becomes at first a possibility and then apparent, he must use a rhetoric of crisis to gain similar support that he had in 2016. Even though he at the time of the election is the leader of the country, and has been president for four years, Trump must still present himself as an alternative to who at the time of the presidential election 2020 was the opposition. It is an interesting position to be in, especially Trump's use of populist rhetoric and perpetuation of crisis as a populist leader losing power.

Having identified the crisis, a stolen election; the persons responsible, the Democrats; and the way in which they did it, by counting fraudulent votes, Trump ties it all together by putting this crisis in a larger context: if the election is stolen by the Democrats, the United States as they know it will cease to exist. Thus, Moffitt's second characteristic of populist rhetoric, a performance of crisis, is apparent in the material.

'Bad manners' is the third characteristic of populist rhetoric as defined by Moffitt. It is vaguer in its quality compared to 'us versus them' and perpetuating a sense of crisis, as it has to do with conduct, and behaving in an inappropriate way in relation to the context. It could be said that the extraordinary nature of populist leaders automatically pertains a degree of 'bad manners' as they, like Trump, come on to the political scene acting, in a sense, not like a politician.

As for the analysis in this thesis, I have found evidence of 'bad manners' in the material. One of the most blatant examples of this is Trump's insistence that he won the election, even after Joe Biden had been declared the president-elect and would shortly be sworn into office. Instead of admitting defeat, as a president not having been re-elected would be expected to do, Donald Trump doubles down, and continues to elevate the crisis and perform 'bad manners'.

Studying 'bad manners' within the context of Twitter, however, comes with its own set of challenges. As the rhetoric of Twitter is deeply intertwined with populist rhetoric and the rhetoric of 'bad manners' specifically. Twitter is the ideal platform for populist rhetoric, as it allows Donald Trump to have direct communication with his followers, and the short-form communication of tweets requires a certain simplification of the things one is expressing to fit it all within the 280-character limit. Furthermore, while there is an expectation for presidential conduct, the rules of conduct are slightly blurred on Twitter, as people do in general express themselves differently and more directly online, especially on a platform like Twitter. When it comes to Moffitt's third characteristic of populist rhetoric, 'bad manners', I found evidence of this in the material analyzed, however, I feel as though my analysis is not conclusive enough and that the special relationship between populist rhetoric and Twitter rhetoric should be further studied.

While I originally set out to only study the material according to Moffitt's three characteristics of populist rhetoric, I found other aspects of populist rhetoric, or certain topics that Donald

Trump specifically touched upon in his rhetoric, that I found were worth mentioning separately. These are ‘shifting the blame’, ‘attacking the media’ and ‘turning on his own’.

Shifting the blame is closely related to the ‘us versus them’-binary, as well as identifying the one to blame when perpetuating a crisis. However, I found an interesting rhetoric of blame in the material, with Donald Trump often pointing imaginary fingers at anyone else but himself. At the same time, he also manages to then make sure that him, ‘the people’, get credit for whatever is going well, such as in the tweet exemplified in chapter 5.4. The failures of the election, according to him, are the fault of the Democrats, the failed mail-in voting, anything but him simply not getting enough votes. On the other hand, he is quick to take credit for any apparent successes, such as the safety of the election towards foreign powers. It is an interesting rhetoric of blaming all apparent failures on everyone but himself, while simultaneously taking all credit for the apparent successes.

Criticizing the mainstream media is a common rhetorical tool used by populist leader, and it is visible in the selection of tweets studied. However, while Trump openly voices a disdain for the mainstream media, referring to them as the ‘fake news media’ or the ‘lamestream media’, populist leaders like Trump also have a lot to gain from mediatic controversy. There is evidence of Donald Trump using this rhetoric, both speaking negatively of the mainstream media in general terms, as well as referring to specific media outlets he feels were portraying him unfairly. It is notable that Trump seldom refers to specific media outlets, more often using ambiguous terms such as ‘fake news media’, which again, in the same sense as ‘us’ versus ‘them’, does not clearly define who the media is, rather giving his followers and supporters the opportunity to interpret this on their own terms.

In some of the material, Donald Trump is explicitly referring to Fox News, which is an interesting development. As Fox News is known as the news outlet partisan to the Republican Party, it is interesting to see how Donald Trump changes the boundaries between ‘the people’ and ‘the enemy’. The populist leader’s rhetoric is often binary, there is a good (‘us’) and an evil (‘them’). By referring to Fox News as well as some Republican senators and politicians in his tweets, Donald Trump is essentially shifting them out of ‘the people’, thus subverting the traditional ‘us versus them’-binary.

The rhetoric of blame and crisis which was previously reserved for the Democrats, the obvious 'enemy' in Trump's dichotomy is now being aimed at his own people. According to the material, he claims that Fox News is the biggest reason between the difference in the election results from the presidential elections in 2016, when he was victorious, and 2020, when he suffered a loss to Democratic candidate Joe Biden. As his rhetoric of crisis and blame towards the Democrats did not yield the expected results, it seems he is now seeking other people to blame, and that is in this case the news media that is supposed to be on his side, as well as other Republicans he feels are not on the right side of the issue at hand.

Not only pointing to Fox News, Donald Trump also refers to other Republican politicians, referring to them as 'RINOs', that is, Republicans In Name Only, thus alluding to them no longer being part of the 'true' Republicans. By doing this, he also uses another tool of populist rhetoric, that is, equating the politics and values of the party with himself. Populist leaders are often the distinct figurehead of the party, and in a sense become one with the party. As he finds there are Republicans that disagree with him of the outcome of the election, Trump uses certain terminology to indicate that they no longer belong to the group 'Republican' and thus also no longer 'the people'.

While referring to certain politicians by name, such as Brian Kemp and Mitch McConnell, he also makes general references to Republican senators he claims to have helped win a Republican majority earlier, possibly in reference to the election 2016. In two tweets, he specifically targets senator Mitch McConnell, urging him to take action, while also claiming that he 'saved' McConnell from losing in a previous election, and is now expressing a feeling of betrayal at the fact that McConnell will not return the favor. Again, we see Trump othering Republicans who were previously his 'people'. Again, the rhetoric of crisis is present, with Trump telling these Republican senators to act right now, or the United States will be lost. Furthermore, he alludes to having been left by himself to 'fight' 'the enemy', that is, the Democrats.

Thus, interestingly, while not explicitly placing these Republicans into the category of 'the enemy', they are seemingly no longer part of 'the people'. Instead, Donald Trump subverts the dichotomy that is typical for populist rhetoric and creates a third category, a sort of purgatory that these actors are now placed in, and depending on their actions they can either be welcomed back as 'the people' or they will be 'the enemy'. There is an interesting development to be seen

in Trump's rhetoric following the presidential election 2020. While still portraying all three characteristics of populist rhetoric as defined by Moffitt, he changes the limits of who belongs to 'the people' and who to 'the enemy', and thus also who is responsible for the crisis.

The main aspect of Trump's populist rhetoric in the sample analyzed is the performance of crisis. Even though it is a subsection of the analysis, the performance of crisis is made possible by the other types of populist rhetoric that Donald Trump uses. Creating an 'us' versus 'them' binary is necessary for performing a crisis, as it gives the populist someone to blame said crisis on. Furthermore, his references to the media and other Republicans, as well as the rhetoric of blame are all essential parts of creating the crisis he then performs.

7. Discussion

Donald Trump's use of populist rhetoric in the aftermath of the U.S. presidential election 2020 paints a fascinating picture of a populist leader's action and rhetoric as he is losing power. While Donald Trump still uses rhetoric which is typically associated with populists trying to come into power, as he did in the election 2016, it does not seem to bear the same fruits as it did when he was the alternative to the way the country was run, not the person running the country.

In true populist fashion, he sticks to polarizing rhetoric, pitting an ambiguous 'us' versus a just as ambiguous 'them'. Yes, it can be argued that Trump is very vocal about who he views as 'them', often attacking the Democratic politicians, the mainstream news media, and anyone else he deems 'the elite'. After all, populists are often surer of who they are not than who they are, and thus defining 'the people' is easier by defining who is not 'the people'.

Furthermore, he maintains a notion of crisis throughout the counting of the votes, which he does however elevate once it gets closer to Joe Biden's inauguration and clear to most other politicians that Trump has not, in fact, been re-elected, and that it was not a case of the Democrats trying to steal the election nor a case of voter fraud. Interestingly, he does, however, turn on other Republicans as his accusations of the Democrats turn out to be insufficient, and the investigations of voter fraud fail to give him the results he desperately wants.

Throughout his rhetoric on Twitter in the material studied there is an aura of 'bad manners', because even though separating the rhetoric of Twitter from the rhetoric of populism is a challenging task, Trump brazenly expresses his opinions, performing populism as a non-politician. There are interesting implications of a larger scale relating to how populists behave as they lose power in the rhetoric used by Donald Trump in the aftermath of the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

While the aim of this thesis is to only study the rhetoric of Donald Trump as a populist losing power, I think it raises interesting questions about populist rhetoric and how it may not persuade voters as well a second-time around – which rings true to a pattern of populist leaders talking the talk but not managing to walk the walk and stick to the promises they made once they actually gain power. A good example of this is Donald Trump's wall. While Donald Trump managed to complete hundreds of miles of the wall, the construction was halted as soon as Joe Biden stepped into office. (Rodgers & Bailey, 2020; Hansen, 2022)

While I do not think one can draw any broad conclusions of the rhetoric of populist leaders losing power or the apparent failure of populist rhetoric to garner as big a following once the populist leader has been elected for him to stay in office, I do think it brings forth an interesting question of how populists act when they sense a loss of power. Furthermore, I think it shows the storytelling and performance-centered nature of populism very well, as even when other Republicans and news media that is traditionally partisan towards the Republican party claimed Joe Biden as the winner of the election, Donald Trump refused to accept his loss, and continued spinning his own narrative surrounding the election. This narrative being that he did win the election, and that the only reason he lost is almost a sort of conspiracy against him – no matter how well he did, the 'evil' Democrats were always going to make sure that Joe Biden won.

Creating his own narrative surrounding the election and the results of it through populist rhetoric allows Donald Trump to maintain power, in a way. He may have lost the presidency and the power over the United States, but he maintains power over the narrative surrounding it. This narrative allows him, as well as the Republicans still following him and believing him, to view the election as not a Republican loss but foul play by the Democrats. Thus, by creating this narrative Donald Trump is effectively still shifting the blame onto someone else and sticking to the characteristics of populist rhetoric to the very end.

While the results of this study, that is, that the characteristics of populist rhetoric presented by Moffitt are present in Trump's tweets, are not necessarily surprising, I think they bring a valuable perspective to the field of populist rhetoric. Furthermore, it is interesting to see that as a populist leader like Trump sees his power slipping, he will quite freely change the definitions of 'the people' and 'the enemy', removing other Republicans and Fox News from 'us' and instead placing them in an unnamed third category, thus breaking the traditional populist dichotomy.

There are, of course, a number of limitations to this study. It is only concerned with Donald Trump's populist rhetoric on Twitter, thus not including any other populist leaders' rhetoric when they are losing power. It also does not analyze Donald Trump's rhetoric in speeches and other public appearances during this period. It would be interesting to see what larger effect Donald Trump's populist rhetoric surrounding a stolen election and voter fraud presents, especially considering his choice to run for re-election in the 2024 United States presidential election.

Furthermore, a comparative analysis of Donald Trump's rhetoric during the elections and his run for presidency in his victorious year 2016 and his loss in 2020 could present interesting results when it comes to how he chooses to perform populism and use populist rhetoric, and which topics his rhetoric is focused on. Even more so, analyzing these towards the rhetoric he will come to use in his run for president in 2024 could show a larger scale of the change in a populist leaders rhetoric depending on the situation, as Donald Trump's position leading up to the three elections has been different every time. As a political newcomer offering an alternative way of doing things in 2016, a president trying to win a second term in 2020, and finally, a former president running for re-election after having lost the previous election in 2024.

8. Conclusion

In this thesis I have analyzed the rhetoric of Donald Trump on Twitter following election day, 3 November 2020, in the United States presidential election 2020. Drawing from theories rhetorical analysis and Benjamin Moffitt's three characteristics of populist rhetoric: 'the people' versus 'the enemy', the performance of crisis, and 'bad manners', I completed a rhetorical analysis on Trump's tweets from 3 November 2020–8 January 2021. My results

show that Trump uses populist rhetoric according to Moffitt's three characteristics in the chosen material.

The first characteristic of populist rhetoric analyzed in the material is the 'us versus them'-dichotomy. This is a tool in populist rhetoric that divides the public into the empty signifiers 'the people' and 'the enemy'. In his tweets, Donald Trump makes explicit references to this by using the words 'us' and 'them', respectively. Further, he positions himself as part of 'the people', which for Donald Trump is a romanticized notion of the American Heartland, while positioning others, most notably the 'Radical Left Democrats' and 'fake news media', as 'the enemy'. By doing this, Donald Trump also has someone to blame for the notion of crisis he perpetuates.

The second characteristic of populist rhetoric analyzed in the material is the performance of crisis. As Trump has found someone to blame for the crisis, that is, the Democrats and the media, he can now focus on perpetuating a sense of crisis to 'the people'. A populist crisis is of a temporal nature, meaning that Trump uses rhetoric that has a sense of urgency: something needs to be done now, or everything will be lost. The main crisis he performs is that of the stolen election caused by voter fraud. In his tweets, he claims that there were late votes for Joe Biden, that the mail-in ballots were untrustworthy, and that the voting system used, Dominion Voting Systems, was controlled by the Democrats. As he has now identified the apparent failures in the voting process, he can further elevate the election to the status of crisis, using rhetoric claiming that America will be stolen by the Democrats if nothing is done quickly, and that the election results and the Democrats being in power will be the end of the United States.

The third of Moffitt's characteristics of populist rhetoric analyzed is 'bad manners'. This characteristic of populist rhetoric is the most challenging to analyze as the chosen material for this thesis is tweets, and there is an overlap between populist rhetoric and the rhetoric of Twitter. By subverting expectations of how a politician should act, a populist leader like Donald Trump is essentially always performing 'bad manners', as he uses rhetoric and expresses himself in a non-political way. The relationship between Twitter and populism is mutually beneficial, as populist leaders opt for Twitter to communicate straight to the audience, and the presence of populist leaders who tweet controversial things generates more traffic to Twitter. In conclusion, while Donald Trump does perform 'bad manners', where the line between the rhetoric of Twitter ends and populist rhetoric begins is unclear.

While I have focused on rhetoric, that is how Trump expresses himself, I also found that there were certain categories of topics that either came up frequently enough to warrant further discussion or that were unusual for a populist leader. These are shifting the blame, discussing the news media and, surprisingly, turning on his own people.

While shifting the blame, in a way, is present in all three characteristics of populist rhetoric presented by Moffitt, it is a topic that comes up frequently enough in the chosen material quite explicitly. While not only identifying 'us' and 'them' and thus finding someone to blame for the crisis of the stolen election, Trump also explicitly uses a rhetoric of blame to shift the responsibility onto someone else. Simultaneously, he takes credit for whatever he perceives are the successes of the election.

Another topic that often comes up in Trump's rhetoric is the distaste for the mainstream media. In his tweets from the time period I studied, he often refers to them as the 'fake news media'. While the media are also part of Donald Trump's 'them' or 'the enemy', as explained earlier, he also makes explicit references to not only their role in the perceived crisis of the stolen election, but also his contempt for them.

In an interesting turn of events, Donald Trump expresses contempt not only towards the 'liberal' media, but also the media outlet known to be partisan towards the Republican party, that is, Fox News. As the inauguration of Joe Biden as president grows closer and Donald Trump is still perpetuating the crisis of a stolen election, he turns away from simply blaming the known 'enemy', that is, the Democrats and media outlets supporting them, and consequentially also shifts the blame onto who are supposed to be his 'people'.

He makes explicit references to Fox News being the biggest difference in the outcome of the 2016 and 2020 elections, blaming them for his loss. He also positions himself as the 'golden goose', that is, who made Fox News successful in the first place, and expresses a betrayal from their side, alluding that they should have stuck by him no matter what. By not doing so well enough according to Trump, he changes the limits of who belongs to 'the people' and who belongs to 'the enemy' in a way that is unusual for populist leaders, thus challenging the 'us versus them'-binary.

He furthers this rhetoric by calling out other Republican politicians in his tweets, viewing them as not 'true' Republicans, as in true populist leader fashion, the definition of a Republican is based on the leader Donald Trump. Again, he performs a rhetoric of betrayal on the part of these Republican politicians, claiming that he has helped them in the past but that they are now unwilling to do so for him. While not explicitly placing these Republicans and Fox News into 'the enemy', he separates them from 'the people', placing them in an unknown third category, almost a purgatory, from which they can either fight their way back to 'the people' or become part of 'the enemy'.

In this thesis I have studied the rhetoric of a populist leader losing power, a unique situation, as populism is often studied when gaining power. By using the characteristics of populist rhetoric, Donald Trump skillfully creates his own narrative surrounding the election. Instead of viewing it as a Democratic win, he paints it as a crisis to be solved by the Republicans, or the Republican Party as well as the country will be lost. In this way, he also manages to hold on to power. While he may be losing the power as the leader of the country, he maintains the power surrounding the narrative of the election: he did not lose the election, it was stolen from him.

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Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, December 30) *Hearings from Atlanta on the Georgia Election overturn now being broadcast. Check it out. @OANN @newsmax and many more. @BrianKempGA* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1344288700851744769?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, December 9) *If somebody cheated in the Election, which the Democrats did, why wouldn't the Election be immediately overturned? How can a* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1336730906107768842?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 11) *A guy named Al Schmidt, a Philadelphia Commissioner and so-called Republican (RINO), is being used big time by the Fake* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1326525851752656898?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 12) *@FoxNews daytime ratings have completely collapsed. Weekend daytime even WORSE. Very sad to watch this happen, but they forgot what* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1326920264203046915?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 14). *The hand recount taking place in Georgia is a waste of time. They are not showing the matching signatures. Call* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1327715767916392449?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 15) *….owned Dominion Voting Systems, turned down by Texas and many others because it was not good or secure, those responsible* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1328152466752491526

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 15) *….perhaps like never before! From large numbers of Poll Watchers that were thrown out of vote counting rooms in many* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1328152465016020993

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 15) *All of the mechanical 'glitches' that took place on Election Night were really THEM getting caught trying to steal votes.* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1327958640309972992?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 15) *He only won in the eyes of the FAKE NEWS MEDIA. I concede NOTHING! We have a long way to* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1327979630477922304?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 15) *I WON THE ELECTION!* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1328200072987893762?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 15) *Why does the Fake News Media continuously assume that Joe Biden will ascend to the Presidency, not even allowing our* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1328152462331699202?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 15). We won't let a RIGGED ELECTION steal our Country! [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1328093294782509060?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 16) *The Radical Left Democrats, working with their partner, the Fake News Media, are trying to STEAL this Election. We won't* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1328361451497664512?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 17) *The only thing secure about our 2020 Election was that it was virtually impenetrable by foreign powers. On that, the* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1328856932011167744?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 17) *Wow! Michigan just refused to certify the election results! Having courage is a beautiful thing. The USA stands proud!* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1328883405837258753?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 18) L*ook at this in Wisconsin! A day AFTER the election, Biden receives a dump of 143,379 votes at 3:42AM* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1329233502139715586?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 18) *The Great State of Michigan, with votes being far greater than the number of people who voted, cannot certify the* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1329093126238203905?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 18) *This was a rigged election. No Republican Poll Watchers allowed, voting machine "glitches" all over the place (meaning they got* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1329064787142172673?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 21) *This is not at all frivolous. It is brought on behalf of one of the most respected members of the* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1330323589170663426?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 26) *I gave a long news conference today after wishing the military a Happy Thanksgiving, & realized once again that the* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1332169753004224515?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 30) *@OANN WOW, total election corruption in Arizona. Hearing on now! Why isn't @FoxNews covering the Arizona hearings?* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1333464453778706433?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 4) *We are up BIG, but they are trying to STEAL the Election. We will never let them do it. Votes* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1323864823680126977?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1323864823680126977%7Ctwgr%5E62953cb59fae48ac563f1d71bbde5152ce1517b2%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thetrumparchive.com%2F%3Fsearchbox%3D22weareupbig22

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 4). *We are up BIG, but they are trying to STEAL the Election. We will never let them do it. Votes* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1323864823680126977?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1323864823680126977%7Ctwgr%5E62953cb59fae48ac563f1d71bbde5152ce1517b2%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thetrumparchive.com%2F%3Fsearchbox%3D22weareupbig22

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 5) *ANY VOTE THAT CAME IN AFTER ELECTION DAY WILL NOT BE COUNTED!* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1324368202139357186?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1324368202139357186%7Ctwgr%5E62953cb59fae48ac563f1d71bbde5152ce1517b2%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thetrumparchive.com%2F%3Fsearchbox%3D22weareupbig22

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 5). *All of the recent Biden claimed States will be legally challenged by us for Voter Fraud and State Election Fraud.* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1324386685858287616?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%

7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1324386685858287616%7Ctwgr%5E62953cb59fae48ac563f1d71bbde5152ce1517b2%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thetrumparchive.com%2F%3Fsearchbox%3D22weareupbig22

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 6) *I had such a big lead in all of these states late into election night, only to see the leads* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1324855496722026498?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 7) *Tens of thousands of votes were illegally received after 8 P.M. on Tuesday, Election Day, totally and easily changing the results* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1325065540390559745?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1325065540390559745%7Ctwgr%5E62953cb59fae48ac563f1d71bbde5152ce1517b2%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thetrumparchive.com%2F%3Fsearchbox%3D22weareupbig22

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 7) *THE OBSERVERS WERE NOT ALLOWED INTO THE COUNTING ROOMS. I WON THE ELECTION, GOT 71,000,000 LEGAL VOTES. BAD THINGS HAPPENED* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1325194709443080192?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 9) *@FoxNews, @QuinnipiacPoll, ABC/WaPo, NBC/WSJ were so inaccurate with their polls on me, that it really is tampering with* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1325961114514038786?s=20

Trump, D. [@realdonaldtrump]. (2020, November 9) *Georgia will be a big presidential win, as it was the night of the Election!* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1325896369534607360?s=20

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