

## Examining Leaders' Relations with Bureaucracy in the Context of Right-Wing Populism: The Case of Trump

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the populist politics of Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, and analyzes the impact of populism on Trump's leadership style. The research evaluates political discourses produced during the 2016 and 2024 election campaigns—including campaign speeches, political advertisements, campaign slogans, and posters within the framework of critical discourse analysis. The study is guided by the central question of how Trump, as a populist leader, mobilized emotions, utilized the media, and employed a populist style of communication. It investigates how Trump produced and legitimized power through his populist approach, and how this process was shaped along the axis of power and discourse. Furthermore, the study explores the extent to which concepts such as power, domination, inequality, and discrimination—core elements of critical perspectives are embedded in and articulated through Donald Trump's populist rhetoric. This study aims to demonstrate, through the case of Donald Trump, how a populist leader employs political language, produces power through discourse, and how this process is reflected in the political rhetoric of the Republican Party. Accordingly, the impact of populism on political leadership style and the representational strategies constructed through discourse are analyzed in depth, and the relationship between leadership and populism is evaluated at both theoretical and empirical levels. The findings indicate that Trump primarily employed populism at the level of style rather than as a coherent ideology. In this context, Trump's populism is characterized by rhetorical strategies such as the people–elite dichotomy, the emphasis on “us versus them,” the use of simple, plain, and direct expressions, appeals to locality, nationalism, and traditionalism, frequent references to crisis and threat, as well as the use of coarse manners and exaggerated statements.

**Keywords:** Populism, Donald Trump, Critical Analysis, Leadership, Style.

## Sağ Popülizm Bağlamında Liderlerin Bürokrasi ile İlişkilerinin İncelenmesi: Trump Örneği

### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin 45. Başkanı Donald Trump'ın popülist siyasetini incelemekte ve popülizmin Trump'ın liderlik tarzı üzerindeki etkisini analiz etmektedir. Araştırma, 2016 ve 2024 seçim kampanyaları sürecinde üretilen siyasal söylemleri kampanya konuşmaları, siyasal reklamlar, seçim sloganları ve afişler dâhil olmak üzere eleştirel söylem analizi çerçevesinde değerlendirmektedir. Çalışma, Trump'ın bir popülist lider olarak duyguları nasıl harekete geçirdiği, medyayı nasıl kullandığı ve popülist bir iletişim üslubunu nasıl benimsediği sorusunu merkeze almaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Trump'ın popülist yaklaşımı aracılığıyla gücü nasıl ürettiği ve meşrulaştırdığı; bu sürecin güç ve söylem ekseninde nasıl şekillendiği incelenmektedir. Ayrıca, eleştirel perspektiflerin temel unsurları olan güç, tahakküm, eşitsizlik ve ayrımcılık gibi kavramların Donald Trump'ın popülist söyleminde ne ölçüde yer aldığı ve nasıl ifade edildiği araştırılmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Donald Trump örneği üzerinden bir popülist liderin siyasal dili nasıl kullandığını, söylem aracılığıyla nasıl güç ürettiğini ve bu sürecin Cumhuriyetçi Parti'nin siyasal söylemine nasıl yansıdığını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, popülizmin siyasal liderlik tarzı üzerindeki etkisi ile söylem aracılığıyla kurulan temsil stratejileri derinlemesine analiz edilmekte; liderlik ile popülizm arasındaki ilişki kuramsal ve ampirik düzeylerde değerlendirilmektedir. Bulgular, Trump'ın popülizmi tutarlı bir ideoloji olmaktan ziyade ağırlıklı olarak üslup düzeyinde kullandığını göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda Trump'ın popülizmi; halk–elit karşıtlığı, “biz–onlar” vurgusu, basit, yalın ve doğrudan ifadelerin kullanımı, yerellik, milliyetçilik ve gelenekçiliğe yapılan göndermeler, kriz ve tehdit söylemi ile kaba tavırlar ve abartılı ifadeler gibi retorik stratejilerle karakterize edilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Popülizm, Donald Trump, Eleştirel Analiz, Liderlik, Üslup.

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## 1. Introduction

Populism is a concept that has come to the fore in modern politics due to its highly diverse nature. The reason for this diversity lies in the lack of scholarly consensus on a single, agreed-upon definition of populism. For this reason, populism has been examined in the academic literature through various analytical frameworks, including ideology, discourse, strategy, and political logic.

Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2019) define populism as a “*thin-centered ideology*.” This characterization stems from populism’s “thin” core, which allows it to easily combine with and adapt to other ideologies. Kurt Weyland (2021), by contrast, conceptualizes populism as a political strategy, referring to the methods through which power is acquired and exercised. Accordingly, Weyland (2021) evaluates populism within the framework of the strategy–leader relationship. Approaches that treat populism as discourse focus on its linguistic dimension and examine its rhetorical features. For instance, Kirk A. Hawkins (2012) frames populist discourse as a struggle between good and evil. In this perspective, ideology and discourse are used together, since discourse is understood as a reflection of ideological structures. Depending on its discursive form, language is thus regarded as a tool for the production of power (Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012). According to Ernesto Laclau (2007), populism constitutes a political logic that constructs society and enables its political formation. Paul Taggart (2004) likens populism to a chameleon, while Margaret Canovan (1981) explains it through the metaphor of the “Cinderella Complex.” Ionesco and Ernest Gellner (Jan-Werner Müller, 2017) compare populism to a ghost. In conclusion, populism’s capacity for self-reproduction, along with its flexible and ambiguous nature, has given rise to a wide range of interpretations and scholarly studies.

Despite definitional differences, debates on populism reveal the prominence of several common themes. Concepts such as the people, the elites, the general will, the us–other dichotomy, othering, and crisis appear as shared elements across diverse definitions. In the twenty-first century, the concept of leadership has been added to these core themes. In particular, the emphasis placed on leadership in the context of Latin America, and Kurt Weyland’s (2021) identification of leadership as a political–strategic instrument, have brought leadership to the forefront of populism debates. In this context, the type of leadership in question is a charismatic and personalistic form of leadership. This understanding of charismatic and personalized leadership aligns with Kurt Weyland’s (2001) conception of leadership in populism. According to Weyland (2001), populist leadership relies less on institutionalized structures and more on direct and personal bonds between the leader and the people.

“... populism can best be defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises governmental power based on direct, unmediated, and non-institutionalized support from a large number of mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland, 2001).

This strategy conceptualizes populism as a fragmented phenomenon lacking a strong organizational structure. Consequently, it also implies the absence of a powerful and effective movement. However, what holds this unorganized and dispersed mass together creating a collective bond is a charismatic authority who presents themselves as the voice of the people, sacrifices themselves for the people, offers solutions to crises, and stands with the victims against “others.” Through the strategies they employ, this authority is transformed into a charismatic leader in the eyes of the people. For example, Benjamin Moffitt (2020) argues that it is difficult to imagine contemporary populism without leadership, drawing attention to the importance of the leader and leadership by posing the question, “Who actually performs populism?”

Within the scope of this study, not only populist leadership is examined, but also the representational tools employed by leaders, such as media, emotions, and style. By focusing on the representational instruments that help populist leaders construct their legitimacy and presence in the eyes of the people, the analysis addresses not only leadership itself but also the strategies utilized by the leader, thereby completing the strategy–leader framework. In the literature, particularly among studies addressing the relationship between populist actors and bureaucrats, there is a noticeable scarcity of bureaucracy-centered analyses. Unlike existing studies, this research seeks to examine the populist actor–bureaucrat relationship through a bureaucracy-focused analytical perspective.

## 2. Populism

### 2.1. What is Populism?

The question of what populism is as a concept constitutes the first issue that needs to be addressed. However, before answering this question, it is useful to examine the current state of the populism literature and to highlight several important points regarding the definition of populism. As a concept, populism is highly contested, and the doubts surrounding it have not yet been resolved. To briefly summarize the conceptual ambiguities related to populism:

According to Rogers Brubaker, the findings can be summarized as follows: for nearly half a century, the populism literature has struggled with ontological doubts concerning the nature of its object of analysis. Three main reasons can be identified for approaching populism with skepticism. First, populism brings together diverse political projects shaped by different social bases and forms of action. Second, speaking in the name of the people the core claim of populism is a widespread practice encountered in many contexts, which makes its treatment as a distinct analytical category questionable. Third, populism is a morally and politically charged term that functions not only as an object of analysis but also as a weapon in political struggle (Brubaker, 2017). In this context, populism exhibits different political manifestations depending on its empirical diversity; speaking in the name of the people is not unique to populism nor a distinctive feature of it; and because the concept is morally and politically value-laden, it cannot easily serve as a fully objective object of analysis.

General observations regarding the populism literature can be summarized as follows. First, the literature on populism is fragmented, and empirical studies on populism are mostly limited to specific countries and regions. Second, the literature has reached a level of maturity that requires a direct and sustained focus on the concept of populism itself. Third, studies on populism show a tendency to become part of the mainstream within the political science literature. Finally, research on populism is directly connected to practical politics (Kaltwasser et al., 2017).

For this reason, when attempting to define populism, we encounter multiple definitions of populism. Each of these definitions seeks to illuminate the phenomenon of populism through different axes of empirical reality. In this context, it is important to emphasize that each definition of populism discussed below represents a different dimension of reality. While the number of definitions of populism has increased in parallel with its empirical diversity, these definitions have also begun to converge and diverge categorically. As the number of definitions of populism has increased in parallel with its empirical diversity, these definitions have also begun to converge with one another in certain respects while diverging categorically in others. This section will present some of the definitions that are widely accepted in the literature and that have academically contributed depth and richness to the concept of populism.

**Table 1.** Definitions and Perspectives of Populism

Perspective	Brief Definition	Authors (examples)
<b>Populism as a Mobilization Strategy or Form of Organization</b>	“Populism can best be defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises governmental power based on direct, unmediated, and non-institutionalized support from a large number of mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland, 2001). “A mass movement led by an outsider or maverick who seeks to gain or maintain power by using anti-establishment appeals and plebiscitary linkages” (Barr, 2009: 38).	Brubaker (2017); Jansen (2011); Weyland (2001); Barr (2009); Betz (2002)
<b>Populism as a Discursive Practice</b>	Populism is “a dichotomous discourse that juxtaposes ‘the people’ discursively constructed as a large and powerless group against ‘the elite,’ conceived as a small but illegitimately powerful group, along the lines of a down/up opposition. Populist politics thus claims to represent ‘the people’ against an ‘elite’ that obstructs their legitimate demands, presenting these demands as expressions of the will of ‘the people’” (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017: 310).	Laclau (1985); Laclau & Torfing (1995); Howarth & Stavrakakis (2000); Aslanidis (2016)
<b>Populism as a Socio-Cultural Approach</b>	“Populism is characterized by a specific form of political relationship between political leaders and their social base, established and expressed through ‘low’ appeals that resonate positively among certain segments of society due to socio-cultural and historical reasons. In very few words, we define populism as the ‘flaunting of the low’” (Ostiguy, 2017, p. 73).	Ostiguy (1998, 2009, 2014, 2017); Aslanidis (2020) (populism as a cultural phenomenon)

Perspective	Brief Definition	Authors (examples)
<b>Populism as a Political Style (mostly political communication)</b>	“We define political style as repertoires of performance used to create political relations that appeal to ‘the people’; crisis, breakdown, threat; ‘bad manners’ including slang, swearing, political incorrectness, and roughness being excessively ostentatious and ‘colorful’ as opposed to ‘high’ behaviors such as restraint, rationality, and technocratic language” (Moffitt & Torney, 2014: 392).	Moffitt & Torney (2014); Block & Negrine (2017); Bonikowski & Gidron (2016)
<b>Populism as “Political Opportunism”</b>	“Political ideas and activities aimed at gaining support by giving ordinary people what they want.”	Betz (1994); Nkrumah (2021); Cambridge (2014)
<b>Populism as ‘Anti-Power,’ ‘Anti-Establishment,’ or ‘Anti-Mainstream’ Attitude</b>	“Populism is a mass movement led by an outsider or maverick who seeks to gain or maintain power by using anti-establishment appeals and plebiscitary linkages. To be clear, populism is not dependent on the use of fiery anti-elite rhetoric, the rise of demagogic outsiders, or highly vertical linkages between leaders and followers. Rather, populism is defined by the specific combination of these factors” (Barr, 2009: 44).	Sikk (2009); Barr (2009)
<b>Populism as a ‘Set of Ideas’ / ‘Thin-Centered Ideology’</b>	“A thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the <i>volonté générale</i> (general will) of the people” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2019: 16).	Canovan (2002); Freedon (2017); Mudde (2004); Shils (1954, 1956, 1960)
<b>Populism as an Attempt at Persuasion</b>	“Politicians use populism as a flexible mode of persuasion (Kazin, 1995): wherever politicians seek to persuade, they claim that there is a conflict between oppressors and the oppressed.”	Kazin (1995)
<b>Populism as Logic</b> <i>(often treated as part of discourse, though not all approaches fully align)</i>	“If populism consists of proposing a radical alternative within the communitarian space choosing at the crossroads upon which the future of a given society depends does this not render populism synonymous with politics itself? The answer can only be affirmative” (Laclau, 2005).	Da Silva & Vieira (2019); De Cleen (2019); Laclau (2005a); Judis (2016); Müller (2016)

Source: Oswald et al., 2022

## 2.2. The Anatomy of Populism

The difficulties discussed above regarding the definition of populism, as well as the conceptual ambiguity surrounding it, also create challenges in identifying the constitutive elements of populism. The empirical diversity of populism and its varied manifestations across different historical and cultural contexts in dispersed geographies bring a wide range of factors to the forefront when attempting to identify its foundational components. Nevertheless, among these factors, some stand out more prominently and are commonly accepted as the constitutive elements of populism.

Turning to the assessments of Yves Mény and Yves Surel regarding the constitutive elements of populism, they identify three fundamental aspects. First, the position and priority of the people within the structure and functioning of the political system are of central importance. In this context, emphasis is placed on the contradiction between a “privileged minority” and “the oppressed.” Second, there is a perceived inadequacy or, in other words, a betrayal of popular representation. Finally, the people must be assigned a privileged and primary role within society. Accordingly, elites should be replaced by leaders who govern in the name and for the benefit of the people (Mény & Surel, 2002). Mény and Surel thus conduct their analysis around the axis of the people, while also incorporating the dichotomy between elites and the people.

Jacques Rancière identifies three core elements that characterize populism. First is a style of discourse that addresses the people directly by bypassing representatives and intermediaries. Second is the claim that governments and ruling elites act in their own interests rather than in the interest of the people. Third is an identity-based rhetoric that can be expressed as fear of, and rejection of, foreigners (Rancière, 2016).

In the assessment of the constitutive elements of populism by Oswald et al., three key components are highlighted: anti-establishmentarianism, being “for the people,” and projection onto out-groups (Oswald et al., 2022). As is clearly evident here, opposition to the existing order is articulated alongside an emphasis

on the people in parallel with anti-elitism, producing a depiction that points toward an antagonistic political structure.

Ben Stanley categorizes the constitutive elements (the conceptual core) of populism as follows: first, the existence of two homogeneous units of analysis the people and the elites; second, a hostile relationship between the people and the elites; third, the idea of popular sovereignty; and finally, the positive valorization of the people alongside the denigration of elites (Stanley, 2008).

The final classification to be addressed here is that proposed by Cas Mudde. According to Mudde, understanding the core division inherent in populism requires an examination of morality. The fundamental antagonism at the heart of populism is grounded in a moral distinction. The essence of the people is morally affirmed and equated with purity, whereas the elites, positioned in opposition to the people, are associated with corruption. This elite–people dichotomy, constructed along a moral axis, constitutes the core division of populism. Built upon this foundation, populism takes shape around four key concepts: ideology, the people, the elites, and the general will. Given their central importance in the conceptual construction of populism, it is useful to outline these concepts in broad terms.

### 2.2.1. Ideology

Ideology is a concept that is conceptually contested, subjective, and lacking consensus. However, within the populism literature, the concept of ideology an important analytical reference point acquires a more fixed content and meaning in the context of Michael Freeden's work, where it becomes more clearly objectified. According to Freeden, ideologies provide a map of the political and social order and, through the set of concepts they construct, offer a coherent worldview (Freeden, 2003).

The distinctive contribution of Freeden's conceptualization of ideology lies in his introduction of the notion of "thin-centered ideology." The concept of thin-centered ideology has been widely accepted by populism theorists and constitutes one of the fundamental pillars upon which theories of populism are built.

Freeden defines a full ideology as follows: for an ideology (such as socialism, Marxism, or liberalism) to qualify as a full ideology, it must offer a reasonably broad though not necessarily exhaustive range of answers to the political questions produced and confronted by societies (Freeden, 1998). According to Freeden, thin-centered ideologies do not fully meet this criterion. He defines a thin-centered ideology in the following terms:

"A thin-centered ideology is one that deliberately removes and rearranges concepts, arbitrarily detaching itself from broader intellectual contexts. The result is a structural inability to offer complex ranges of argument, because many of the chains of ideas that would normally extend from the general and abstract to the concrete and practical, from the core to the periphery and back again, are simply absent. ... Consequently, the intellectual ambitions and scope of a thin-centered ideology are limited" (Freeden, 1998).

When examining the populism literature, it is evident that many theorists characterize populism as a concept with a strong ideological dimension. According to these scholars, populism constitutes a "thin" or "thin-centered" ideology (Mudde, 2017; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2019; Abts & Rummens, 2007; Stanley, 2008).

While defining populism as a thin-centered ideology, populism theorists also distinguish it from other ideologies. Populism lacks the intellectual sophistication and coherence necessary to be compared with "thick" or "full" ideologies such as liberalism and socialism (Mudde, 2017). Viewed in this light, populism as an ideology does not generate comprehensive answers to the political questions produced by modern societies, nor does it map the social order in the way thick ideologies do (Kaltwasser & Mudde, 2019).

Thus, when describing the main elements or, in other words, the anatomy of populism, the ideological dimension discussed above represents, on the one hand, one of populism's core components, while, on the other hand, populism as an ideology has itself become a major mainstream perspective within the broader field of populism studies.

At this point, however, it is important to note that Paris Aslanidis raises a critical objection to the conceptualization of populism as a thin-centered ideology. According to Aslanidis, despite the widespread

acceptance in the literature of populism as a thin-centered ideology, this characterization is ultimately misleading. He argues that populism “clearly falls short of the status of an ideology.” Aslanidis substantiates this claim through three main arguments: first, the notion of “thinness” is spurious; second, the approach entails methodological inconsistencies; and third, it presents insurmountable obstacles in terms of taxonomy and measurement (Aslanidis, 2016).

### 2.2.2. Public

According to Cas Mudde, the key or core concept of populism is “the people.” The other fundamental concepts of populism, namely “the elite” and “the general will,” are structured around the axis of the people. When elites are portrayed as enemies of the people and the general will is depicted as a mirror of the people, it becomes evident that the key concepts of populism are organized around the centrality of the people (Mudde, 2017).

As a key concept in the populism literature, the people has been examined and analyzed in various ways by many theorists, and a rich body of debate exists regarding what the concept is and what it signifies. Ernesto Laclau conceptualizes the people as “empty signifiers” (Laclau, 2018). The implication of defining both elites and the people as empty signifiers is that determining who belongs to each category is ultimately a matter of interpretation (Oswald et al., 2022).

However, in Mudde’s approach, which evaluates the people alongside the ideological dimension of populism, the people is not a semantically empty concept. According to Mudde, because populism is fundamentally based on a moral division, the people are conceived as pure. The purity attributed to the people is mirrored, in the case of elites, by the notion of corruption (Mudde, 2017).

On this issue, Paul Taggart draws attention to a void at the core of populism, which he describes as “the empty heart” or “heartland” of populism (Taggart, 2004). According to Taggart, populism’s ability to adapt to any context stems from this emptiness at its core (Taggart, 2004). In this sense, the emptiness at the heart of populism allows the concept of the people to be defined with reference to an “idealized conception of community” (Taggart, 2004).

Finally, it can be argued that populism theory has a discursive counterpart centered on the people, and that this discourse essentially amounts to a slogan aimed at “giving power back to the people” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2019).

### 2.2.3. Elites

One of the main axes of populism is anti-elitism. The core argument of anti-elitism is to divide society into two groups the pure people and the corrupt elites and to emphasize the dichotomy between them. According to Cas Mudde, this dichotomy is fundamentally moral in nature (Kaltwasser & Mudde, 2019). From a populist perspective, the pure people and the corrupt elite or, put differently, the good people and the bad elite are positioned in direct opposition to one another (Hawkins, 2009).

To render this theoretical and abstract description more concrete, one illustrative example can be given: American conservative populists often juxtapose ordinary people against a liberal elite characterized as latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, New York Times reading, Hollywood-loving (Nicholson & Segura, 2012).

### 2.2.4. General Will

Populists, generally speaking, draw on Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s discourse. According to them, politics should follow the general will of the people. In the populist argument, the segment of the people described as the “pure people” is homogeneous, and all internal divisions are considered artificial and therefore rejected. The general will of the people, and the foundations of this will within the populist argument, rest on two elements: common sense and particular interests.

According to populists, the pure people are homogeneous, possess common sense, are honest, and rational. The other segment of the people, by contrast, opposes common sense, is deceitful, and forms part of the corrupt elite (Mudde, 2017). At this point, the common sense attributed to the people appears as a manifestation of the general will and represents the general interest, whereas the other segment of the

people lacking common sense and representing the corrupt elite stands in opposition to the general will, or in other words, represents particular interests, namely the interests of the elites.

Jan-Werner Müller also argues that Mudde's treatment of populism in a Rousseauian framework, and his construction of a moral dichotomy between the pure people and the corrupt elite along the axis of common sense, is an acceptable approach (Müller, 2014).

According to Mudde, the common-sense solutions that constitute the manifestation of the general will are neither ideological nor partisan; rather, they are logically derived from the general will itself (Mudde, 2017). While the common-sense solutions based on the general will and the homogeneous image of the pure people are presented as representing the will of the entire people, the solutions put forward by elites are portrayed as representing particular interests (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2019).

### 3. Populism and Leadership

#### 3.1. Populism and Political Leadership

Populism frequently emphasizes the charismatic nature of leadership. Taggart (2004) categorizes the structural elements of populism into three categories: the leader, parties, and movements. According to Taggart (2004), the emphasis on the leader in populism has become its most visible central image. The flexible structure of populism and its inability to produce fixed values due to this flexibility have revealed its potential to draw nourishment from personality politics. In this context, populist leadership has often become a phenomenon discussed alongside charismatic authority. Directly or indirectly, populist leaders have been explained through the concept of charisma.

According to Max Weber (1986), the charismatic leader possesses extraordinary qualities, and these qualities are perceived by followers as sacred or exceptional. Another definition of charismatic leader by Weber (1986) is based on morality, religion, devotion, and the personal characteristics of the charismatic leader. Similarly, Taggart (2004) explains populism through the concept of morality. Because at the heart of the people-elite distinction lies a moral separation. In this understanding, the people are a moral and virtuous community, while the elites are corrupt. Therefore, the leader representing the people must possess the highest moral qualities.

The similarities between populism and charismatic leadership have been examined by Taggart, and the focus is not solely on moral similarity (Taggart, 2004): The emphasis populism places on charismatic leadership stems from its opposition to representative politics. Populism, which opposes the institutions in representative politics, sustains its existence through the leader. From this perspective, in populism, the goal is to highlight individuals rather than institutions. The view advocated by populism is to convince the masses that institutions, parliaments, and bureaucratic mechanisms are pro-elite and safeguard the interests of the elites.

The principles of simplicity and directness in populism are also closely related to charismatic authority. Populism's understanding of simplicity arises from its attempt to overcome the complex systems and problems caused by representative politics through a personality cult. Charismatic authority increases its influence during times of crisis. Therefore, populism, where charismatic authority is dominant, strengthens its existence in times of crisis. The charismatic leader is a person with superior abilities and competencies who saves the people during crises and bravely fights against the crisis. In times of crisis, only those with superior abilities earn the right to authority. For this reason, charismatic leaders are identified with the role of savior.

As Benjamin Moffitt (2015) points out, crisis is not merely a backdrop for the populist leader but also a tool of political performance that is actively constructed and sustained. The charismatic leader, by undertaking this performance, both reinforces their legitimacy and establishes an emotional and moral bond with the people.

Finally, the similarity between Weber's (1986) charismatic authority and populism's understanding of charismatic leadership lies in the temporary and unstable nature of charismatic leadership. In both Weber's (1986) understanding of charismatic leadership and the leadership understanding in populism, authority is personalized and tied to the person. Moreover, charisma, being a quality that may be limited to the leader's lifetime or shaped according to context and period, also aligns with the populist understanding.

Populist leadership serves as the carrier of populist discourses, and these discourses are conveyed by leaders with a dominant charismatic trait (Weyland, 2001). Weyland (2001), while evaluating populism as a political strategy, states that the creators and implementers of this strategy are charismatic leaders. In particular, the slogan "We Are the People" is the discursive expression of direct representation. Kurt Weyland's (2001) understanding of leadership in populism relies on a direct and personal connection rather than institutionalized structures. This strategy does not possess a strong organization, and thus it also implies that a strong and effective movement cannot exist. As a result, Weyland (2001) emphasizes the organizational weakness of populist leadership.

The characteristics that make populist leaders extraordinary are not solely their charismatic nature. They also stem from their ability to appear "ordinary" (Moffitt, 2020). In other words, what is meant by ordinariness is that leaders do not have a complex structure and behave like one of the people in order to represent them. The leader who represents the people is also the spokesperson of the people.

Populist leaders claim that they do not belong to politics. They are forced to engage in politics, and they make this sacrifice for the people. The people are the silent majority, and leaders reluctantly become the voice of the silent majority. As Moffitt (2015) points out, populist leaders not only manage the crisis but also stage, produce, and sustain it. For this reason, populism becomes "reluctantly" politicized precisely in this crisis environment. While populist leaders reject the notion of institutionalization, they undertake political action in the name of the people as a compulsory duty. Populist leaders claim that they are not part of politics but are forced to engage in it to protect the interests of the people. This discourse reveals the perception that the leader is making a sacrifice for the people.

According to Sasure, populist leaders have a performative political identity. These leaders use far more tools beyond traditional political language. Examples of this include media, stage language, body language, and emotional rhetoric (Moffitt, 2020).

### 3.2. Representation Tools of Populist Leaders

Populist leaders are not merely figures representing their party but also the visual and discursive carriers of the ideas, ideologies, strategies, and discourses they advocate. Populist leaders, who are the voice of the people, strengthen their representational ability through the closeness and emotional bond they establish with the people, solidified by their personality that reinforces their charismatic authority. Therefore, the populist leader becomes not only a political actor but also an ideological image. In this context, while the first question is how the leader, who has become a political image, conveys their ideology and message to the masses, the second question is how they ensure that the conveyed idea resonates with the masses.

In attempting to answer these questions, three dominant elements play a critical role in the construction of populist leadership and the legitimacy of the populist leader's charismatic authority: media, emotions, and style.

#### 3.2.1. Media

Media is a tool used by all political actors to carry their ideas and ideologies. However, viewing media solely as a mechanism that transmits the words of political actors would limit our understanding of its influence. Media is also an active tool that carries ideologies and serves as a channel in the reproduction of ideologies. In this respect, media is not only a transmitter but also a shaper and director (Mazzoleni, 2008).

The most important tool that populist leaders resort to in the discursive construction process of the people-corrupt elite opposition is media. Since the leader attempts to make the people's voice heard through media, it transforms into a tool that legitimizes the leader's charismatic authority. In this way, the populist discourse disseminated and legitimized through media is reproduced both in its ideological and discursive forms.

Among the ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) listed by Althusser (2010) such as family, law, politics, unions, culture, etc. the focus of this study is on communication and media apparatuses. In this context, media helps reshape the masses and reproduce ideas through ideologies without using repression, that is, without physical coercion.

The reason media is an ISA stems from the characteristic of state ideological apparatuses being free and diverse. Reproduction occurs through ideologies rather than by using force or applying pressure (Althusser, 2010). Although the fundamental difference between ideology and repressive apparatuses is based on repression, Althusser (2010) emphasizes that this distinction is not absolute. He argues that both apparatuses use repression or freedom directly or indirectly depending on conditions. For example, repressive state apparatuses do not use only repressive tools but also ideological ones. Nevertheless, the dominant aspect in the tool used is repressive, or in state ideological apparatuses, priority is given to ideology, but repression can also be used. Therefore, all state apparatuses use both repressive and ideological tools in some way. Media is one of these apparatuses. Questions such as how it affects the visibility of leaders and at what level populist leaders establish relationships with media institutions have been addressed by many thinkers working in the field of political communication. Examples of these thinkers include Mazzoleni (2008), Stępińska, & Hopmann (2017).

Media is a powerful mobilization tool in sustaining the existence of populism (Mazzoleni, 2008). The underlying reason for its being a powerful tool is related to the personalities and styles of populist leaders. The charismatic, confrontational, and challenging attitude of populist leadership, its provocative nature; emotional and dramatic oratory, divisive sentences attract media attention and create news value. Populist leaders who convey political messages to the masses through media transmit their discourses with personalized, symbolic, and emotional messages. For this reason, Mazzoleni (2008) argues that populist politicians strengthen the mobilization of populism by addressing public issues in a mediatic communication style. In this new situation, media populism is not only a tool for populist actors but also an environment that enables their discourse and strategies. Populist leaders exhibit a special talent in creating headlines through these methods and succeed in shaping their discourses according to the spirit of the times. Frequently making controversial, sensational, or provocative statements in press conferences, events, and interviews is also a result of this skill (Mazzoleni, 2008).

### 3.2.2. Emotions

At the core of populism lies a moral dichotomy in the distinction between the people and the elites. On one side stands the superior, moral, tradition- and value-bound, honest, and virtuous people, while on the other side are the corrupt elites who disregard traditions and values. Populist leaders carry out their ideas and political discourses through this emphasis, assuming the mission of being "the voice of the people." Within the framework of this mission, populist leaders with charismatic authority develop feelings of belonging and loyalty among the masses by establishing meaningful and emotional bonds. Therefore, populism is not only a political discourse, strategy, or ideology but also a tool that mobilizes emotions.

*"Populism should be understood not merely as a form of political discourse or an ideological structure; it should also be comprehended as a political style heavily laden with emotions" (Salmela & von Scheve, 2018).*

Unorganized communities can transform into a collective subject through shared common emotions. Salmela and von Scheve (2018) explain in their article the circumstances under which unorganized communities unite around a common emotion: Emphasis is placed on collective emotions forming in situations where national identity, cultural belonging, social status, and economic security are threatened. Among common emotions, the dominant ones in populism are negative emotions such as anger, fear, and humiliation.

The emotions that trigger political mobilization can be explained through the "affective communities" theory. Affective communities form a political subject. This formed political subject enables the leader to gather the masses around the concept of "us." Nicolas Demertzis (2006) evaluates populism as a political culture intertwined with emotions. Collective emotions of the people such as anger, feelings of exclusion, humiliation, or anxiety play a critical role in the effectiveness of populist discourse. Therefore, populism is not only a reaction to a crisis of representation but also an organized expression of the emotions experienced by the people in the face of the system (Moffitt, 2020).

There are four primary emotions that stand out at the foundation of populism: fear, disgust, anger, and love (Illouz & Sicron, 2023). The emotion of fear is an instinct that develops against those who are not

like oneself, strengthens through the perception of the other, and thus drives unity against others. Fear creates a sense of uncertainty in individuals. Through fear, the people unite against others to form a whole. The emotion of disgust is what a person feels toward those who are not like themselves. This emotion is exclusionary while also preserving one's own values. If populism is characterized by emotions, the emotions reflecting the character's concept are generally negatively weighted (Illouz & Sicron, 2023). Examples include emotions such as anger, resentment, sadness, fear, etc. Anger is the emotional tool most frequently and intensively used in populism. Because anger evokes a feeling of exclusion in populism. The emotion of anger also feeds the polarizing language, one of populism's fundamental characteristics. Thus, anger creates a polarizing and confrontational language. This emotion typically emerges when silence begins to find its voice among the people. With the logic that "the moral people have been suppressed and ignored against the corrupt elites," the people adopt an accusatory and aggressive attitude. Factors such as lack of representation, emerging crises, the destruction of traditions, the degradation of native and nationalist understanding, and institutionalization reveal anger (Illouz & Sicron, 2023).

Populist leaders resort to emotional strategies to strengthen their charismatic authority and utilize the strategic function of emotions. The service of emotions to a purpose creates a powerful impact in the social context. The leader uses these emotions to create a strong effect, achieve their goals, and gain societal support. Hope unites the masses around a common story by creating an expectation vision for the future. In particular, populist leaders portray themselves as saviors or heroes by using emotions in the avoidance category such as fear, sadness, and regret thus legitimizing their authority through the savior role.

### 3.2.3. Style

All leaders use rhetoric the art of oratory in their speeches to create a specific narrative. The fundamental characteristic of this art is storytelling-based narration. The leader creates their own story. Typically, the created story includes the leader's life, the struggles they have faced, their losses, and their gains. The leader forms a target audience regarding who will own the created story. An inspiring message is emphasized through the created story, and individuals form a group identity around this message. Populist leaders find their role of representing the voice of the people within the story they create.

Metaphors are frequently used in the art of storytelling narration. However, to understand this art, one must refer to Aristotle's conception of rhetoric (Edinger, 2013). Aristotle advocates that an effective speech should have three main components. Ethos represents credibility. The first step of persuasion is built on trust. The trust relationship between the speaker and the listener facilitates the internalization of speeches and mobilization. Pathos is empathy. The speaker prepares the speech text by understanding the emotions, thoughts, sensitivities, troubles, and needs of the target audience. Logos is logic. Although emotions are prominent in an effective speech, logic is important for sustainability. The speaker should shape their speeches on a concrete and rational ground (Edinger, 2013).

Leaders benefit from certain techniques when using the art of rhetoric. For example, they start their speeches with an impressive opening. A technique frequently employed by populist leaders is the use of effective slogans that appeal to the essence of the masses. Sentences such as "I am the people, I am one of you" can be given as examples. Pointing out is another method. In their speeches, leaders direct the masses specifically to a particular group, situation, object, or sentence. Another is the us-versus-them distinction used in the polarizing sentences of populist leaders. Populist leaders define their existence through others, explaining what they are not rather than what they are. By emphasizing differences, they separate the moral people from the corrupt elites. Another technique used in speeches is encouraging action. They attempt to mobilize the masses with a strong and enthusiastic tone. In Donald Trump's election speeches, the sentence "We must work together to make America great again" seeks to evoke strong and enthusiastic emotions. These techniques make the leader's speech more effective and lasting.

If we look at the characteristics of populist style, populist leaders generally use the following expressions (Moffitt, 2020):

- People-elite distinction
- Us-them emphasis

- Simple, plain, direct expressions
- Locality-nationalism-traditionalism
- Crisis and threat emphasis
- Coarse manners/exaggerated expressions.

#### 4. The Use of Populist Leadership Tools: The Case of Donald Trump

In this section, drawing from Donald Trump's 2016 discourses, the Republican Party's platforms prepared for the 2016 and 2024 elections will be analyzed. The fundamental questions in the study are as follows: Did Trump act outside the party platform's line? How have the party platforms been influenced in the context of Trump's leadership? The answers to these questions will be analyzed through the party platforms prepared for the 2016 elections (Republican National Committee, 2016) and the 2024 elections (Republican National Committee, 2024). The main headings of the study will consist of the categories of immigration, economy, foreign policy, and health.

##### 4.1. Immigration

In 2016, the Republican Party adopted a moderate protectionist approach in its immigration policies. Within this framework, the party platform prioritized legal immigrants. Expressions highlighting the positive aspects of legal immigrants such as their patriotism, contributions to the American people, and hard work were used. In contrast, for illegal immigrants, policies included securing the borders, effective enforcement of immigration laws, repealing amnesty laws, eliminating sanctuary cities, and constructing a wall along the southern border (Republican National Committee, 2016).

However, Donald Trump's 2016 discourses did not distinguish between legal and illegal immigrants (Trump, 2016, August 31). Therefore, generalized and negative expressions were used toward all immigrants. From this perspective, Trump's strategy in his election campaigns and promises involved generalization for immigrants and prominent negative self-presentation strategies. Trump's style was harsh, accusatory, polarizing, and provocative. The immigration policies advocated by Donald Trump show similarities with the Republican Party platform. For example, policies such as building a border wall, ending catch-and-release practices, eliminating sanctuary cities, and ensuring the implementation of amnesty laws emphasize strict protectionist measures. However, the language used differs from the party platform. Compared to the Republican Party platform, Trump's style is harsher, more accusatory, and polarizing. Expressions such as "an impenetrable border wall," "Mexicans," "thousands of criminal aliens," and describing immigration as "the greatest challenge" serve as examples of exaggeration and othering strategies. Additionally, immigrants were portrayed as potential criminals, with rising crime rates, violence, terrorism, and economic difficulties articulated through immigrants.

Some provocative expressions toward immigrants include the following (Trump, 2016, August 31):

- "Countless Americans who would be alive today if not for the open border policies of this administration."
- "I've met many parents who have lost their children because of Sanctuary Cities and open borders."
- "Then there is the issue of security. Countless innocent American lives have been stolen because our politicians have failed in their duty to secure our borders and enforce our laws."

In the 2024 Republican Party platform, immigration policies commit to reimplementing all border policies of the Trump administration (Republican National Committee, 2024). The party introduced its immigration policies with the slogan "Seal the border, stop the migrant invasion." The word "invasion" used in the platform continues the language Trump employed for immigrants in his 2016 election campaign. While the 2016 Republican Party platform avoided accusatory, provocative, and polarizing language toward immigrants, the post-Trump party platform's language has undergone a change. In this context, strict measures have been included, such as deporting illegal immigrants and abandoning open border policies. Examples include the following sentences (Republican National Committee, 2024, Chapter 2):

- "Republicans offer a determined plan to end the open border policies that have caused a flood of illegal immigrants, deadly drugs, and migrant crime."

- “End the invasion at the Southern Border...”
- “Launch the Largest Deportation Program in American History.”
- “President Trump and Republicans will reverse the Democrats’ destructive Open Border Policies that have allowed criminal gangs and illegal immigrants from around the world to roam freely in the U.S. The Republican Party is committed to sending illegal immigrants who violate the law back to their countries.”

In the 2024 Republican Party platform, exaggerated expressions are evident in word choices such as "flood metaphor, invasion, and the largest deportation program." Additionally, to convey impact and harsh rhetoric in the platform text, some letters were capitalized contrary to writing rules Open Border Policies, Largest Deportation Program and some sentences were written in bold.

#### 4.2. Economy

In the 2016 Republican Party platform, nationalist economic development goals such as revitalizing the national economy and creating new job opportunities were emphasized. Expressions in the platform were supported by numerical data related to the economy. Improvements in the tax system were advocated, along with fair and simple taxes. The encouragement of a competitive environment was highlighted. Additionally, strategies such as deregulating financial markets and implementing free economy policies were outlined.

In contrast, Donald Trump's 2016 election promises in the economic field differed from the Republican Party platform by prioritizing protectionism and locality, while opposing free trade. For this reason, a nationalist economic understanding dominated Trump's economic policies. A national economic strategy that highlighted America's workforce and production was supported. The "Buy American, Hire American" principle was a reflection of this national economic strategy. Through this principle, the aims were to reduce dependence on foreign policy, support domestic production, and create employment. Policies within the party platforms included job creation, an America First trade policy, withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, renegotiation of NAFTA, and reviewing economic relations with China. In energy policies, fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas were encouraged. In terms of tax policies, tax cuts were a common goal in both programs.

In the comparison made from a discursive perspective, the Republican Party platform predominantly features expressions that evoke future-oriented and hopeful emotions. It focuses more on the question "What can we do?" rather than "What has not been done?" In contrast, Donald Trump's campaigns and election speeches employed a pessimistic style that highlighted negative emotions and created a crisis atmosphere. Another distinction separating it from the Republican platform is the intense use of the "America First" emphasis in Trump's election promises. Additionally, compared to the Republican Party platform, it carries a more protectionist and localist tone. The sentence "... we must change the current globalization policy and replace it with a new Americanism policy" can be cited as an example. In his promises, Trump presents his narrative more through what has not been done rather than what needs to be done. He harshly criticizes the current administration and Obama-Clinton leaders. Examples include the following sentences (Trump, 2016, August 8):

- “The only thing Hillary Clinton has to offer is more of the same: more taxes, more regulation, more bureaucrats, more restrictions on American energy and American production.”
- “If you were a foreign power aiming to weaken America, you couldn’t do better than Hillary Clinton’s economic agenda.”
- “She is the candidate of the past. Ours is the campaign of the future.”

Based on the examples above, it is evident that Trump's discourses employ polarizing, provocative, and discrediting discourse strategies toward the elites he defines as the "other." Van Dijk's (2006b) ideological square strategy frequently finds a place in Trump's election campaigns. While Trump describes his own leadership and era positively and hopefully, he associates the Clinton-Obama era with crisis and threats. This situation reflects the us-them polarization in Trump's speeches and campaigns as a distinction between insiders and outsiders. In the 2016 Republican Party platform, however, such a dominant distinction or polarizing language is not used to the extent seen in Trump. The platform

progresses more around the party's focus, advancing through an institutional framework rather than targeting individuals or parties. Yet Trump creates a crisis environment in his campaigns and among the masses by bringing out negative emotions. For instance, victimhood discourses are employed, such as "This is the weakest recovery since the Great Depression," "the lowest labor force participation rate," and "These are America's forgotten men and women. People who work hard but have no voice."

In the 2024 Republican Party platform, the economy section is shaped by the economic reforms implemented by Trump. Trump is described with positive self-presentation, while the Biden-Harris administration is criticized using negative self-presentation strategies. The 2024 platform differs in content from the 2016 party platform. The 2024 program uses a differentiating language through the Trump-Biden-Harris trio. Crisis and threat discourses are dominant in the program. There are frequent references to Trump's name, and these references are made with praise. The party has become identified with Trump's personality and has produced policies supporting Trump's administration. In particular, the frequent use of Trump's name in the 2024 Republican Party platform is a significant indicator of the party's personalization. For example, the sentence "President Trump radically transformed American trade policy by renegotiating failed agreements" clearly demonstrates this approach.

In the 2024 program, the emphasis on "America" is dominant. Compared to the 2016 program, the 2024 platform is more localist and protectionist. In particular, there is a stance against unfair foreign competition within the program. In Trump's 2016 election campaigns, trade agreements related to NAFTA and China were heavily criticized. This approach has continued its influence in 2024, with the criticisms re-expressed in a heavy discourse. Additionally, alongside a heavy, polarizing style very similar to Donald Trump's discourse, writing rules have also been used by emulating Trump's style (Republican National Committee, 2024, Chapter 5):

- "The Republican Party advocates a patriotic 'America First' Economic Policy."
- "We will prioritize domestic production and guarantee national independence in essential goods and services. Together, we will build a strong, self-sufficient, and prosperous America."
- "Republicans will strengthen 'Buy American and Hire American' policies."
- "Become a Superpower in Manufacturing"
- "Our America First Economic Agenda is built on five pillars: Reducing Regulations, Cutting Taxes, Securing Fair Trade Deals, Providing Reliable and Abundant Affordable Energy, and Supporting Innovation."

### 4.3. Foreign Policy

In the 2016 Republican Party platform, the concept of "American Exceptionalism" is prominent. In foreign policy, the "America First" approach has been adopted, and a "Sovereign America Understanding" is advocated in international organizations. The party platform aims to increase America's effectiveness on the international stage and promote the adoption of American values as universal values. To ensure security in foreign policy, it is believed that military power and defense spending need to be increased, and agreements contrary to U.S. values and national interests have been rejected.

Trump's foreign policy election campaigns in 2016 are similar to the Republican Party's programs of that year. Objectives include increasing defense spending and rebuilding the military, developing intelligence and cybersecurity activities, and fighting ISIS in the Middle East. However, the "America First" approach has become not only a foreign policy theme but the central motif of the entire policy (Trump, 2016, April 27).

- "My foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American security above everything else. That will be the foundation of every decision that I will make."
- "America First will be the major and overriding theme of my administration."
- As in his other election speeches and promises, Trump has created a perception of crisis. "Our foreign policy is a complete and total disaster. No vision, no purpose, no direction, no strategy."
- Criticisms of Obama-Clinton in foreign policy have been made harshly. "But the legacy of the Obama-Clinton interventions will be weakness, confusion, and disarray."

The 2024 Republican Party platform, like the others, prioritizes America and American values. A strong and stable foreign policy in the Middle East has been adopted. A tough stance against China has

been exhibited. It is stated that relations with NATO and Europe need to be renegotiated. The platform aims to strengthen American leadership worldwide (Republican National Committee, 2024).

#### 4.4. Health

In the 2016 Party Platform, health policies were aimed at improving the healthcare system. Within this framework, the repeal of Obamacare was targeted. According to Trump's claim, the Obamacare implementation caused increases in healthcare service prices, drug prices, and insurance premiums. The party's goal was to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable, high-quality healthcare. Another prominent theme in healthcare was abortion. The platform firmly opposed abortion. With the statement "We call for a permanent ban on federal funding and subsidies for abortion and health plans that include abortion coverage" (Republican National Committee, 2016), a strict and firm stance against abortion was exhibited.

Donald Trump's programs in his election campaigns aligned with the party platform. Trump criticized the Obamacare system and promised a patient-centered healthcare system that promotes quality and affordability. He pledged affordable healthcare and defended the Medicare system. However, there was a difference in approach regarding "abortion." While the 2016 Party Platform categorically rejected abortion, both in Trump's 2016 election campaigns and in the 2024 Republican Party Platform, a more moderate approach different from the strict stance was adopted, advocating that abortion regulations should be left to the discretion of the states.

#### 5. Conclusion

In this study, the impact of populism on political leadership has been analyzed through the political discourses of Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, during his 2016 Presidential Election campaign. Within the scope of the analysis, rally speeches held in states during the 2016 Presidential elections, election advertisements, posters and slogans used at rallies have been evaluated. As a result of the analysis, within the literature where the conceptual definition of populism is discussed as ideology, political logic, strategy, and discourse, this study has focused on the strategy and discourse dimensions of populism. In defining populism as a strategy, Kurt Weyland's (2021) understanding of leadership has been addressed. In the discourse section, Moffitt's (2015) metaphor of considering politics as a stage where populist politicians assume the role of performers on this stage, and voters are regarded as spectators has been utilized. Within this framework, the strategies Trump employed to convey his populist style to the audience through his performer image have been examined in detail.

The question of the extent to which populist elements are present in Donald Trump's style has been analyzed. As a result of the analyses conducted, frequently used expressions by Trump have been examined from a populist perspective. For example, phrases such as "I will fight for you and your future," "I will make America great again," "American greatness," "America First," "silent majority," "corrupt system," and "I am not part of the system" have concretized the impact of populism on the style reflected in political leadership. Indeed, approaches that treat populism as a discourse view it as a reflection of ideological structure (Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012), and Canovan's (1984) assertion that populism relies more on style than essence is supported by these findings.

In this study, expressions containing moral oppositions in Trump's populist rhetoric have been emphasized. Trump defines the power as a "corrupt system" and the "insiders," while positioning himself as a "savior from outside the system" and a moral leader. By prominently featuring the people whom he calls the "Silent Majority" and describes as "Forgotten Americans" in every speech, he shares his mission and vision of "We will make America great again together." Additionally, he expresses that he fights on behalf of and for the people against elites in politics (whom he calls lobbyists), media, and the financial sector.

The study has also treated populism not only as a style but as a strategic approach. Within the study, methods of gaining and exercising power in the context of political strategy have been examined. Drawing from Weyland's (2001) definition of strategy, Trump's political strategies for gaining power have been characterized by power capacity. Moffitt's (2020: 85-86) description of populist leaders as performers in the political arena draws attention to the importance of the leader in strategy. Because, according to Weyland (2001), populism is a political strategy in which a leading personality seeks or uses support from

unorganized masses through direct, unmediated, and uninstitutionalized means to gain governmental power. Trump, particularly by advancing through the people, creates common demands with uninstitutionalized mass support. By uniting the people around these created demands, he attempts to form a whole. The leader represents a scattered and mass group of people excluded and othered from political life, protecting the uninstitutionalized majority against crises and threats. Thus, the bond between the leader and the masses is solidified with scattered but intense support (Weyland, 2001).

In Trump's election speeches, party platforms, and election advertisements, the theme of crisis predominantly stands out. As Moffitt (2015) notes, populist leaders not only manage crises but also stage, produce, and sustain them. The critical discourse analysis used in the study has revealed that the crisis theme is intensely employed in Trump's political discourse. Crises have brought disaster, and the message conveyed is that salvation from this disastrous environment is possible only through a leader supported by the people. As Benjamin Moffitt (2020) points out, crisis is not merely a backdrop for the populist leader but also a tool of political performance that is actively constructed and sustained. The charismatic leader, by undertaking this performance, both strengthens their legitimacy and establishes an emotional and moral bond with the people. The characteristics that make populist leaders extraordinary are related not only to their ability to cope with crises but also to their capacity to appear "ordinary." Trump, with his savior and charismatic leader figure, has produced ordinary and simple solutions against large and complex crises, threats, and disorders. In this way, he has attempted to position himself in the collective memory as someone from the people, ordinary, and charismatic. By appearing and speaking like the people, he has garnered support through the image of being "of the people."

In Trump's rhetorical strategy, the emphasis on "again" is prominent. Nationalist emotions are mobilized through repetitions of "America." The "America" emphasis dominates the speech. Through repetition and emphasis strategies, he attempts to create stability in the masses' thoughts and make his ideas enduring. Metaphorical expression, storytelling, and exaggeration are predominantly used as rhetorical arts in the discourse. Polarizing language prevails. This language emerges through the us-them distinction strategy. Additionally, a stigmatizing discourse is preferred in his speeches. By employing victimization and martyr narratives, he appeals to the emotions of the people who have been poorly represented and ignored by bad policies for many years. Furthermore, drawing from van Dijk's (2006a) ideological square strategy, it is clearly observed that positive and negative self-presentation are applied in his political discourses.

In conclusion, this study has sought answers to the question "How does populism shape political leadership style and the discourse of populist leaders?" through Trump's political discourses. By analyzing how a political leader uses language and produces power through discourse, particularly via the example of Donald Trump, the study has contributed to the literature by highlighting the importance of the populism perspective in political discourse studies on leaders from different periods.

#### **Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest**

Çalışmada herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.  
There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person in the study.

#### **İntihal Politikası Beyanı / Plagiarism Policy**

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This article was scanned in Plagiarism programs and Plagiarism was not detected.

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Bu çalışmada Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi kapsamında belirtilen kurallara uyulmuştur.  
In this study, the rules specified within the scope of the Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive were followed.

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