

Name of the student:	Covadonga Solares Morales
Title of the thesis:	Understanding the future of the transatlantic relation: The impact of Donald Trump's populist foreign policy rhetoric on the US Congress' debates on NATO
Reviewer:	Abel Escribà-Folch

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

This MA thesis examines, using discourse analysis, the impact (or degree of replication) that Donald Trump's narrative towards NATO and the European allies had among members of US Congress and the existing bipartisan consensus.

The relevance of the research is well justified in general, but it is, in my opinion, a bit overstated and (to some extent) oversold, considering the question is rather limited in scope as it focuses on narratives, yet the process of foreign policy-making and the influence of actors in it is more complicated than a unidirectional discursive process. The role of Congress and the specificities of the American design and policy-making process concerning international security need more context and discussion in this initial discussion so that the author provides a better frame for the relevance of the potential relationship explored. For example, at the beginning the authors affirms "Addressing this question becomes relevant because of its implications for the future of the transatlantic relation"; but this is never discussed, so we do not know the implications, especially considering that a change in the President has triggered a complete change in this policy.

The literature review seems comprehensive and well organized. I think section 1.2 could be streamlined a bit, and include a more critical discussion on multilateralism and then on foreign policy analysis and the specific process of design and decision-making in the case under study, the US. This is only partially done in section 1.4, but centred in Trump, rather than in the institutional process, and the relevant actors involved: especially, the Congress and the specific Committee. Another option is to make the case for how leaders influence foreign policy more specifically, and after discussing the ample literature on this, provide a summary of American leaders and the changes they caused or led in foreign policy.

I really enjoyed sections 1.3 and 1.4; they are very informative and insightful, and they really point to the importance of leaders' role and discourse in shaping policy positions concerning foreign policy and its international implications. Actually, some of these insights should be present in the introduction in fact, to make it stronger.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The approach used is defined as deductive – inductive discourse analysis, yet a miss a bit the deductive part here in the building of the argument and theory sections.

The analyses are well explained and conducted. Yet, they present some limitations in being able to establish or gauge the true degree of influence the President's views and positions had among members of Congress, especially Republican ones.

As for the analysis and data, the first part, which concentrates on Trump's positions and discourse, uses 10 public appearances. I wonder if that is enough and whether this is the most relevant source of information. It includes "4 TV and newspaper interviews with media outlets, 3 speeches at NATO Summits and Conferences and 3 campaign rallies." This overlooks the preferred outlet Trump used for communicating, namely, Twitter. My main concern is that whether such public appearances are enough to get relevant information, especially, considering that the paper focuses on the impact on Congress, which a particular type of audience, and not on the impact of European leaders, for example. That is, it is theoretically relevant that the analysed audience is domestic not foreign. So, the sources need more discussion and the choice should be better theoretically-informed. This is important since, as the author stresses, this is the deductive part of the paper. The deductive part needs more theoretical development guiding the selection process and the expectations.

For example, in page 31, the author mentions two works that analyse Trumps discourse on foreign policy. But they are only briefly mentioned in this section, and their findings and contributions are not

presented. There are other words on the use of Twitter by Trump and their impacts on domestic and global audiences and policy. This all seems relevant to me and should have been discussed. The analysis of Trump's statement seems a bit descriptive, and lacks a bit of connection to the theoretical points discussed in the sections of populist foreign policy, as the analysis moves straight to the "impact" on congressional debates. It is in this second empirical part that I miss some expectations that are theoretically-informed, and that take into account the nature and characteristics of the audience and institutions, and even the individuals at stake. More justification on this particular relationship and its importance would have been helpful, at both the theoretical as well as empirical level. There is the risk of simply a copy-cat behaviour; but also, one must take into account the role of committees and the very particular structure of party politics in the US. These elements could have been leverage to provide a more nuanced picture and framework for the study. The inductive part focuses on six debates, as the author explains, which, in this case, seem better justified for the purposes of the thesis.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

The research goals seem to be accomplished, considering some of their limitations, as stressed above (in a constructive manner). The results are clearly summarized. The author acknowledges the limitation of her work, which is always important and academically honest. I miss here a bit more discussion on the contributions made to the larger literature and the policy implications of the research.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE


(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

All formal aspects seem correct. Some years are missing in in-text citations. Also, I do not think literal quotes need to be put in italics, quotation marks are sufficient; but it is also essential to cite the page where the quote is located, which is missing in many of them. Citations from news outlets are often incorrect or missing.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

This is a well written and executed master's thesis. The literature review is overall comprehensive and well discussed. The insights on populist foreign policy are interesting and nicely presented. The analyses are conducted professionally, carefully, transparently, and rigorously, for which I commend the author. The weak point in my opinion is the shallow theoretical background informing the research question and the lack of specific expectations (even if context specific) being theoretically-informed.

Grade (A-F):	90 Very good
Date:	Signature:
12/07/2022	

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.