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**Populist Trends in Republican Presidential  
Nomination Acceptance Speeches**

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## **Abstract**

Populist rhetoric was quantified in all US Republican presidential nomination speeches between 1968 and 2020 utilizing Paul Taggart's model of Populism as an index to discern the viability of populist rhetoric as an effective campaign strategy in light of the shrinking core demographics of the Republican Party. The data found underscored the 2013 Growth and Opportunity Project conducted by the Republican National Convention (RNC) that the core demographics of the RNC were shrinking in electoral relevance and that the RNC was not persuasive with demographics that existed outside of their core constituency. This research showed that while populism is an everpresent phenomenon in RNC campaign rhetoric it is not sufficient in compensating for the depleting electoral strength that once guaranteed definitive electoral victories. Additionally, neither the degree of populism recorded in the speech nor in the audience response thereto correlates to the electoral outcomes. While populism is a powerful rhetorical tool it remains too volatile and unpredictable, making it a poor choice of campaign strategy. In effect, this index is valuable as a retrospective tool to study the intricacies of the national mood at the time of the election, but it is not a predictive tool regarding electoral outcomes.

## **Keywords**

Populism, Campaign Rhetoric, Republican, US Politics, Presidential Campaigns, US Elections

## **Klíčová slova**

Populismus, předvolební rétorika, Republikáni, politika, USA, prezidentské kampaně, Volby v USA

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2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, 26 April, 2023

Sophie Elisabeth Benson

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**Institute of Sociological Studies and  
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**Master thesis proposal**

**Topic of work**

As the American Civil Rights movement began to gain momentum in the mid-1960s a strategic decision was implemented to use the mass media to bring the protests in the American South into the living room televisions of families throughout the nation. Shocking images of black Americans practicing civil disobedience and being met by militant violence from white police officers and citizens were imperative to convincing moderate white democrats that the civil rights movement could not wait any longer and civil rights needed to be guaranteed immediately for all citizens (Cobb, 2015). The move was effective and in 1964 and 1965 the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act were respectively signed into law. The 1964 Civil Rights Act protected American citizens from discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and religious denomination, however, the legislation was flawed because several states had laws in place that made it near impossible for minority groups, particularly black Americans to participate in local and national elections, particularly in southern states wherein slavery was primarily practiced. In 1965 the legislative gaps that allowed for this continued discrimination were addressed in the Voting Rights Act which protected minority voters in local and national elections.

The protections guaranteed through the Voting Rights Act had a very immediate effect with states like Mississippi showing 67% of eligible black voters registered in 1968, whereas only 7% had been registered in 1964 (Cobb, 2015). By the 1980's the percentage of the adult black population on the voter rolls in the South had already surpassed that in the rest of the country. The makeup of local government also changed as a result of increased minority voter participation as voters elected representatives that represented their interests with more African Americans holding public office across the South in the 1980s than in the rest of the nation combined (Cobb, 2015). Furthermore, a study conducted of cities in Florida found black municipal employment quadrupled between 1960 and 2000. By the end of the segment of study African Americans comprised 25% of the supervisory positions (Cobb 2015).

The extensive broadcasting of mass civil disobedience had been a gamble because not all American households supported emancipation through these means, if at all. The conservative movement experienced a rhetorical shift during this period, justifying that they were not anti-progress or racist, rather they were anti-disorder. The 1968 presidential election was the first campaign cycle following the Voting Rights Act, and the first time the phrase "law and order" enters the national political arena in Richard Nixon's Republican National Convention nomination acceptance speech (NBC News, 2020).

The term "law and order" has a lengthy history in United States politics, going as far back as the 1840s. Per Professor Sarat, "Law and Order" campaigns and political parties appear as the nation is on the precipice of major social change. "Law and Order" candidates speak to the status quo that pushes against the social change (NBC News, 2020). This can be seen in the cases of universal suffrage, prohibition, and labor unionization. The powers that be raise alarms that to change the social order would be a catastrophic danger to the American public and that law and order would be at risk, the implication being that breaking with the status quo would threaten the

entire social order of the nation. The use of coded anti-progress language in Republican party talking points became commonplace with GOP strategist Lee Atwater speaking remarkably plainly regarding the 1968 campaign. “You start out in 1954 by saying ‘Nigger, nigger, nigger.’ By 1968 you can’t say ‘nigger’ – that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states’ rights, and all that stuff.” In less polished terms a Republican supporter told journalists “Y’all know about law and order. It’s spelled n-i-g-g-e-rs” (Zwiers, 2019).

These movements are historically effective, but only in the short term, therefore “law and order” movements can be characterized as the apparent political death gasps of an era, as the status quo struggles to maintain relevancy amid a progressing social scene. Throughout most of its history “law and order” campaigns were limited to local politics.

The full effects of this shift in voting power granted by the Voting Rights Act can be recognized in the historic landslide victory of Barack Obama as the first man of color to assume the office of the presidency. Following the election the RNC leadership conducted the Growth and Opportunity Project, also referred to as the “election autopsy” report to understand how they had so misjudged the general electorate. The report found that the American electorate demographics were shifting with people of color, women, religious minorities, and urban centers growing in political power (2013). This raised a problem for the RNC political strategy which had built its rhetorical base around catering to white, Christian men, primarily from rural settings (Franke-Ruta, 2019). This demographic was rapidly shrinking in rhetorical power, and the report concluded it would continue to do so. The report included suggestions on how to modify the party rhetoric in an effort to reach out to these voting groups who were growing in political power. In the 2012 election cycle, the RNC’s presidential nominee was Mitt Romney, who was rather conservative and inauspicious in an effort to pull more electoral votes. However, the effort again failed and Obama was elected for a second term.

Beginning in 2012 a concentrated effort to chip away at the Voting Rights Act began to appear throughout the country, primarily in southern states. In 2012 19 states had instated voting restrictions on registration or voting that had great potential to negatively affect minority turnout (Cobb, 2015). Then in a 2013 ruling, the Supreme Court voided some of the statutes of the Act, the argument being that the voting protections had clearly been so successful they were no longer necessary (The Department of Justice, 2023). Since then, primarily Republican-leaning states have imposed greater and stricter conditions on the constitutional right to vote. These conditions are difficult to overturn because per the Supreme Court’s 2013 ruling a voting restriction must be intended to suppress minority votes rather than simply showing the effect of suppressed minority participation for a voting condition to be overturned. As these efforts ramped up in intensity in the lead-up to the 2016 election Donald Trump galvanized the core Republican base with the most overt and intense “law and order” rhetoric in the history of Republican presidential nominees. He continually referred to himself as the “law and order” candidate and used related coded terminology to inspire fear and anger in the RNC core audience.

### **Assumed research methods**

I would like to study the trajectory of the specific “law and order” rhetoric utilized in Republican National Convention (RNC) presidential nomination speeches as the effects of the Voting Rights Act first became realized and how the usage of the phrase changes as the Act became challenged and weakened on a national scale. The



hypothesis is that it is not coincidental that the term “law and order” emerged in the national political vernacular as minority voting protections were legally protected. Additionally, the term has made a dramatic resurgence following the RNC “autopsy report” following President Obama’s election. The report showed how effective the legislation was in changing the general electorate of America into a more diverse voting block. This has led to increased Republican efforts to modify the general electorate through voter suppression, rather than altering its platform to meet the interests of the changing electorate.

I would like to analyze speeches RNC presidential nomination speeches from election cycles following the passage of the Voting Rights Act, as well as significant amendments to the powers it guarantees. The party nomination acceptance speeches are a major rhetorical moment in each presidential campaign in part because the speeches are broadcast nationally and set the tone for the election moving forward. I will conduct a qualitative textual analysis of the 1968 and 2016 RNC nomination acceptance speeches. The 1968 election was the first presidential election that took place following the passage of the Voting Rights Act, meaning this was the beginning of the expansion of minority participation as part of the national electorate. The 2016 election is the first election following the Supreme Court ruling in 2013 (*Shelby County [Ala.] v. Holder*) which weakened voter protections and resulted in a limiting effect on voter registration and participation. Primarily I will analyze the usage of “law and order” and other coded language (i.e. “rule of law,” “respect for the law.”). These phrases are recognized as coded anti-minority dog whistles. Per the hypothesis, the usage and prevalence of these phrases should increase as the American electorate becomes more diverse.

Additionally, I would like to incorporate a quantitative component to my analysis by studying the demographic make-up of the general electorate in these two election cycles, specifically in regard to the percentage of white voters in comparison to voters of color who were able to register and participate in the elections. Per the hypothesis, the tone of the nomination acceptance speeches will shift as the percentage of minority voter participation increases. Should “law and order” rhetoric be relevant as the hypothesis suggests, coded language that implies the dangers of minority voter participation should be reflected in the demographic make-up of the two election cycles.

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## **Introduction**

When the 2016 United States Presidential election was called in the late hours of the 8th of November naming Donald Trump the victor, the sense of collective shock was palpable throughout not only the Democratic party and its constituency but throughout the nation as a whole. That the Republican party was in a downward spiral had been the accepted reality, confirmed and underscored by the Republican's own Opportunity and Growth Project, which found that the Republicans were losing their national relevance as it only focused on persuading its shrinking constituency (Republican National Convention, 2013). Despite, or perhaps due to, these elective drawbacks the Trump campaign was able to take advantage of a populist undercurrent in the electorate and manipulate it into an electoral victory. The populist outburst that seemingly overwhelmed and upended elective, political, and social norms throughout the nation, was an unwelcome reminder that not only is American democracy susceptible to populist tendencies, but rather it has been so for a while. By his own claim, Trump echoed the populist rhetoric of Nixon's campaign half a century earlier, and Nixon's campaign echoed populist rhetoric that dates back to the first half of the 19th century (Barbaro, 2016). A nation that was founded on a populist revolution should not be surprised that a populist undercurrent exists within its political system, to a volatile effect (Olsen, n.d.).

Social and communication research can often find themselves in the pitfall of only acknowledging populism when it has tangible social effects, downplaying that populism is an ever-present feature of the democratic system. As such, it stands to reason that there will be undercurrents and shadows of populism between the dramatic outbursts that are generally associated with populist movements. To understand how

populist movements connect to one another, this research tracks populist tendencies in Republican campaign rhetoric between Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential election success, and Donald Trump's second election in 2020. Utilizing Paul Taggart's model of populism as a guide, the populist effects of the Republican candidates, the audiences, and the general electorates for all fourteen speeches will be analyzed in search of trends and patterns to determine whether relying on populist enthusiasm is a feasible or effective strategy for the Republican party as they face the possibility of dwindling relevance in the national political debate.

# 1. Literature and Theoretical Background

## *1.1 The Shifting Electorate*

## *1.2 American Populism*

Among the major accomplishments of the American Civil Rights movement was the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which the Justice Department called "the most successful piece of civil rights legislation ever adopted by the United States Congress (Johnson, 2021)". Shortly after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, it became apparent that the legislation was not completely successful in protecting black voters in Southern states from systematic efforts to keep them from voting (Johnson, 2021). The Voting Rights Act was built off of the protections guaranteed in the 14th Amendment as well as the Civil Rights Act and was wildly effective immediately. For example, Mississippi saw a massive jump in voter registration of black constituents, with 7% of eligible voters registered in 1964 before the Voting Rights Act, going to 67% in 1968 following its ratification (Cobb, 2015). By the 1980's the percentage of the adult black population on the voter rolls in the South had already surpassed that in the rest of the country. The makeup of local government also changed as a result of increased minority voter participation as voters elected representatives that represented their interests with more African Americans holding public office across the South in the 1980s than in the rest of the nation combined (Cobb, 2015).

Jumping ahead four decades, following the second election of Barack Obama in 2012, the Republican National Convention (RNC) conducted a review of the election results, particularly focusing on the interests and demographics of the electorate. To the RNC the shock of Obama's second win was massive and unfathomable in part because

he was so completely unpopular among core base Republicans. The RNC conducted the Growth and Opportunity Project (often referred to as the Autopsy Report), which found that the United States electorate was shifting and the Republican's core constituency was shrinking. Where the Republican strategy was focused on appealing to white, Christian, middle-aged men living in rural communities, the electorate was becoming increasingly diverse with younger voters, of diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, and ideological backgrounds, residing in cities holding much more significance in the elections. The report was at times brutal in its findings:

We need to do a better job connecting people to our policies... The Republican Party needs to stop talking to itself. We have become expert [sic] in how to provide ideological reinforcement to like-minded people, but devastatingly we have lost the ability to be persuasive with, or welcoming to, those who do not agree with us on every issue.

(Republican National Convention, 2013, p.5 )

The report noted, in no uncertain terms, that the Republican party had lost its capacity to be persuasive and relevant to those in the electorate who are not already 100% committed Republicans. The report concluded with a lengthy section detailing strategies to better engage with the shifting electorate in the coming elections.

Elections are not won by preaching to the choir, rather they are won by engaging with those who are uncertain or shifting in their political opinions, those who could vote either way. Lazarsfeld's landmark study "The People's Choice" concluded that mass media communication does not influence the public directly (1948). Rather, opinion leaders exist at all strata of society, individuals who are highly exposed to formal modes of communication. The study found that the interpersonal connections formed by the

opinion leaders were much more effective at persuading the general public, in that case coincidentally also in a U.S. presidential election. What is not specifically addressed in the research but can be inferred is that an opinion leader is only as influential and significant as the size of their community network. Meaning that opinion leaders in rural communities, who are the core demographic of Republican strategists may have less success than their urban counterparts due to the natural population size. This was less of a problem for the Republicans when a significant portion of the United States population lived in rural communities, but over the course of the 20th century, America began to experience a population shift towards urban centers. This meant that the rural communities, who used to make up for their localized small populations by being part of a large voting block of small localized communities, were shrinking in political power because the *number* of small localized communities was beginning to shrink, thereby losing their political significance. A simple remedy for this at the legislative level was to artificially adjust population size, by increasing voter restrictions and by depleting the power of voters through redistricting and gerrymandering (Kirschenbaum, 2021). By diluting the voting strength of urban centers and democratic strongholds the Republican strategists sidestepped the issue of shifting demographics and were able to continue to focus their campaigns on the same electorate subgroup.

During this same period in the early 2010s, Republican-led states began implementing legislation that placed restrictions on voting rights, such as limiting early voting locations and hours of operation, criteria to qualify for mail-in voting, limiting the number of voting locations in districts that tended to vote democratic (and were often predominantly populated by people of color), and aggressive redistricting of state voting districts (Childress, 2012). These policies were decried as being motivated by race as they prominently affected people of color living in urban settings, ultimately



decreasing their electoral power. These claims were eventually brought before the Supreme Court in the *Shelby County [Ala.] v. Holder* case. In summation, the case was elevated to the Supreme Court after the Voting Rights Act was reauthorized by Congress for a 25-year period (Department of Justice, 2023). Shelby County of Alabama raised concerns with Section 5 of the Act, which required states with a documented history of discrimination to submit any proposed change of law or redistricting that would affect voting to the Justice Department for approval prior to its implementation. Section 4(b) was also disputed as it provides the formula by which Section 5 is informed.

The state of Alabama, which was included in this group, argued that the criteria by which states were being judged were out of date and therefore invalid. Furthermore, they argued that the precedent being set was a dangerous overreach of the Federal government into State level legislation. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Shelby County and the two sections were, in effect, made void. The Court specifically avoided ruling on the legality of the overall legislation, rather it made Section 5 inoperable until the formula in Section 4(b) which informs Section 5 is reevaluated and updated by Congress. While the ruling did invite Congress to enact a new coverage formula, at this time it has still not done so as members of Congress debate the necessity of such legislation today. The House of Representatives did pass legislation to restore Sections 4(b) and 5 in December 2019, and August 2021, however, Senate Republicans blocked consideration of the legislation in January 2022 (Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 2022).

As it currently stands, it is still possible to contest voting restrictions as unconstitutional, but only after they have been implemented and after tangible negative effects are recorded. Furthermore, the Supreme Court ruled that any law could be struck

down if it was proven that it violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment *only if the intent* was racially motivated, rather than proving that the legislation had a disproportionate effect on people of color (*Washington v. Davis*, 426 U.S. 229 (1976), n.d.). The intent is much more difficult to prove than the effect, as noted by John J. Betancur in his discussion of neo-racism:

Still tangled in the logic of "classical" racism, courts look today for intention to determine whether a practice or outcome is racist or not. Racism, the argument goes, requires intentional harm and a perfectly identifiable perpetrator. Under the circumstances, racism today shines through effects so subtly produced or veiled as to make it apparently invisible - and thus requiring equally sophisticated tools to unveil the forms it hides under.

(Betancur, 2013, p384)

The shifting discussion surrounding race strategically ignores that an active intent of race-motivated harm is not necessary if the institutions in place reinforce a racially motivated structure. In fact, these biased structures are what made the creation of the Voting Rights Act necessary in the first place. Ultimately the Supreme Court's ruling led to an increase in voter restriction legislation all in the name of ensuring the integrity of the elections.

The next presidential election was in 2016, which Donald Trump won. It is significant to note that Trump won the electoral vote, but not the popular vote. The electoral college is an antiquated system that was innately designed to limit the power of the voter base, "as a compromise between the election of the President by a vote in Congress and election of the President by a popular vote of qualified citizens" (National Archives, 2019). The idea is that the general public cannot be entrusted to make

leadership decisions without a failsafe of elected representatives to verify the authenticity or integrity of the vote. The electoral college is comprised of electors who are selected through a two-step process. First, the party leadership at the state level will nominate a slate of potential electors who are selected in recognition of their loyalty and support to the specific party, rather than the state or country itself. While often not expressly included on the written ballot these electors are included, effectively, in the general election of the state. During the general election, when constituents are placing their votes for a presidential candidate they are actually placing their ballots for the presidential candidate and the associated party's slate of potential electors. The candidate who wins the state's popular vote also wins the full slate of potential electors being appointed to the position. Only two states have a system for appointing electors that allows for proportionate distribution of electors to reflect the state election results. To complicate matters, some state party leadership requires candidates to vote for the party nominee (National Archives, 2019). In effect, this means that even if a candidate only wins a state by 60% of the popular votes, they win 100% of the state electoral votes. As a countermeasure, some state legislatures have passed laws in recent years that require the electors to vote in accordance with the national popular vote rather than the state level (National Archives, 2019). So even if a candidate may lose a specific state with 35% of that state's popular vote, they will win 100% of the state's electoral votes because the candidate won the national popular vote by 60%. Effectively the electors do not have the freedom to carry out their roles as intended, and in effect, a system that was designed to protect the country from populist extremism has been weaponized to be a dangerous tool of populism. Returning to the 2016 election, this means that although more individuals voted for Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton, the effects of limited voter accessibility, redistricting, and winner-take-all protocols for the

distribution of electoral votes resulted in Trump claiming more electoral votes than Clinton.

Additionally, electoral votes are not always a fair distribution of power amongst the American population as a whole. In general, states are awarded their number of electors based on their total population, so elector numbers are reevaluated every ten years when the census was completed (The Guardian, n.d.). Each state is guaranteed three electors, equaling the minimum number of representatives in Congress that a state may have (two senators, one house member) and then electors are added per the population size, so in 2000 Florida had 27 votes, 2 for their senators and 25 for the approximately 13 million population (The Guardian, n.d.). This system works as designed when state populations increase, however, problems begin to occur as the state populations shrink, elevating the value of voters in rural America disproportionately.

In 2008, on average a state is awarded one electoral vote for every 565,166 people. However, Wyoming has three electoral votes and only 532,668 citizens (as of 2008 estimates). As a result, each of Wyoming's three electoral votes corresponds to 177,556 people. Understood in one way, these people have 3.18 times as much clout in the Electoral College as an average American, or 318%.

(FairVote, 2022)

This uneven distribution of voter power is what made capturing the attention and the vote of rural American voters so important to the strategy of the Grand Old Party (GOP) as they are often referred to, and exemplifies why the GOP focused their efforts on these rural populations, which were generally white Christian patriarchal communities. So long as the opinion leader of these communities was persuaded the election wins were guaranteed.

While these predominantly rural states continue to hold outweighed electoral power, their populations are depleting to more urban centers in other states (California, Texas, Florida, New York, etc.) thereby increasing these more populous states' voting power. While the Wyoming voter does have 318% more say than the average American they still only offer 3 votes of the 538 total votes, and the 270 minimum needed to win a presidential election. The GOP strategy did make use of a convent loophole but it did not take into account that states with larger populations and urban centers would still continue to grow and overwhelm the voting power of the rural populations. The election autopsy report of 2012 is so remarkable because the Republicans had a considerable advantage for decades. They had built their entire political system around a singular group never considering the possibility that the relevance of this group would waiver. Even with a solid and unwavering base, the lopsided electoral college, and aggressive gerrymandering efforts in the more powerful states, the GOP continues to sink in significance.

### **1.2.1 “We the People”**

The Founding Fathers of the United States of America were very much enamored with the classical philosophies of the Greeks and the Romans, incorporating literary, architectural, and philosophical ties to the classics into their new experiment on self-government (Murphy, 2008). It is also apparent they considered the fears raised by the likes of Plato and Aristotle regarding democracies' susceptibility to populist movements when constructing their new form of self-government (Olson, n.d.). Much forethought was given to the concern that the young Republic could be overwhelmed and weaponized by a populist leader and damage the experiment overall, as can be seen in the writings of James Madison.

[The pattern of classic populism] was among the evils James Madison sought to contain through the Constitution. His great fear, as he put it in Federalist No. 49, was that "the passions,...not the reason, of the public would sit in judgment." If this were permitted, Madison wrote in Federalist No. 10, "the influence of factious leaders may kindle a flame"; the American republic, he believed, should be designed to keep such conflagrations in check...Madison assumed that Americans would be tempted to demand classical populism; the challenge was to reduce the ability of the government to supply it. In this sense, his creation has clearly worked: America has never had a classically populist regime.

(Olson, n.d.)

That populism would appear in the American political system was less of a question of *if*, and rather a question of *when* and *how*. To his credit, Madison and his colleagues succeeded in their goal of creating a system that was robust enough to withstand most populist movements before they could ever reach elected office, and those who did were limited by checks and balances from enacting their policies in full (Olson, n.d.).

Fortunately, the electoral system and the government overall have strong checks and balances in place that keep any particular branch of government from infringing upon the rights and authority of another branch in the event that populism seeps into any branch of government. For example, even during the most tumultuous days of the Trump presidency, which were certainly damaging in their own right, the “guardrails of democracy” held firm against the most populist inclinations of the unprecedented administration (Kamarck, 2022). Per Kamarck, despite repeated efforts by the administration to behave as an absolute political power, the institutions of Congress, the judiciary, the press, the civil service, and the balanced maintenance of power between

the federal government and the states were not weakened by the will of the executive branch, all maintaining their independence, authority, and mission (2022). Per Patrick Liddiard, “legislative institutional power is an important part of democratic durability because stronger legislatures are better able to check abuses of executive power that can undermine democracy” (2019). The system of government created appears to be able to withstand the potential of executive abuses, even if the checks and balances on executive power appear to function slower than assumed.

Two things can be true at the same time, and while the Founders were aware of the dangers of populism and successfully incorporated defenses against popular uprisings into their new political system, the American Revolution was itself a populist uprising. The popular consciousness tends to avoid considering movements with a positive outcome as populist because the term itself is tinged by the numerous negative examples of populist outbursts. Paul Taggart’s model of populism includes the criteria of “absent core values,” meaning populist movements are identified by their behaviors, impulses, and reactions, and not the content of their movement’s ideology (2004). In the case of the American Revolution, one could certainly see the framework of a populist movement, with its charismatic leader (George Washington), the elites that were in opposition to the people (King George and the Red Coat Army), a one-size-fits-all solution to a complex problem (independence certainly was a solution, but also not the only option), and the crisis of the injustice. The feeling of being fundamentally wronged and mistreated is palpable and ever-present in the language of the Revolution, as though independence is not an option, but rather a necessity for the people to thrive. Consider the phrasing utilized in the Declaration of Independence:

...When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation... We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

(National Archives, 2023)

Imagine this language used in a modern context. *Due to the British's failure to treat the people with the respect and dignity they are inherently due by their Creator, it is their duty to "institute new Government"* (National Archives, 2023). *Since their Creator endowed the people with inalienable rights to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness," which the British elites are impending, it is the "Right of the People to alter or to abolish"* (National Archives, 2023). The justification for popular resistance was not unwarranted, and the deeper implications of creating an independent state were carefully considered by its leaders, but this does not negate that the actual process of revolution was populist, as many revolutions are. The perceived failure of the elites to



honor the inalienable rights of the people was the foundation of the American Revolution, and also a cornerstone of populist movements well before and long after the founding of the United States of America. This can also be seen in the language of the Constitution: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America (National Archives, 2023). The American Revolution is riddled with populist rhetoric and behaviors. Indeed, perhaps this very behavior is what caused James Madison’s concerns and why the Founders built protections against populism into their new form of government.

### **1.2.2 Racially Motivated Populism**

During his 2016 RNC nomination acceptance speech, Donald Trump referred to himself as the “law and order candidate,” a claim that was met by roaring applause at the convention (C-SPAN, 2016, 33:55). The designation as the “law and order candidate” indicates that there is significance and meaning behind the claim, and encouraged renewed interest in the phrase. Per Austin Sarat, “Politics of law and order, almost from the beginning of the Republic, has been a politics of fear and a politics of resentment; fear of change and resentment against those who are bringing about change” (NBC News, 2020, 0:38). Presumably, the audience did not believe they were cheering the notion that they were fearful and resentful, which begs the question of what the politics of law and order effectively mean, and what they mean to its supporters.

The phrase dates back to the 1840s, reappearing in campaigns in the intervening centuries that seek to maintain the status quo in the face of social change, arguing that

they are opposed to the social disorder that they believed was guaranteed in the absence of the status quo. This can be seen in Governor Samuel W. King of Rhode Island, who created the first Law and Order party as a guise to keep poor, disadvantaged people and immigrants from gaining voting rights (NBC News, 2022, 1:02). Law and Order maintained its anti-immigrant undertones when the phrase was picked up by the temperance movement in the early 20th century. The political movement of prohibition had its stronghold in rural and predominantly Protestant communities, which sought to control and punish what they believed to be the disorderly conduct of Catholic immigrants arriving in urban centers throughout the nation. Effectively, the “law and order” rhetoric sought to force control over the changing dynamics of the American population, a sentiment that would remain a recurring phenomenon in United States politics.

In the 1920s, Governor of Massachusetts, Calvin Coolidge, utilized “law and order” rhetoric in his attempt to halt the formation of labor unions, arguing it was a threat to the capitalist system. As with the previous two incarnations of “law and order” Coolidge was successful in slowing the social change that was upon his state, but ultimately he was unsuccessful in his rhetoric as the rights of unions to organize was recognized and guaranteed at the federal level by the National Labor Relations Act, signed in 1935. Coolidge’s usage of the term shifted it from the anti-immigrant background and forced the term in a more generalized anti-progression direction. It would not be until the presidential elections of 1968 that the phrase would take on its new racial undertones. The campaigns of Richard Nixon and George Wallace, the Alabama Governor running as an independent, both utilized the fear tactics incorporated into “law and order” rhetoric. In fact, Wallace utilized the framework so effectively that he ran the most successful independent candidate campaign in United States history,

again exemplifying the galvanizing power of the rhetoric. It is speculated that the general election would have been a much closer race had Wallace's running mate, not publicly and flippantly dismissed the dangers of nuclear war while simultaneously insisting nuclear disaster was inevitable at the height of the Cold War tensions, thereby alienating a base that was motivated by fears rooted in modernity (Rozsa, 2022). Since then Republican campaigns have often incorporated similar fear tactics into their campaign rhetoric. In the 1980s Republican strategist, Lee Atwater deconstructed the strategy in remarkably blunt terms:

You start out in 1954 by "Nigger, Nigger, Nigger." By 1968 you can't "Nigger" - that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like, uh, forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff, and you're getting so abstract. Now, you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites ... (If) it is getting that abstract and that coded, we're doing away with the racial problem one way or another. . . . "We want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "Nigger, Nigger, Nigger".

(Zwiers, 2019)

While arguments against forced busing or focusing on State's rights on their surface appear to be a matter of difference of opinion, they are deeply rooted in racial issues. Forced busing, for example, refers to a method of integration where black students from poorer districts were bused in every day to attend school in wealthier white districts (Hannah-Jones, 2019). Similarly, state's rights almost always come down to state-level legislatures fighting against federal legislation that would encourage integration,

increase tax spending for minority or struggling families, or protect equal access to voting, however, “state’s rights” has often been a guise for the right to localized bigotry (Brownstein, 2022). The [state’s] “rights revolution” was borne in the 1960s, but paid homage to the Civil War (Brownstein, 2022). As part of the effort to ensure national civil rights, the federal government needed to be able to ensure rights nationally. As such Congress and various court rulings “overturned state bans on interracial marriage; access to contraception and abortion; set a nationwide floor of voting rights; dismantled state-sponsored segregation; and barred discrimination on the basis of race, gender and, more recently, sexual orientation” (Brownstein, 2022). These overturnings were never popular and in recent decades Republicans have sought to regain local control and away from “national authority.” Consider again, *Shelby County [Ala.] v. Holder*, which also claimed to be an issue of state’s rights, which it is if one considers nationwide protections of minority rights to be a federal overreach.

In an effort to shift the conversation but continue to make the same racially motivated arguments, an association is made between seemingly benign terminology and racial imagery. This can be seen in the 1968 election when a proud Wallace supporter told a journalist, in less polished terms “Y’all know about law and order. It’s spelled ni-g-g-e-rs” (Zwiers, 2019). It would seem that the constituents that want to recognize the connection have no problem doing so, and those who choose to ignore the implications are given a way out by this shift in strategy. Consider the “Willie Horton” campaign ad in the 1988 election - although the research did indicate that the campaign had lost its rhetorical potency once the racist undertones were exposed, George H. Bush did go on to not only win the election but to win by a significant margin (O’Donnell, 2020). The Republican party is not an innately racist or anti-progressive institution,

however, it is undeniable that successful Republican campaigns have populist undertones, which the “law and order” rhetoric exemplifies.

### **1.2.3 Economic Populism**

Since American right-wing populism has a tendency to express itself in racist or anti-immigrant rhetoric there is a tendency on the left to portray all right-wing populism as purposefully and solely racist, which is inaccurate. Some studies suggest that loss of status and racist sentiment were in fact the primary motivator of Trump’s 2016 victory, and that economic factors were minute in significance (Chokshi, 2018). Loss of status is of course a significant political motivator, and very much in line with the continued trend of “law and order” rhetoric, but to suggest that economic factors are insignificant is unwise and inaccurate.

Patenaude argues that the current populist expression is not a reemergence of the reactionary phenomena, but rather that right-wing populist movements in the United States have been present in the political arena since Nixon’s election in 1968 (2019). He continues that while the original impetus for the movement was reactionism against the civil rights movement, American right-wing populism has been building in anger and perceived insults over the past half-century. This thesis is in itself not unusual as the 1968 campaign is understood to be the inception point of modern American populism and even Trump’s campaign claimed that his 2016 RNC nomination speech would be heavily influenced by Nixon’s 48 years prior (Patenaude, 2019). Where Patenaude’s proposal differs is in the impetus for populist reactionism. While he concedes that populist movements are colored by their racist and anti-immigrant sentiments he argues that the root of the political frustration is economic insecurity. When racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric is voiced it is a secondary outcome of the initial and primary

concern of financial security that is perceived as not being received and met by the political elites.

By contrast, racial resentment is linked primarily to policy attitudes. Harboring racial resentment as a result of policy preferences does not necessarily imply that someone is racist, only that he or she harbors prejudices over perceived economic slights and disadvantages.

(Patenaude, 2019)

As argued by Mudde, populism is a “thin ideology” making it quite chameleonic in its manifestations, causes, and goals (2004). So while American right-wing populism may have roots in economic insecurity, it has over the past number of decades bled into any number of other social issues. Grattan writes about the increasing association of right-wing populism to “white social democracy” as a rhetorical reactionary mechanism to exclude emerging social groups from the reinforced in-group (Grattan, 2014). This notion is tied to an increased anti-globalist sentiment, as is described by Fisher and Taub:

Since the 1960s, populism has been attached to the idea of ethno-nationalism and portrayed as the last defense against globalism, and has been steadily progressing from a small, tepid movement unable to gain ground electorally, to a movement that is capable of “upending the politics of a country.”

(Fisher, 2017)

The destructive power and electoral significance of these perceived wrongs and social injustices at the hands of the globalized system are becoming increasingly visible, and destructive to the democratic system.

Patenaude is among those who argue that rising populism is the unsurprising counter response (or even outright rejection) to globalization. “Globalists were so obsessed with the idea of “total integration” that they did not observe a lack of enthusiasm among ordinary people for globalist policies” (Patenaude, 2019). Rico and Anduiza’s work underscores this conclusion, wherein they found that three factors are significant to vulnerability towards populist attitudes, (1) personal vulnerability, (2) objective personal economic decline, and (3) sociotropic perceptions, and how the increasingly globalized economy inadvertently encourages populist thinking (2019). For example in regards to American populism, the first criterion is exemplified by the increased feelings of vulnerability induced by economic anxiety wherein “(“competition over scarce resources”) has contributed to racial resentments, such as when whites lost ground during the Great Recession” (Rico, 2019). Anduiza and Rico’s second factor is rooted in the anxieties of deprivation of lifestyle and livelihood, wherein the concern is related to “reduction in basic goods and services and denial of access to public assistance” (2019). Finally, sociotropic perceptions are perceptions of the health and stability of the economy overall. Sociotropic voting is based entirely on perceptions rather than personal realities, wherein pocketbook voting is based on personal finances and economic struggles, sociotropic voting is interested in the tone of the discourse surrounding economic health. Consider the following findings from Kinder and Kiewiet.

Whether voters were preoccupied in their personal lives with rising prices or with unemployment had no effect on their votes for Congress .... [P]ersonal economic grievances played at best a minor role in accounting for patterns of stability and change in congressional voting over time .... The evidence was much stronger at each point for the sociotropic prediction.... [V]oters’

judgments of recent trends in general business conditions, their ratings of the incumbent administration's handling of economic matters, their evaluation of which party was equipped or more inclined to solve national economic problems, all contributed to their ... political predispositions. Political preferences thus seem to be shaped by citizens' conceptions of national economic conditions, not by the economic circumstances of their personal lives.

(Kinder, 1981, p. 153–154)

What matters most in personal decision-making is not that which voters can actually independently verify (i.e. their personal financial circumstances) but rather what they believe to be the overall situation. This broad conception of the economic environment is easily manipulated by populist rhetoric, which is concerning given how important this factor is in making voters feel confident and safe in their national economy. This underlines the difficulty of populist trends: the sentiment does not need to be based on objective reality to be persuasive or wildly significant (this is also true for the loss of status argument, wherein the perception of loss is more significant than an actual loss of status). The actual health of the economy is not as significant as the perception of economic health. As U.S politics begins to enter an era of post-truthism and “alternative facts” encouraging confidence in the government and the state of the economy has become a carnival mirror maze: while there is an objective reality based on truth, the perception of alternative facts is leading to chaos and confusion. Moustafa Bayoumi wrote that the post-truth era of politics began with the W. Bush administration and the Iraq war, wherein “truth is, at best, an inconvenience,” and the “apparatus of lying became institutionalized” (Bayoumi, 2023). While economic perceptions and not racist sentiment are at the root of American populism, the significance is merely the



perception of insecurity or deprivation rather than any truth to the lost status and security.

### ***1.3 Paul Taggart's Model of Populism***

Paul Taggart's model of populism identifies common features of populist movements, having published a number of books and articles focusing on the phenomena and set out criteria for identifying these movements. He suggests that successfully identifying these features will allow the development of a universally applicable approach to populism. He has distilled these criteria into five main identifiers; hostility to representative politics, heartland, no core values, crisis, and self-limiting nature (2004). These criteria clearly and efficiently identify populist movements as they appear and as such will be utilized in this analysis of the RNC nomination acceptance speeches.

Taggart's first criterion to recognize populist phenomena is hostility to representative politics. The very composition of representative government encourages public participation, which is exploited by populist movements who hold that the solution to their ailments is not more representative government but a "better" government. This is often mischaracterized as calls for more "vertical" access from the general public to the governing elites. Rather, the case being made is for a stronger connection between the masses to elites "but this can be through processes of direct democracy as much as through processes of representative politics" (2004). The hostility of populist movements towards representative government is not with representation itself but rather the format of representation, which is perceived as failing to address their concerns.

The next criterion identified is the idea of the heartland, which serves as an idealized scene drawn up from the past. The term heartland is used because the phenomenon has more to do with sentiment rather than the reality of a rhetorical situation, wherein imprecision is not only a quality but a benefit. The imprecision means that “different positions can implicitly conjure up heartlands that differ from each other but where the difference can be ascribed to the nature of heartlands rather than to the different starting positions of the advocates” (2004). The ambiguity is an asset because it subtly moderates differences in the ideology of the constituency, which might otherwise grow into division, which “suits populists who portray themselves as monolithic and untainted by internal conflict” (Taggart, 2004). Since this idealized, uncomplicated, non-political realm is imagined, it is not burdened by the realities of life by existing in the collective imagination of the populist movement, allowing it to serve as a mirage of a perfect society.

The third criterion is that in spite of the rhetorical romanticism of the heartland, the movement lacks the core values to structure it, meaning there are no values of a populist movement that are consistent throughout the phenomena.

Populists have been revolutionary, reactionary, left-wing, right-wing, authoritarian and libertarian ... (which) is not indicative of the emptiness of populism as a concept but it does reveal the empty heart of populism that gives it both weakness and potential ubiquity.

(Taggart, 2004)

Taggart argues that the lack of concrete values stems from the concept of the heartland, and is by design rather than by accident, allowing for populism to develop as a highly chameleonic phenomenon. While this benefits populist movements, it has made

formally identifying and studying them difficult. As the heartland is the motivating factor populist movements feel unique from one another. The lack of core values that tie various movements together means that populist movements are identified by their impulses and reactions rather than their motivating heartlands. Regardless of its form, at its core, its belief system remains fluid and changing to motivate populist impulses.

For his fourth criterion, Taggart identifies a sense of crisis. Populist movements are unable to garner the popular momentum required to motivate a movement in stable and calm political conditions, rather they need to utilize the energy of a sense of crisis to build up their cause. Often this sense of crisis is borne out of a discomfort with change or a “sense of moral decay, but it always spills over into a critique of politics and into the sense that politics as usual cannot deal with the unusual conditions of crisis” (Taggart, 2004). The ambiguity or shrouded sense of crisis is used to the benefit of the populists, who latch on to the feeling in order to claim the urgency of response as their message. The ambiguity of the message also makes it difficult to counter it rhetorically since it becomes an argument about the feelings and perceptions of the populist constituents.

As his final criterion, Taggart identifies the self-limiting nature of populist parties. Populist movements’ success is often based on single-issue politics borne out of a sense of immediate crisis, which is problematic once the concern is addressed and a solution is institutionalized. Taggart discusses that the appeal of populists is their unorthodox methods and ideas, which lose their flair once institutionalized into the political norms (2004). Populists often form movements rather than parties, however, movements are much more difficult to institutionalize, thereby limiting the life expectancy of such populist phenomena. Additionally, populist movements often gain

momentum through a charismatic leader. While this is effective in the short term, this style of personalized leadership has no longevity, particularly in regard to succession. Without the ability to transfer this populist following to new leaders, populist movements are often bound to the public life of their self-assigned leader.

## 2 Research Goals

*The purpose of this research is to track the intensification of populist rhetoric in the Republican presidential candidate speeches in correlation to the shrinking Republican primary demographics. Furthermore, it seeks to identify whether a populist trajectory exists in the past six decades and to determine whether or not such a trajectory is intensifying.* Additionally, should such a trajectory be identified, this research seeks to determine whether or not the intensification of populist rhetoric is successfully persuading the electorate. If not, one could determine that the rhetoric is only successful in galvanizing its limited base who then weaponize the electoral system to their benefit rather than persuading a sufficient portion of the electorate. In the event that such a trajectory does exist, it would be a valuable predictive tool for future presidential elections.

This research operates under the assumption that as the key demographic of the Republicans began to shrink the focus of the party's rhetoric shifted away from seeking to persuade the general electorate, and instead focused on encouraging populist anger in their core base regarding their slipping significance in the national discourse. Due to gerrymandering, the electoral college, and the stripping of the Voting Rights Act of its enforcement capacities, the portion of the electorate that needs to be galvanized in order

to win elections is dramatically reduced to strategic effect. That being said, the Republican presidential victories since 2004 have all been marked by a loss of the popular vote, owing their victories to the electoral college. This means that even when operating with the modified electorate, the electorate continues to drift away from the Republican interests and priorities. This is the impetus for the increasing intensity of the populist rhetoric in the Republican talking points: in spite of their best efforts to remold the electorate to their interests, rather than reworking their priorities to the interests of the electorate, the shift away from them is growing more expansively.

The data pool is comprised of the RNC nomination speeches from 1968 to the present. This is on the basis that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was a pivotal shift in the U.S. electorate, with 1968 being the first election with the Act in effect. Other economic and cultural factors also played into the progressive depletion of the Republican voting base, however, for the purposes of this research the ratification of the Voting Rights Act is delineated as the beginning of the period of interest. Furthermore, the 1968 election also marked the introduction of the “law and order” rhetoric into the national political vernacular. Since the term is associated with populist movements this also underscores the timeframe of interest.

The trajectory of the RNC nominee acceptance speeches from 1968 to 2020 will be analyzed utilizing Paul Taggart’s model of populism as an index. The RNC speeches are sampled for the research because the nomination acceptance speeches, for both parties, mark the start of the general election and the speeches set the tone for each parties’ talking points, acting as a rhetorical baseline. The primary elections, where candidates compete for their party’s nomination, serve as a collective brainstorming as various candidates offer various positions and priorities. By the time the party

nominations have been announced the priorities of each party have been workshopped and nicely ironed out. For this reason, the 14 RNC nomination acceptance speeches will serve well as a snapshot of the RNC perspectives of each election cycle.

Additionally, this research will take into consideration the electoral and popular vote results of each election in conjunction with the speeches' populist ratings. The results of the popular vote of each election will offer a clear empirical result of the general population's approval of the rhetoric. Additionally, this can be compared to the electoral college results to determine to what degree the electoral college is still representing the general population's wishes and to what degree the electoral college is being weaponized as a means of populist control of a shrinking faction.

### **3 Methodological Section**

In order to study the potential correlation between the presidential nomination acceptance speeches and the presence of populist rhetoric over time each of the 14 RNC nomination acceptance speeches given between 1968 and 2020 will be analyzed in accordance with an index based on Taggat's five criteria model of populism. Taggat's five markers of populism have been defined in the operational index which is included below. The chart also includes manners in which these criteria would materialize in a speech.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Materialization</b>
<b>Hostility to Representative Politics (HTRP)</b>	<p>Hostility is with the format of representation, which is perceived as failing to address their concerns</p> <p>Not with representation itself</p>	<p>Call for a stronger connection between the general public and the elites</p> <p>Focus on a need for “change”</p> <p>Accusations of government inaction/ incompetencies</p>
<b>Heartland (HL)</b>	<p>Affectionate remembering of the past</p> <p>Focused on sentiment rather than the realities of the past</p>	<p>Recalls scenes of an idealized past</p> <p>Imprecision used to its benefit</p> <p>Idealization of “real” America, when it was “respected”</p>
<b>Absent Core Values (ACV)</b>	<p>There are no populist values that are consist throughout the phenomena</p> <p>Identified by their impulses and reactions</p>	<p>Impulsive enthusiasm, ecstatic audience responses, and chants that interrupt the flow of the speeches</p> <p>Does not include planned and polite applause</p>
<b>Crisis (C)</b>	<p>Capitalizes upon a sense of crisis to build up their cause</p> <p>Unable to motivate a movement in stable and calm political conditions</p>	<p>Sense of discomfort with change or “moral decay”</p> <p>Criticism that “politics as usual” cannot manage the magnitude of the crisis</p> <p>Crisis in differentiated from general problems by the sense of urgency and dread</p>
<b>Self-Limiting Nature (SLN)</b>	<p>The focus on a crisis limit the movement to the resolution of the crisis</p> <p>Mobilization by a charismatic leader is limited by their term/ relevance</p>	<p>Usually single issue focus related to the crisis</p> <p>Charismatic leadership</p> <p>“Believe me,” and “only I can fix it” rhetoric</p>
Source: Taggat, 2004		

Using the Apple Numbers application, comparable to Microsoft Excel, the speeches will be separated into their individual sentences because this is a natural and convenient unit of study. Each sentence will receive a numerical rating from 0 to 5, depending on the number of criteria of populism met. By doing so each speech may receive a score based on the average sentence score, allowing for comparisons to be made amongst the various speeches as a whole on the basis of the rhetoric present. Should a trajectory of any kind exist in regard to populist rhetoric, these numerical values will allow for observation of these trends. Below is a sample index from Nixon’s 1968 RNC nomination acceptance speech.

Speaker, Year	Sentence No. 10	Sentence No. 11
Nixon, 1968	And he is a man who fully shares my conviction and yours, that after a period of forty years when power has gone from the cities and the states to the government in Washington, D.C., it's time to have power go back from Washington to the states and to the cities of this country all over America. (APPLAUSE)	We are going to win because at a time that America cries out for the unity that this Administration has destroyed, the Republican Party—after a spirited contest for its nomination for President and for Vice President— stands united before the nation tonight. (APPLAUSE)
HTRP	1	1
HL	1	0
AVC	1	1
C	1	1
SLN	0	0
<b>Index Score</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
Source: Peters, n.d.		

Sentence no. 10 receives a 4 score because it is hostile to Washington D.C. politics, demanding a change (HTRP) bringing power back to the people (HL). This misplaced



power over the past forty years is a crisis (C) that would be relieved if it were returned to the people (HL). The power cited is misplaced and stolen from the people (HL) and being misused by the government (HTRP). This statement is met with roaring applause (ACV). Sentence no. 11 receives a 3 score because it also alludes to the crisis (C) as “America cries out” for the unity and leadership that has been “destroyed” by the previous administration (HTRP). Again, the audience cheers enthusiastically (ACV).

Furthermore, in an effort to put these numerical results into more context and determine the efficacy of the populist rhetoric present, the average scores of each speech will be compared with the respective election’s popular vote and electoral vote. The popular vote will be the basis for determining the persuasive efficacy of the rhetoric upon the general electoral, also assuming that the general electorate is representative of the general population. The electoral vote will be included as well to show if the victorious candidate won based on merit. Should the electoral vote align with the popular vote the candidate won on their merit, however, if there are major differences between the electoral vote and the popular vote it can be assumed that the victory is due to the manipulation of the electoral system. Since there have been instances of elections wherein the victor won only on the basis of the electoral vote and not the popular vote, it is of interest to determine if a correlation exists between the degree of populist rhetoric present and the outweighed electoral success.

### ***3.1 Limitations***

The research is limited by its sample population, as the rhetorical tone of each election cycle is defined by the respective party’s presidential nominee, and thereby the respective candidates’ nomination acceptance speeches. Ideally, there would be multiple staple speeches that occur during the campaigns, that could be compared to one another.

Unfortunately, the nomination acceptance speech is one of the only stand-alone staple speech that all serious presidential candidates give, besides campaign announcements, campaign withdrawals, concession, and victory speeches. Furthermore, while there is at least one presidential debate between the party nominees, these are not comprised of pre-scripted speeches and are not rhetorically structured in a manner suitable to be included in this study. It is in the nature of a debate to challenge the ideals and assumptions of the opponent, making the rhetoric artifact much more combative. In the interest of this study, it is more appropriate to study the rhetoric of the national convention speeches which exist essentially in an echo chamber. The manner in which an idea is presented is different when the speaker knows it will be challenged, versus as they speak with a friendly audience.

While analyzing each election cycle's nomination acceptance speeches is a relatively small sample, the speeches do represent the beginning of the general election and set the tone for the campaign to come. While candidates workshopped their positions during the primaries, wherein numerous candidates compete for their party's nomination, by the time each party formally appoints their nominee in the national conventions, the candidates' rhetorical positions are mostly solidified. Furthermore, due to the broad audience that the party nominations attract, both in person and via broadcast and news coverage, the speeches cover a broad swath of subjects. Arguably the party nomination speeches are the most significant and representative speeches of the entire election cycle. Therefore, even though the sample is somewhat limited, each data artifact has tremendous rhetorical depth and represents the intended campaign strategy and tone.

### ***3.2 Ethical Considerations***

Due to the nature of the research there are no ethical risks in regard to research participants or such. That being said, given the tense nature that U.S. politics have taken on in recent decades it is relevant to note that the author is a registered Democrat. The author emphasizes that this research does not have a vendetta and does not seek to prove that Republicans are innately populist or more susceptible to populist rhetoric than Democrats, who have their own history of populist tendencies.

Rather, this research sets forward with the acknowledgment that populism is not an inherent personal characteristic or the negative behaviors associated therewith. Rather populism is a response to frustrations with the political system, as Liddiard writes: “populist mobilization by its nature represents deficiencies in representation that the mainstream parties have failed to address, to the point that a sizeable portion of the electorate has rejected the political system itself” (2019). Populism encompasses a sense of crisis because it is born of, and gains momentum from the sense of urgency and fear that crises produce. When writing about the economic roots of American right-wing populism Patenaude makes the following note regarding the intersection of racism and populism.

The influence of economic grievances on racial resentment among white supremacists does not suggest that white supremacists inherently support populism; it only illustrates how economic anxiety leads to changing perceptions with regards to numerous social issues.

(2019)

Racism and bigotry are not inherently interwoven with populism, and while some people or groups are more susceptible to populist ideologies than others, to seek refuge in a populist movement is reflective of the deep sense of desperation they are experiencing rather than an innate character flaw. As most people can attest to, high-stress situations do not always result in the clearest or most rational thinking and decision-making, and populism is a casebook example thereof.

Furthermore, given the rhetorical divide that is currently building within the United States, it is important to continue to seek to bridge the divides that exist between those persuaded by right-wing populism and those who they hold accountable and who are genuinely failing at understanding and soothing the concerns of the first group. A first step in this process is by making efforts to understand the rhetorical goals of Republican voters, the rhetorical structuring of Republican candidates, and identify what is deemed to be persuasive to their constituency.

## **4 Data Findings**

Each of the 14 RNC nomination acceptance speeches were listened to and analyzed three times to ensure accuracy and equal judging. Each sentence received a score between 0-5 as the Index score. The Index score is comprised of five sub-scores, each category representing Paul Taggart's five criteria of populism: Hostility to Representative Politics (HTRP), Heartland (HL), Crisis (C), Self-Limiting Nature (SLN), and Absent Core Values (ACV). Each of these categories' scores is comprised of the total counts of each criterion in the speech, averaged. Table 1 shows the populist score of each respective category for each respective speech. For ease of reading

successful campaigns are listed in green and unsuccessful campaigns are listed in yellow, as noted in the third column, S/U.

Year	Name	S/U	HTRP	HL	C	SLN	ACV	INDEX SCORE		Difference
<i>Averages</i>			<i>0.048</i>	<i>0.090</i>	<i>0.168</i>	<i>0.028</i>	<i>0.319</i>	<b>0.682</b>		
<b>1968</b>	<b>Nixon</b>	S	0.096	0.264	0.460	0.054	0.161	<b>1.034</b>	-	
<b>1972</b>	<b>Nixon</b>	S	0.029	0.096	0.216	0.019	0.274	<b>0.639</b>	↓	0.395
<b>1976</b>	<b>Ford</b>	U	0.102	0.028	0.023	0.000	0.227	<b>0.385</b>	↓	0.254
<b>1980</b>	<b>Reagan</b>	S	0.039	0.123	0.162	0.025	0.250	<b>0.598</b>	↑	-0.213
<b>1984</b>	<b>Reagan</b>	S	0.054	0.088	0.047	0.000	0.404	<b>0.597</b>	↓	0.001
<b>1988</b>	<b>Bush Sr.</b>	S	0.010	0.030	0.003	0.020	0.227	<b>0.389</b>	↓	0.208
<b>1992</b>	<b>Bush Sr.</b>	U	0.131	0.067	0.073	0.021	0.278	<b>0.572</b>	↑	-0.183
<b>1996</b>	<b>Dole</b>	U	0.018	0.096	0.177	0.015	0.318	<b>0.625</b>	↑	-0.053
<b>2000</b>	<b>W. Bush</b>	S	0.046	0.114	0.086	0.011	0.407	<b>0.664</b>	↓	-0.040
<b>2004</b>	<b>W. Bush</b>	S	0.007	0.098	0.109	0.014	0.406	<b>0.634</b>	↓	0.030
<b>2008</b>	<b>McCain</b>	U	0.013	0.019	0.022	0.000	0.462	<b>0.516</b>	↓	0.118
<b>2012</b>	<b>Romney</b>	U	0.000	0.045	0.045	0.004	0.317	<b>0.426</b>	↑	0.090
<b>2016</b>	<b>Trump</b>	S	0.078	0.073	0.578	0.156	0.411	<b>1.570</b>	↑	-1.144
<b>2020</b>	<b>Trump</b>	U	0.053	0.121	0.348	0.047	0.330	<b>0.898</b>	↓	0.672

Author, Text Analysis

This data can also be understood by considering the speakers' populism score as separate from the audiences' populist score. The ACV subcategory is understood to be the audiences' response to the speech. While a speech could be meeting all other criteria of HTRP, HL, C, and SLN, the data shows that ACV clearly makes up the most sizable component of the majority of Index scores, and is the largest overall value of the averages. While a concrete definition of populism in academia is not yet agreed upon, there is a consensus that the public, or the populous, is deeply significant to populism, particularly if they are being swept with a political concept or idea. Therefore it was

deemed significant to have a value to measure the audience in comparison to the speaker. For this reason, speaker scores are separated from the audience's response.

Speaker scores are represented by the sums of HTRP, HL, C, and SLN, and ACV

represents the audiences' score.

Year	Name	S/U	HTRP	HL	C	SLN	SPEAKER SCORE	ACV	INDEX SCORE	
<i>Averages</i>			<i>0.048</i>	<i>0.090</i>	<i>0.168</i>	<i>0.028</i>	<i>0.334</i>	<i>0.319</i>	<b>0.682</b>	
<b>2016</b>	<b>Trump</b>	S	0.078	0.073	0.578	0.156	0.884	0.411	<b>1.570</b>	↑
<b>1968</b>	<b>Nixon</b>	S	0.096	0.264	0.460	0.054	0.874	0.161	<b>1.034</b>	-
<b>2020</b>	<b>Trump</b>	U	0.053	0.121	0.348	0.047	0.568	0.330	<b>0.898</b>	↓
<b>2000</b>	<b>W. Bush</b>	S	0.046	0.114	0.086	0.011	0.257	0.407	<b>0.664</b>	↓
<b>1972</b>	<b>Nixon</b>	S	0.029	0.096	0.216	0.019	0.361	0.274	<b>0.639</b>	↓
<b>2004</b>	<b>W. Bush</b>	S	0.007	0.098	0.109	0.014	0.228	0.406	<b>0.634</b>	↓
<b>1996</b>	<b>Dole</b>	U	0.018	0.096	0.177	0.015	0.306	0.318	<b>0.625</b>	↑
<b>1980</b>	<b>Reagan</b>	S	0.039	0.123	0.162	0.025	0.348	0.250	<b>0.598</b>	↑
<b>1984</b>	<b>Reagan</b>	S	0.054	0.088	0.047	0.000	0.189	0.404	<b>0.597</b>	↓
<b>1992</b>	<b>Bush Sr.</b>	U	0.131	0.067	0.073	0.021	0.294	0.278	<b>0.572</b>	↑
<b>2008</b>	<b>McCain</b>	U	0.013	0.019	0.022	0.000	0.054	0.462	<b>0.516</b>	↓
<b>2012</b>	<b>Romney</b>	U	0.000	0.045	0.045	0.004	0.094	0.317	<b>0.426</b>	↑
<b>1988</b>	<b>Bush Sr.</b>	S	0.010	0.030	0.003	0.020	0.063	0.227	<b>0.389</b>	↓
<b>1976</b>	<b>Ford</b>	U	0.102	0.028	0.023	0.000	0.153	0.227	<b>0.385</b>	↓
Author, Text Analysis										

Finally, Table 3 shows the popular vote versus the electoral vote in each of the respective elections. It is again noted that while the popular vote informs the electoral vote the two are not equally correlated and a less than 50% popular vote result can still result in a higher than 50% electoral vote result. For this reason, successful and

unsuccessful campaigns are still highlighted in green and yellow respectively for ease of reading.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>S/U</b>	<b>Electoral Vote</b>	<b>Popular Vote</b>	<b>Difference</b>
1968	Nixon	S	0.559	0.434	0.125
1972	Nixon	S	0.967	0.607	0.36
1976	Ford	U	0.446	0.480	-0.034
1980	Reagan	S	0.909	0.507	0.402
1984	Reagan	S	0.976	0.588	0.388
1988	Bush Sr.	S	0.792	0.534	0.258
1992	Bush Sr.	U	0.312	0.374	-0.062
1996	Dole	U	0.296	0.407	-0.111
2000	W. Bush	S	0.504	0.479	0.025
2004	W. Bush	S	0.532	0.507	0.025
2008	McCain	U	0.322	0.457	-0.135
2012	Romney	U	0.383	0.472	-0.089
2016	Trump	S	0.599	0.462	0.137
2020	Trump	U	0.431	0.469	-0.038
Peters, n.d.					

#### **4.1 Trends and Patterns**

In the following section the data will be reviewed in regards to successful versus unsuccessful campaigns (Tables 4 and 5), speaker populism score (Table 6), Audience populism score (Table 7), as well as trends and deviations among the two-time nominees (Table 8) so as to better understand the data set collected.

##### **4.1.1 Successful vs Unsuccessful Campaigns**

When reviewing the difference between the successful and unsuccessful campaign variable averages, the successful campaigns' overall index is markedly higher

than the unsuccessful campaigns, 0.766 to 0.570 respectively. The difference appears to lay within the speakers' scores as the difference in audience scores is 0.004, which is insubstantial. Successful speakers have on average a higher score of 0.235 compared to unsuccessful speakers. This increase is made up of the HL, C, and SLN scores which are higher than the unsuccessful counterparts. Interestingly, unsuccessful campaigns have higher HTRP politics averages, with the two highest HTRP scores from Ford (1976) and Bush Sr. (1992) represented. The difference in the HTRP scores between successful and unsuccessful campaigns is 0.008, which is negligible. Overall, successful campaigns do have higher Index scores on average, however, the difference is due to the speakers themselves rather than an increase in audience support or excitement.

**Table 4: Successful Campaigns**

Year	Name	S/U	INDEX SCORE	HTRP	HL	C	SLN		SPEAKER AVERAGE	ACV	DIFFERENCE
<i>Averages</i>			<b>0.766</b>	<b>0.045</b>	<b>0.111</b>	<b>0.207</b>	<b>0.037</b>		<b>0.921</b>	<b>0.318</b>	<b>0.604</b>
1968	Nixon	S	1.034	0.096	0.264	0.460	0.054	-	1.395	0.161	1.234
1972	Nixon	S	0.639	0.029	0.096	0.216	0.019	↓	0.764	0.274	0.490
1980	Reagan	S	0.598	0.039	0.123	0.162	0.025	↑	0.760	0.250	0.510
1984	Reagan	S	0.597	0.054	0.088	0.047	0.000	↓	0.738	0.404	0.334
1988	Bush Sr.	S	0.389	0.010	0.030	0.003	0.020	↓	0.429	0.227	0.202
2000	W. Bush	S	0.664	0.046	0.114	0.086	0.011	↓	0.825	0.407	0.418
2004	W. Bush	S	0.634	0.007	0.098	0.109	0.014	↓	0.739	0.406	0.333
2016	Trump	S	1.570	0.078	0.073	0.578	0.156	↑	1.721	0.411	1.309
Author, Text Analysis											

**Table 5: Unsuccessful Campaigns**

Year	Name	S/U	INDEX SCORE	HTRP	HL	C	SLN		SPEAKER AVERAGE	ACV	DIFFERENCE
<i>Averages</i>			<b>0.570</b>	<b>0.053</b>	<b>0.063</b>	<b>0.115</b>	<b>0.015</b>		<b>0.686</b>	<b>0.322</b>	<b>0.364</b>
1976	Ford	U	0.385	0.102	0.028	0.023	0.000	↓	0.516	0.227	0.288
1992	Bush Sr.	U	0.572	0.131	0.067	0.073	0.021	↑	0.771	0.278	0.492
1996	Dole	U	0.625	0.018	0.096	0.177	0.015	↑	0.739	0.318	0.420



2008	McCain	U	0.516	0.013	0.019	0.022	0.000	↓	0.548	0.462	0.087
2012	Romney	U	0.426	0.000	0.045	0.045	0.004	↑	0.472	0.317	0.155
2020	Trump	U	0.898	0.053	0.121	0.348	0.047	↓	1.072	0.330	0.742
Author, Text Analysis											

#### 4.1.2 Speaker vs Audience Populist Scale

This distinction between speaker and audience is important because the overall Index score can be skewed according to any one of the values, which most often is the ACV score. For example, there are some interesting data points in Table 6, which shows the elections' scores sorted from most populist to least populist. While the leading scores are unsurprising, notably that Trump's 2016 and Nixon's 1968 speeches hold the highest populist scores respectively, more interestingly are the speeches that appear in the lower values, particularly McCain's 2008 speech which receives a 0.5 total rating. While this score is below the overall Index average it is a markedly high score when considering that McCain's Speaker score is 0.05, meaning that the audience's response is responsible for a tenfold increase in the overall rating.

When considering Table 7, wherein the speeches are sorted according to audience engagement, most of the speeches that occurred before 1992 make up the bottom half of the scale (i.e. less populist audience score), with the exception of Reagan's 1984 speech. In fact, if the data is broken into halves represented by 1968-1992 and 1996-2020, the average ACV scores differ by 0.119, with the 1968-1992 audiences scoring an average of 0.26, and the 1996-2020 audience scoring 0.379. These differences are also not associated with the electability of the candidate, as previously noted the successful vs unsuccessful ACV scores are nearly identical. It should also be noted that the 1968-1992 group is comprised of five wins and two losses, while the 1996-2020 group is made up of three wins and four losses. When considering the

speaker score distribution there is not a similar 1968-1992 vs 1996-2020 trend. The difference between the first seven scores and the second seven scores is 0.015, with the 1968-1992 group receiving an average of 0.326 and the 1996-2020 group receiving 0.341. The top seven scores are four wins and three losses, which is also true for the bottom seven scores.

<b>Table 6: Sorted According to Speaker</b>					<b>Table 7: Sorted According to Audience</b>				
Year	Name	S/U	SPEAKER SCORE	ACV	Year	Name	S/U	ACV	SPEAKER SCORE
<i>Averages</i>			<b>0.334</b>	<b>0.319</b>	<i>Averages</i>			<b>0.319</b>	<b>0.334</b>
2016	Trump	S	0.884	0.411	2008	McCain	U	0.462	0.054
1968	Nixon	S	0.874	0.161	2016	Trump	S	0.411	0.884
2020	Trump	U	0.568	0.330	2000	W. Bush	S	0.407	0.257
1972	Nixon	S	0.361	0.274	2004	W. Bush	S	0.406	0.228
1980	Reagan	S	0.348	0.250	1984	Reagan	S	0.404	0.189
1996	Dole	U	0.306	0.318	2020	Trump	U	0.330	0.568
1992	Bush Sr.	U	0.294	0.278	1996	Dole	U	0.318	0.306
2000	W. Bush	S	0.257	0.407	2012	Romney	U	0.317	0.094
2004	W. Bush	S	0.228	0.406	1992	Bush Sr.	U	0.278	0.294
1984	Reagan	S	0.189	0.404	1972	Nixon	S	0.274	0.361
1976	Ford	U	0.153	0.227	1980	Reagan	S	0.250	0.348
2012	Romney	U	0.094	0.317	1976	Ford	U	0.227	0.153
1988	Bush Sr.	S	0.063	0.227	1988	Bush Sr.	S	0.227	0.063
2008	McCain	U	0.054	0.462	1968	Nixon	S	0.161	0.874
Author, Text Analysis					Author, Text Analysis				

#### 4.1.2.1 Two-Time Candidates

Candidates who were the RNC party nominee more than once also offer an interesting data set. All two-time candidates ran their second election as incumbents

meaning they had a record of proof, either of their successes or ongoing projects to defend and campaign on.

<b>Table 8: Two-Time Nominees</b>									
<b>Year</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>S/U</b>	<b>HTRP</b>	<b>HL</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>SLN</b>	<b>SPEAKER AVERAGE</b>	<b>ACV</b>	<b>INDEX SCORE</b>
<i>TOTAL DATA SET AVERAGES</i>			<i>0.048</i>	<i>0.090</i>	<i>0.168</i>	<i>0.028</i>	<i>0.334</i>	<i>0.319</i>	<i><b>0.682</b></i>
<i>Averages</i>			<i>0.054</i>	<i>0.107</i>	<i>0.208</i>	<i>0.037</i>	<i>0.407</i>	<i>0.315</i>	<i><b>0.760</b></i>
<b>1968</b>	<b>Nixon</b>	S	0.096	0.264	0.460	0.054	0.874	0.161	<b>1.034</b>
<b>1972</b>	<b>Nixon</b>	S	0.029	0.096	0.216	0.019	0.361	0.274	<b>0.639</b>
<b>1980</b>	<b>Reagan</b>	S	0.039	0.123	0.162	0.025	0.348	0.250	<b>0.598</b>
<b>1984</b>	<b>Reagan</b>	S	0.054	0.088	0.047	0.000	0.189	0.404	<b>0.597</b>
<b>1988</b>	<b>Bush Sr.</b>	S	0.010	0.030	0.003	0.020	0.063	0.227	<b>0.389</b>
<b>1992</b>	<b>Bush Sr.</b>	U	0.131	0.067	0.073	0.021	0.294	0.278	<b>0.572</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>W. Bush</b>	S	0.046	0.114	0.086	0.011	0.257	0.407	<b>0.664</b>
<b>2004</b>	<b>W. Bush</b>	S	0.007	0.098	0.109	0.014	0.228	0.406	<b>0.634</b>
<b>2016</b>	<b>Trump</b>	S	0.078	0.073	0.578	0.156	0.884	0.411	<b>1.570</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>Trump</b>	U	0.053	0.121	0.348	0.047	0.568	0.330	<b>0.898</b>
Author, Text Analysis									

Table 8 shows all scores of each two-time candidates' speeches, wherein the average of this specific data set is higher in every speaker category than the overall Index averages. The overall ACV average is higher than the two-time candidates' ACV average but the difference of 0.004 is quite minute. The average index score of the two-time candidates is 0.078 higher than the overall Index score for the entire data set.

As shown in Table 9, for the most part, two-time candidates are less populist in their second speech than their first, noting that negative scores indicate that the second year variable was higher than the first. Interestingly, this decrease in overall populist score also includes that the average ACV score increases with the second election,

meaning the audience is more populist than during the initial election. Interestingly, all three candidates who won their reelection decreased in populist values in their second RNC nomination acceptance speech. The Index scores of Nixon, Reagan, and W. Bush all decreased, and more significantly, their speaker scores all dropped as well.

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Average Score</b>	<b>Yr 1 Score</b>	<b>Yr 2 Score</b>	<b>Score Change</b>	<b>HTRP Change</b>	<b>HL Change</b>	<b>C Change</b>	<b>SLN Change</b>	<b>Speaker Change</b>	<b>ACV Change</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>0.760</b>	<b>0.851</b>	<b>0.668</b>	<b>0.183</b>	<b>-0.001</b>	<b>0.027</b>	<b>0.099</b>	<b>0.033</b>	<b>0.158</b>	<b>-0.047</b>
<b>Nixon</b>	<i>0.837</i>	<i>1.034</i>	<i>0.639</i>	<i>0.395</i>	0.067	0.173	0.244	0.035	0.519	-0.113
<b>Reagan</b>	<i>0.598</i>	<i>0.598</i>	<i>0.597</i>	<i>0.001</i>	-0.015	0.035	0.115	0.025	0.160	-0.154
<b>Bush Sr.</b>	<i>0.481</i>	<i>0.389</i>	<i>0.572</i>	<i>-0.183</i>	-0.121	-0.043	-0.070	-0.001	-0.235	-0.051
<b>W. Bush</b>	<i>0.649</i>	<i>0.664</i>	<i>0.634</i>	<i>0.030</i>	0.039	0.016	-0.023	-0.003	0.029	0.001
<b>Trump</b>	<i>1.234</i>	<i>1.570</i>	<i>0.898</i>	<i>0.672</i>	0.025	-0.048	0.230	0.109	0.316	0.081
Author, Text Analysis										

Otherwise, the two-time candidates' change in Index score all fall into one of three groups: decreased, consistent, or increased. Trump has the most dramatic decrease in populist scores followed by Nixon. Trump's unsuccessful second campaign shows a striking 0.316 change in speaker score as well as a 0.081 ACV change, both becoming less populist. (It is noted that Trump's 2020 election speech occurred during Covid-19 health restrictions so the speech occurred outdoors with a markedly smaller audience than the 2016 speech.) Nixon's second speaker score is lower by 0.519 with an audience increase of 0.113. Nixon won the 1972 election by one of the highest margins of the data set.

Reagan and W. Bush show almost no change between their two elections, with a 0.001 and 0.030 difference in overall score respectively. Reagan's second speech is interesting because while he is 0.16 less populist his audience is 0.154 more populist than the first audience, the highest ACV increase in the data set. W. Bush is much more

consistent between his two speeches where his second speaker score is 0.029 less and his audience is also 0.001 decreased. Both Reagan and W. Bush won their reelections, though Regan by much more significant popular and electoral margins.

Finally, Bush Sr. has the lowest overall average between his two speeches, 0.481, while also being the only candidate to increase in overall populism in his second speech, showing a 0.183 increase. Both his speaker score and his audience increase in populism, though notably not in tandem with each other, where Bush Sr. earned a 0.235 increase and his audience a 0.051 increase. Bush Sr.'s second election campaign resulted in both the lowest popular and electoral vote results for two-time candidates, 37% and 31% respectively.

## **5 Discussion**

The following section will further delve into the research data, with a focus on patterns that occur in the various criteria specifically identified in Paul Taggat's model of populism, behavioral shifts that have occurred over the period of interest, trends that appear in the speeches of two-time candidates in comparison with themselves, as well as analyzing anomalies that appear in the 1984, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2020 elections.

Please note that in this discussion speeches are cited with the assigned paragraph or line number from the Speech Index Excel document included in the supplements. All speeches are sourced from the American Presidency Project as compiled and managed by the University of Santa Barbara. All audio recordings are sourced from C-SPAN. Finally, Trump's 2016 and 2020 speeches required further sources due to his tendency to

go off script, which was not always reflected in the versions compiled by the American Presidency Project.

### ***5.1 Criteria-specific Patterns***

Findings clearly show speeches that are overall more populist are associated with successful election campaigns (see Table 2), however, there does not appear to be any criteria-specific pattern that indicates electability. Some criteria do appear less than others, for example, SLN appears surprisingly rare, receiving the overall lowest average score of 0.028. While bravado and confidence are important when running for any elected office, most certainly for the presidency, most candidates avoid an “only I can fix it” rhetoric. Many walk the line with “together we can” or “my administration will” statements, language that is actually included in all fourteen speeches in some form or another, wherein they do continue to acknowledge that other people are crucial to any success that they as president will be able to deliver. Those with high SLN criteria simply include “only I can fix it” phrasing along with the more normalized “together we can” rhetoric. Arguably, for any campaign, or populist movement, to be successful the intended audience must be instilled with a sense of agency so that they are encouraged to take the desired action. For this reason, candidates that do have higher SLN scores must also include a focus on the audience (i.e. The People) and encourage their action to the benefit of the campaign or movement.

ACV appears to be the most significant variable of the group as it differentiates the audience from the speaker. Considering the overall averages, ACV receives a 0.319, almost double the score of the next highest score being 0.168 for C; other scores are significantly lower for HL, HTRP, and SLN, receiving 0.090, 0.048, and 0.028 scores respectively. In fact, ACV’s 0.319 makes up nearly half of the Average Index score of

0.682, underscoring the immense importance of the audience in building up populist energy. As seen particularly in the 1984 and 2008 speeches, the audience raised the index scores of speeches that were not scoring as highly populist on the speaker scale, as nearly average in populism, exemplifying how significant the ACV variable can be. Furthermore, this anomaly shows that the audience's reaction is not dependent on the speakers' rhetoric. The two appear to be operating separately from one another, again exemplified by the 1984 and 2008 elections, as well as all of the Nixon and Trump speeches. Should the speeches' populism have a direct correlation to the audience the 1984 and 2008 speeches should have lower scores and the 1968, 1972, 2016, and 2020 audiences should have higher scores.

Finally, a note on high HTRP scores, which appears to be associated with negative election results. The two highest-scoring HTRP speeches are Gerald Ford's 1976 campaign, with a 0.102 HTRP score, and George Bush Sr.'s 1992 campaign, with a 0.131 score. Both speeches were of incumbent campaigns marked by controversial presidencies. Ford famously was the last man standing following the Watergate scandal, ascending to the office of the President in 1974 after Nixon appointed him to the role of Vice President, replacing Spiro Agnew, who also resigned from his office in the fallout of an unrelated scandal (Bomboy, 2022). Despite his best efforts to convince the public otherwise, Ford had inherited an administration in turmoil; the sinking public trust following the Watergate scandal, the Vietnam War's satisfying and troubling end, and an economy struggling under the worst recession since the 1930s and the high inflation (Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023). To make matters worse he was constantly at odds with the Democratic Congress, and the resentment he felt spilled out into his speech.

Paragraph #	SPEECH	HTRP	HL	ACV	C	SLN	INDEX SCORE
	I faced many tough problems.						0
	I probably made some mistakes, but on balance, America and Americans have made an incredible comeback since August 1974. (A&C)			1			1
	Nobody can honestly say otherwise.						0
	And the plain truth is that the great progress we have made at home and abroad was in spite of the majority who run the Congress of the United States.	1					1
18	For 2 years I have stood for all the people against a vote-hungry, free-spending congressional majority on Capitol Hill. (A&C)	1		1			2
	55 times I vetoed extravagant and unwise legislation; 45 times I made those vetoes stick. (APPLAUSE)	1					1
	Those vetoes have saved American taxpayers billions and billions of dollars.						0
	I am against the big tax spender and for the little taxpayer. (APPLAUSE)			1			1
Appendix 3: 1976 (Ford) Unsuccessful							

In a functioning democracy, one would hope that the executive and the legislative branch can function and work together without resorting to excessive vetos and overrides, yet Ford portrays it almost as a sign of strength that he battled against the “vote-hungry, free-spending congressional majority” like a mythical leviathan (Peters, n.d.). Furthermore, Ford runs into the same issue that Bush Sr. runs into in his second election, which is an executive that cannot work in tandem with the legislative appears weak. Both men call on the electorate to elect new members to Congress so that they can achieve much more during their presidency, which is not a strong rhetorical argument to make, with Bush Sr. going so far as to ask for a line-item veto so that he can veto Congress and still pass legislation.



Paragraph #	SPEECH	HTRP	HL	ACV	C	SLN	INDEX SCORE
44	Now, Congress won't cut spending, but refuses to give the President the power to eliminate pork-barrel projects that waste your money.	1					1
	Forty-three Governors have that power.						0
	So I ask you, the American people: Give me a Congress that will give me the line-item veto. (A&C)	1		1			2
Appendix 7: 1992 (Bush Sr.) Unsuccessful							

Regardless of how well-founded or accurate the complaints of the two candidates were, they come across as embittered and emasculated, which are not desirable leadership characteristics when it comes to selecting an executive.

## ***5.2 Behavioral Shift Overtime***

The ACV scores also indicate that a behavioral shift is occurring over time, wherein the audience becomes much more gregarious and rambunctious. As previously noted, when the data set is divided into two sets of seven consecutive years, the second group comprised of 1996-2020 receives a 0.379 ACV score, compared to the 0.26 ACV score of the 1968-1992 group. The video footage of the conferences certainly shows a shift in the audiences' perception of the formality of the event where early speeches show many more audience members in suits and formal attire, whereas later speeches show audiences clad in American flag-themed casual attire (i.e. baseball caps, tank tops, etc.). This physical shift in audience behavior, while not formally studied or taken into account in this research's findings, does also indicate a shift in the mindset of what is appropriate at the RNC. It stands to reason that along with a more casual dress code and more casual and gregarious "exchange" and engagement between the audience and the

speaker is also to appear. There is a generalized upward trend in ACV scores, but overall the ACV scores are much more consistent than the speaker, tending to float around the 0.2-0.45 range, markedly smaller than the speakers' roughly 0.05-0.9 range. When the speakers are divided into chronological groups there is no similar pattern of scoring. As previously noted the speaker and the audience do not appear to affect or influence each other directly in this rhetorical situation and this again underlines that finding.

It is significant to note that any number of external factors could be influencing the audiences' reactions. This warrants a closer analysis of a particular case, McCain's 2008 speech, which simultaneously scored the highest ACV score (0.462) and the lowest speaker score (0.054). There is nothing in McCain's rhetoric that seems to warrant the audience reaction he is receiving and he often seems bewildered by his enormously positive reception. If economic uncertainty is truly the main root of populist tendencies in American democracy, then McCain's speech appears to exemplify this phenomenon. Considering that McCain's speech was occurring in the midst of the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression it is unsurprising that the audience is reacting so excitedly. In fact, the few times that McCain's speech does meet the crisis criteria in the index are when he references the personal difficulties the crisis has brought on.

Paragraph #	SPEECH	HTRP	HL	ACV	C	SLN	INDEX SCORE
29	These are tough times for many of you.				1		1
	You're worried about keeping your job or finding a new one, and you're struggling to put food on the table and stay in your home. [USA! USA! USA!]			1			1
Appendix 11: 2008 (McCain) Unsuccessful							

This section received a 2 score; 1 for Crisis, and 1 for Absent Core Values. It is here again noted, that Absent Core Values does not mean that the applause was unwarranted, as this statement clearly did. Rather, it indicates that the audience applause extended past standard polite applause, and interrupted the speaker's attempt to move forward in his speech. McCain's statements were accurate and understanding of the circumstances many of the audience members were finding themselves in, but also his statement did not say anything new or offer any solution and yet he found himself being drowned out by the crowd. Interestingly, "USA! USA! USA!" chants tend to have a celebratory tone, more commonly found at sporting events. That the crowd responded to the acknowledgment of their staggering economic difficulties with the celebratory "USA! USA!" would further underscore that the speaker and his audience are out of sync with one another.

### ***5.3 Trends of Two-Time Candidates***

The two-time candidates who won their reelection campaigns all decreased or maintained their index and ACV scores and decreased speaker scores between campaigns as is also their speaker scores. The difference in ACV scores between the Nixon and Reagan campaigns significantly increased, wherein the second campaigns' audience was much more populist than the first. This would speak to the widely held popularity of both candidates, underscored by them both winning the most significant electoral wins in U.S. history up until that campaign. Furthermore, their second speeches are much less populist than their first because they have the successes of their administration to speak about, and as such are able to project confidence in their speeches to enthusiastic audiences that underscored the successes of the administration through their high ACV scores. W. Bush is the only exception with a 0.001 decrease in

ACV values, however, this value is so small it is considered immaterial and the score is understood as staying consistent.

The shift that occurred between Reagan's first election and W. Bush's second is fascinating, less in regards to the implications of populist rhetoric, as much as it shows the impact of the shifting electorate. Both receive Index scores slightly below the overall average, and both score below the two-time candidate average by a larger margin. The differences that occur between Reagan and W. Bush are quite unremarkable except for their election outcomes. In 1980 Reagan won 50.7% of the popular, resulting in a colossal 90.9% electoral vote. A quarter of a century later W. Bush also wins 50.7% of the popular vote in 2004, equating to a mere 53.2% electoral victory. This shows not only how dramatic the electoral shift has been, but also how quickly the shift occurred. In the span of five election cycles, the RNC went from winning indisputable electoral victories with only moderate popular approval, to electorate outcomes that are more reflective of the popular vote. It is little surprise that the RNC built its political strategy around a very small demographic; when winning over a small demographic was enough to claim such decisive victories then why bother engaging in significant outreach beyond the core base? Considering again Table 3, wherein the outweighed RNC electoral vote to popular vote victories can be seen up until the 2016 election; while the 59.9% electoral vote to 46.2% popular vote is not as dramatic as in other elections, it is the second election since 2000 wherein a candidate received less than 50% of the popular vote and yet claims the electoral vote. On average Republican electoral victories are 16.9% higher than their popular vote results, whereas Democrats claim electoral victories on average 7.8% higher than their popular vote, meaning that Republican victories appeared to be much more decisive than they actually were. This could have contributed to the false sense of security the RNC felt in their core base.

Additionally, it shows that Democratic candidates win elections wherein the electoral vote is reflective of the popular vote more often than Republican candidates.

Furthermore, since the electoral shift occurred so quickly the necessity of the Growth and Opportunity Project is also clear as the RNC very quickly went from massive electoral victories up to the 1980s, to barely securing the Presidency in the early 2000s, to decisive losses in the 2010s. If electoral shifts were not something perceived as a plausible factor in the intervening three years between elections, it could take a couple of election cycles before realizing that the issue at hand is more complicated than a bad year.

Two-time candidates nearly always receive a lower score on their second speech than their first. Bush Sr. is the only exception to this trend with his first speech receiving a 0.389 Index score and his second speech jumping to 0.572. Bush Sr. won his first election quite handily with a 79.2% electoral vote and a 53.4% of the popular vote. Arguably this was because his first campaign was his third successful campaign after running the two previous successful elections with Reagan, the main takeaway from his 1988 speech being how successfully he had served as Vice President. Where the tone of his first speech is rather relaxed and celebratory, there is an anxious undertone to his second campaign, which makes itself apparent in his speech scores. The 0.183 jump in Index score between his first and second speech feels like a desperate attempt to convince voters he should maintain his role. Presumably, this is due to the fallout from his signing a tax increase into law during the first year of his administration. Famously he had remarked in his 1988 speech that he would fight against any increased spending packages offered by Congress.

Paragraph #	SPEECH	HTRP	HL	ACV	C	SLN	INDEX SCORE
66	And I'm the one who will not raise taxes. (CHEERS)			1			1
	My opponent now says he'll raise them as a last resort or a third resort.						0
	When a politician talks like that, you know that's one resort he'll be checking into. (CHEERS)			1			1
	My opponent won't rule out raising taxes, but I will, and the Congress will push me to raise taxes, and I'll say no, and they'll push, and I'll say no, and they'll push again, and I'll say to them, "Read my lips: no new taxes." (CHEERS)	1		1			2
Appendix 6: 1988 (Bush Sr.) Successful							

When within his first year of office he signed a “stealth budget” in an effort to reduce the budget deficit, “read my lips” became a national punchline (Rothman, 2018).

Research at the time had found that the electorate believed that any politician would raise taxes, and the question was not *who* would raise taxes, but rather who would raise them *as a last resort* (Rothman, 2018). By raising taxes in his first year and in an unpopular spending package Bush Sr. had called into question his credibility as the candidate who would hold off on tax increases. Bush Sr.'s desperation to regain public confidence in his second speech is palpable which is presumably why he increases his HTRP score, blaming Congress for forcing him into an uncomfortable position.

Paragraph #	SPEECH	HTRP	HL	ACV	C	SLN	INDEX SCORE
53	Now let me say this: When it comes to taxes, I've learned the hard way.						0
	There's an old saying, "Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment."						0
	Two years ago, I made a bad call on the Democrats tax increase.						0
	I underestimated Congress' addiction to taxes.	1			1		2
	With my back against the wall, I agreed to a	1			1		2

	hard bargain: One tax increase one time in return for the toughest spending limits ever.						
54	Well, it was a mistake to go along with the Democratic tax increase, and I admit it. (Applause and Cheers(A&C))	1		1			2
	But here's the question for the American people.						0
	Who do you trust in this election?						0
	The candidate who's raised taxes one time and regrets it, or the other candidate who raised taxes and fees 128 times and enjoyed it every time? (Viva Bush! Viva Bush! Viva Bush!)			1			1
Appendix 7: 1992 (Bush Sr.) Unsuccessful							

Throughout his speech, he continues to express contempt for Congress and scores the highest HTRP score of the entire data set, 0.131, a more than tenfold increase from his 0.01 HTRP score four years prior. The increased effort does not pay off as Bush Sr. loses the 1992 election with 31.2% electoral results and 37.4% popular vote results. This is the lowest election outcome for an incumbent candidate, though not in the overall data set. His audience does become more populist in his second speech which is on trend, but the 0.051 increase is quite small.

If low SNL scores indicate giving the electorate a sense of agency to go out and vote, Bush Sr.'s high HTRP score had the inverse effect. He comes across as embittered and passive, blaming the failures of his administration on the power of the Democratic Congress. While high HTRP scores may be beneficial in a first election in the sense that a candidate can point out the problems in government that they intend to correct, as an incumbent it gives the impression of weakness and inability to carry out the responsibility of office. As such Bush Sr. appears to be the only incumbent who lost by becoming more populist in his speeches.

## ***5.4 Anomalies***

### **5.4.1 1984**

Reagan's 1984 speech shows speaker vs ACV anomalies. Whereas the overall Index score stays effectively the same with a 0.001 decrease in populism, his speaker score decreases by a sizable 0.160, and his audience increases by 0.154, accounting for roughly a 60% increase in audience enthusiasm. Reagan appears to be surprised at times by his audience as he has much more difficulty managing his audience than he did in his first campaign. Reagan would go on to win the largest electoral victory in U.S. history, winning 49 of the 50 states with a staggering 97.6% of electoral votes, and 58.8% of the popular vote. Arguments as to how Reagan was able to achieve this impressive victory are broad, but overall the conclusion is that Reagan was charming, optimistic, photogenic, incumbent, and lucky.

President Reagan's victory in 1984 and the margin by which he won were due to conditions that were in place well before the campaign even began; ingrained voting patterns; the Republican bias in the electoral college; a booming economy coupled with a shift in which party was perceived as better able to keep the nation prosperous; a Democratic candidate who was out of step with most southern voters; Reagan's incumbency; and the match-up between a united party and a divided one.

(Rosenstone, 1985)

In Reagan's second election, it is possible to see how the rhetorical environment can be misinterpreted. Reagan was a charismatic candidate, without a doubt, but his overwhelming victory stemmed from a plethora of factors well outside of his control.



The spiked audience score would seem to support a correlation between the ACV score to the electoral win, however, this anomaly is explainable outside of the dataset collected, and no trends exist among other campaigns within the dataset that support this as a trend.

#### **5.4.2 2000-2004**

Both of W. Bush's elections show near equal values between speaker and ACV scores (0.030 index score difference, 0.029 speaker score difference, 0.001 ACV score), as well as near equal electoral versus popular votes outcomes (2000, Electoral 50.4%, Popular 47.9%; 2004, Electoral 53.2%, Popular 50.7%). That being said, it is difficult to determine the true persuasiveness of the 2000 campaign because not all the votes were correctly accounted for. The Florida recount of 2000 was a turning point in U.S. politics, and the validity of an election was questioned on a national scale as the question of which candidate won Florida was raised to the Supreme Court, which sided in favor of W. Bush (Elving, 2018). The recount of 2000 called into question the efficacy and legitimacy of U.S. election systems in the popular consciousness. This is also apparent in the popular vote outcome of the election, as W. Bush is the first candidate in over 20 years to win less than 50% of the popular vote and still win (to that point, Nixon's 1968 victory with a 43% popular vote was also in a three-way election as George Wallace ran the most successful independent presidential campaign in US history (Rozsa, 2022)). Whereas in the 1984 election, the electoral college was able to deliver decisive results, in 2000 began the razor-close electoral outcomes that appear to be more common in recent elections as W. Bush won the election with 50.4% electoral vote. Even with the so-called politicization of the Supreme Court in favor of W. Bush, the repercussions of the shrinking Republican base are visible as the margin of the win continues to shrink.

### 5.4.3 2008

Similarly to Reagan’s 1984 speech, McCain’s audience is wildly more populist than he is (ACV 0.462, Speaker 0.054), however, where this discrepancy resulted in a historic victory for Reagan, McCain received 32.2% of the electoral vote and 45.7% of the popular vote. While the research from Patenaude suggests, and the 19984 election supports, that the national mood (albeit in wildly different directions) is sufficient to win an election, McCain’s loss also indicates that the populist enthusiasm experienced by the party’s base is not sufficient to win elections by itself either. The 0.462 ACV score is the highest in the dataset and is presumably linked to the real financial effects and fears of worsening economic conditions in the future that people were experiencing at the time. That being said, this real and perceived fear was not sufficient to win an election. McCain’s highest speaker score is a 0.022 C score as he spoke about the financial crisis. Interestingly, this real and acutely felt crisis did not motivate a populist surge to the polls, as the 2016 election did with its’ imagined illegal immigration crisis among other perceived, but less documented crises.

The speech records 144 counts of the audience interrupting McCain, often with chants of “USA! USA! USA!” in situations where it seems rather inappropriate.

Consider the following passage:

Paragraph #	SPEECH	HTRP	HL	ACV	C	SLN	INDEX SCORE
26	I know these are tough times for many of you.				1		1
	You're worried about...[USA! USA! USA!]			1			1
27	Please, please, please. (A&C)			1			1
	My friends, my dear friends, please. (A&C)			1			1
	Please don't be diverted by the ground noise and the static. [applause]			1			1
28	You know, I'm going to talk about it some more.						0

	But Americans want us to stop yelling at each other, OK? [applause]			1			1
29	These are tough times for many of you.				1		1
	You're worried about keeping your job or finding a new one, and you're struggling to put food on the table and stay in your home. [USA! USA! USA!]			1			1
Appendix 11: 2008 (McCain) Unsuccessful							

This exchange occurs within the first ten minutes of the speech, wherein McCain has barely been able to accept the honor and thank those he would like to without being interrupted 23 times, including two “USA! USA!” chants. One gets the impression the audience would behave as such regardless of who is speaking on the stage. That does raise the question of what the audience in this convention expects from McCain. The applause to not give much insight because they applaud everything, but not consistently either. It would seem that they are applauding him for being a Republican, and they would applaud any other Republican candidate just the same.

To understand the spike of McCain’s audience it is important to consider the broader implications of the 2008 election because the election was much more than simply an established Republican senior senator facing off with an enthusiastic Democratic junior senator. The election was first occurring in the midst of the financial crisis. Economic crises do not bode well for incumbents as is seen in every RNC nomination acceptance speech since 1976. The democrat Jimmy Carter served a single term as president, in part because he inherited an economy in recession and his economic policies were seen as responsible for the continued “stagflation” of the 1970s (Domitrovic, 2023). This is further exemplified by the RNC nomination speeches, which mention Carter and his policies by name up until the 1992 election, more than 12 years after Carter had left office (Peters, n.d.). Poor economic choices are a massive

burden in presidential campaigns for both an incumbent candidate as well as an incumbent party. Considering again the election of 2008, not only had the Republican administration waged a costly and unpopular war, but the bank bailout signed by W. Bush was seen as highly disconnected from the public interest (Barofsky, 2013). To make matters worse, McCain was inconsistent when it came to the economy, going from saying the economy was “strong” to a “total crisis” in a matter of 36 hours, a gaffe that did not instill a sense of confidence at a crucial moment in the campaign (Cooper, 2008). So even maintaining the assumption that American right-wing populism is exclusively associated with economic uncertainty, why would the audience throw themselves so wholeheartedly behind a man who admits that he lacks the know-how to provide effective economic relief?

Consider again the broader implications of the 2008 election, which was historic, not only due to the economic factors but the cultural and social factors as well. John McCain was running against Barack Obama, the first-ever black presidential nominee in U.S. history (McFadden, 2018). While many argued that it was outrageous that in the 230-year history of the United States there had never been a black president, there were just as many who asked “Is America ready for a black president?” including Obama’s wife, Michelle, who would become the first black First Lady when her husband won his campaign decisively (Cole, 2018). As uncomfortable as the question was it was also a very relevant and well-founded question. Some would say, even today, more than a decade after Obama’s first inauguration, that it was still too soon and the nation was not yet ready. Even Obama concedes that modern-day Trumpism would not have been possible without the fear the Republican base felt at the visual of a “black man in the White House” (Pengelly, 2020). Others would argue that Obama would not have won such decisive victories were the nation not ready (see Table 3, 2008 and 2012

differences). Perhaps therein lies the issue: perhaps in the election of 2008 most Americans were ready for a black president, but not all Americans. Arguably, this group of Americans, who felt unprepared for the major social change sought refuge in the RNC convention in the hopes of stopping this monumental progressive shift. In doing so they would have fallen into a long tradition of Law and Order parties, fighting against the inevitable change.

One must wonder if McCain had been one to encourage these tendencies, would he have been able to win the election? McCain famously did not engage in any fear-mongering about then-Senator Obama, occasionally to the vocal disdain of his audience (Martin, 2008). McCain went so far as to congratulate his opponent in his own RNC speech for the remarkable campaign he was running (Peters, n.d.).

Paragraph #	SPEECH	HTRP	HL	ACV	C	SLN	INDEX SCORE
20	And, finally, a word to Senator Obama and his supporters.						
	We'll go at it -- we'll go at it over the next two months -- you know that's the nature of this business -- and there are big differences between us.						
21	But you have my respect and my admiration.						
22	Despite our differences, much more unites us than divides us.						
	We are fellow Americans, and that's an association that means more to me than any other. [applause]			1			1
23	We're dedicated to the proposition that all people are created equal and endowed by our creator with inalienable rights.						
	No country – no country ever had a greater cause than that.						
	And I wouldn't be an American worthy of the name if I didn't honor Senator Obama and his supporters for their achievement.						
Appendix 11: 2008 (McCain) Unsuccessful							

Consider, in contrast, the Trump election 8 years later, where similar fear mongering occurred when Hillary Clinton became the first female presidential nominee (Kilgore, 2018). Trump encouraged all the negative tendencies and extreme fears of his supporters, going so far as to be the only candidate to join in his audience's chants (Peters, n.d.). This data is not sufficient to determine if the fear of a black president 15 years ago was greater than the fear of a woman president 7 years ago, though if that had been the case McCain may have been able to weaponize the tendencies into a victory, though this is only speculation. Suffices it to state, McCain and his audience were mismatched, where McCain was running a very traditional campaign based on conservative ideals, his audience was cheering against progressive change. While both look to the past for inspiration, one was motivated by a commitment to conservative political philosophy, the other was motivated by fear.

#### **5.4.4 2020**

It is noted that Trump's second election speech is different from his first, as well as all other speeches analyzed because it is occurring during the peak of the Covid pandemic at a time when social distancing restrictions are still in place. The speech is occurring outside of the White House with a small audience compared to the packed convention centers that hosted each of the prior speeches. This will have affected the ACV score firstly because as a smaller group in an open area, they could not drown out the candidate in the same manner that occurs in previous speeches. Secondly, since this audience was strictly limited by size, it was also, in effect, much more selective regarding who would be able to attend. This most certainly affected the manner in which and the topics that would garner explosive cheering. This could account for the fact that Trump is the only two-time candidate who shows a decrease in ACV score in

his second speech by 0.081 (W. Bush's decreased ACV score by 0.001 is immaterial, and is understood as effectively equal to his 2000 ACV score).

### ***5.5 Limitations and Opportunities for Expansion***

This research is highly limited due to the data set. Even though the data was collected from over 12 hours of recorded speeches, it is limited by its scope and it is extremely difficult to judge the rhetoric of an entire campaign based on a singular speech. The RNC nomination acceptance speeches were selected for this research because they do serve a broad rhetorical purpose in their nature, setting the tone for the remainder of the election cycle. While the sample is smaller than would be desirable for the analysis, this data sample compensates for this by allowing for a uniform selection of the most well-rounded and broad speech for each candidate.

Additionally, since the data does focus on the trends within a singular party, it is unable to provide a complete view of each election cycle. Whether or not a trend of populist rhetoric or momentum does exist would be determinable if both parties' core bases were included in the analysis. It would be very interesting if a future analysis would include the Democratic National Convention (DNC) nomination acceptance speeches to provide a more well-rounded concept of each election cycle overall, as well as bring more context to the overall election results. The DNC operates in the same political system as the RNC, and as such is susceptible to the same political tendencies, even if it is only a difference between left-wing versus right-wing populism. Not only is it unrealistic to suggest the Democrats are less susceptible to populism than the Republicans, but it is also categorically incorrect.

Finally, it is also important to note that election rhetoric has a completely different tone than the tone taken in governance. As such, it would be interesting to

include the respective candidates' concessions, victories, and inauguration speeches in a more expansive analysis. The tone that a candidate takes when they are no longer competing for office could provide insights into their political philosophy, and whether any populist scores they received were due to campaign rhetoric or populist leanings. Furthermore, there is a great deal of insight to be gained into the manner in which candidates express successes and failures which are relevant to the question of populism in United States politics.



## Conclusion

Populism continues to be a significant social phenomenon and a powerful political tool, however, it is also difficult to predict how it will play out in any particular election, making it a volatile and uncertain election strategy at best. The manner in which the populist momentum of the political base and the general electorate manifests itself is too varied to be predictive with significant certainty for any particular election outcome. Additionally, there are too many independent variables occurring outside of the campaign rhetoric that affect the choice of the populous, thereby making any accurate predictions of an election based solely on the populist energy of the speaker or the audience effectively impossible. Even though this research successfully documented the overall dramatic effects of populist energy and audience momentum in presidential campaign rhetoric, it also showed that in the specifics the effects are inconsistent, making it difficult to account for any election outcome, both in the case of successes and losses, in establishing any fixed and definitive rules, trends, or patterns.

Populism, in either or both the speaker and the audience, can give the impression of a successful political movement and steadily building momentum, but it is a mistake to treat it as a reliable predictor or replicable tool. This research underlines that populism offers no guarantees, and in the case of the RNC's existential shrinking core base threat, is not a lasting or feasible solution. While there is a slight upward movement of ACV scores over time, it is again not sufficient to identify a rule of the audience. Furthermore, if there were a clear trend here this would only indicate the radicalization of the core base, and not a shift towards being persuasive to the broader public, which would need to be reflected in the popular vote results. When considering the trend of "law and order" political movements in the United States, it is not

outlandish to suggest that the burst of populism that is currently being experienced in the American political system is part of the normal trend as the nation is on the cusp of major progressive change, mainly through the shifting demographics. This could account for the slight behavioral shift in the audience over time, perhaps becoming more volatile as they perceive their shrinking significance and attempt to halt, or at the very least stall, the inevitable change in demographic.

In effect, this data set has not only verified the findings of the RNC's Growth and Opportunity Report, that they were "speaking to themselves" and had lost touch with the general public, but also indicated that they are continuing to build campaigns solely off of the response from their political base rather than what is popular among the general electorate (Republican National Convention, 2013). This is apparent in the data findings because just as there have been no clear correlations or trends between the speaker and the audience, the audience and the electoral results also do not show a correlation, indicating there are other factors influencing the electoral vote outside of the RNC core base (i.e those who would attend the national convention). Furthermore, this shows that the candidates that win elections with high populist scores, either of their own speech rhetoric or of their audience enthusiasm, are not representing a correlation to electoral success. They may be winning elections, but riling up their own political base and encouraging impulsive enthusiasm is not being reflected as a strong campaign strategy. The audiences appearing at these rallies are, if anything, reflective of the mood of the core base regarding the political moment, but not regarding the candidate specifically. As the Republican base continues to shrink in elective strength, even manipulations to the electoral college will not be sufficient to maintain consistent executive and legislative power in the long run.

The speeches index provides a valuable retrospective insight into the mood of the Republican base, and in comparison to the mood of the general electorate, but it is unable to show predictive patterning regarding a correlation between populist rhetoric, populist energy, and electoral outcomes. While the data indicate that the populist tone of the general elections does play into the election outcomes, overarching trends were not shown. Additionally, while all election anomalies can be accounted for, the data collected are unable to provide an overall trend. Particularly in comparison to the election outcomes, the research findings show the continued manifestation of the RNC report and its stated concerns. Should the RNC continue to select candidates based on their populist strength they will continue to receive unpredictable outcomes, which over time will diminish their voice or relevance in the national discourse.

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